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# Double Hospitality

## *Between Word and Touch*

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### Abstract

A precarious balance exists between remaining faithful to one's own language and history while also maintaining an ethical attentiveness to the Other. The danger in the former is the penchant for colonizing and violently reducing the Other. The danger of the later is a supine servility and inability to offer a linguistic home for welcoming the Other. To navigate these two extremes, the conditional hospitality of Ricoeur's hermeneutics is brought into dialogue with the unconditional hospitality of Derrida's deconstruction. What is needed is the more embodied approach of a carnal hospitality that assists in discerning the right ways of touching and not touching, of uniting word and body, teaching us how to incarnate the impossible possibility of reconciliation and forgiveness with the stranger.

### Keywords

carnal hermeneutics – Paul Ricoeur – Jacques Derrida – hospitality – deconstruction

In this essay I will be proposing two models of hospitality—linguistic and carnal. The linguistic takes its tune from the hermeneutic model of Paul Ricoeur, based on the concept of translation in critical dialogue with the deconstructive approach of Jacques Derrida. Carnal hospitality, for its part, involves a more embodied approach to host and guest inspired by the phenomenological notions of 'double sensation' in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. My basic thesis is that for genuine hospitality to take place we need a twin movement of both word and touch.

## 1 The Linguistic Paradigm—Hospitality as Translation

Translation serves as a paradigm for linguistic hospitality in so far as it involves a mediation between host and guest languages. There is a double duty here: to remain faithful to one's own language while remaining attentive to the novelty of the foreigner's. One can fail in this duty by succumbing to either of the following temptations. First, the impulse to assimilate and absorb the Other into the Same, reducing the singularity of the guest to the totalizing norms of one's native speech. This makes for bad translation, and at a political level can lead to various forms of linguistic chauvinism and colonialism. Second, there is the contrary temptation to evacuate one's own linguistic dwelling altogether, surrendering one's speech to the in-coming Other, even to the point where there is no longer a host at home to receive any guest at all. In this case, one may be so seduced or overwhelmed by the Other that one succumbs to supine servility. To avoid these extremes of linguistic hegemony or humiliation, one is best advised to take a middle road of 'linguistic hospitality' where one honors both host and guest languages equally while resisting the take-over of one by the other.

In *On Translation*, Ricoeur spells out the various implications of this paradigm of linguistic hospitality.

Translation sets us not only intellectual work .... but also an ethical problem. Bringing the reader to the author, bringing the author to the reader, at the risk of serving and of betraying two masters: this is to practice what I like to call linguistic hospitality. It is this which serves as a model for other forms of hospitality that I think resemble it: confessions, religions, are they not like languages that are foreign to one another, with their lexicon, their grammar, their rhetoric, their stylistic which we must learn in order to make our way into them? And is Eucharistic hospitality not to be taken up with the same risks of translation-betrayal, but also with the same renunciation of the perfect translation.<sup>1</sup>

A crucial step in resisting the lure of the Perfect Translation is to honor a dialectical balance between proximity (welcoming the stranger into our midst) and distance (acknowledging that something is always lost in translation: the other's meanings can never be completely mine). A 'hospitable' translator is one who aims at approximate correspondences between two tongues without ever assuming these to be final or adequate. Which is why translation is always

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1 Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, trans. Eileen Brennan (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 23.

an endless task. It is work which is also a *working through*, in the psychoanalytic sense of *Durcharbeitung*—a difficult and demanding labor of mediation between one linguistic mind/culture/world and another. Such mediation involves a process of mourning and letting go—and in particular the renunciation of the egocentric or tribalist drive to reduce the alterities of the guest to one's own will for total adequation. As if, in translation, there were only one true language: my own. Our own. But that is not so. As Ricoeur insists, there is no such thing as language, only languages. *Traditore, traduttore*: to translate is always in some sense to betray; for one can never do one's guest true justice. And this means accepting that we all live east of Eden and after Babel—and that this is a good thing. Our linguistic fallenness is also our linguistic finitude: a reminder of human limits which saves us from the delusion of sufficiency, the fantasy of restoring some prelapsarian logos (where we play God speaking a single divine language with a perfect word for each perfect thing). We also need to abandon the illusion of a perfect logos of the future—such as the enlightenment dream of a *characteristica universalis* or the more recent delusion of a pan-European Esperanto. Indeed the translation model of hospitality stands, politically, as an indictment of all historical attempts to impose a single language on diverse peoples—Greek, Latin, French, Spanish or today English (sometimes known as 'Globish'). Imperial campaigns have always sought to impose a normative *lingua franca* on the multiplicity of vernaculars. But it is the right of every living tongue to speak itself and be translated into other tongues while retaining a certain reservoir of irreducible, untranslatable intimacies and secrets. Whence the legitimate double injunction of every guest language when faced with its host: 'Translate me! Don't translate me!' Take me but not all of me. Take me in, incorporate me, but leave something of me to myself. Good translation is transfusion not fusion. It signals a mutual transaction between two worlds, never a subsuming of their differences into one.

Hospitable translation thus renounces any claim to absolute sovereignty acknowledging that we share words as we share clothes. Or to paraphrase Ricoeur, we should let our language try on the garments of strangers at the same time as we invite them to step into the fabric of our own speech. Translation is transvestitude. And it begins from the word go. In the beginning was hermeneutics—meaning the interpretation of different meanings, tongues, intentions, lexicons. *In principio fuit interpretis*. There is no pure pristine logos, unless it is God's. And we are not God. To be human is to interpret and to interpret is to translate. There never was a self without an other, a host without a guest. From the start was hospitality—and, as we shall see, its twin shadow, hostility.

As such, translation involves a certain humble recognition of our fragility and fallibility, keeping us always open to the never-ending task of *more* translation, *better* translation, *alternative* translation, again and again. The only criterion of a good translation is another translation. Which is why the great classics are both untranslatable and infinitely translatable at once. There are never enough renditions of Homer, Shakespeare or the Bible. (Again, the truth of the Bible is Babel). We are dealing thus with a drama of fragile hospitality. Ricoeur puts it well:

Despite the conflictual character which renders the task of the translator dramatic, he or she will find satisfaction in what I would like to call *linguistic hospitality*. Its predicament is that of a correspondence without complete adhesion. This is a fragile condition, which admits of no verification other than a new translation ... to translate afresh after the translator .... Just as in a narration it is always possible to tell the story in a different way, likewise in translation it is always possible to translate otherwise, without ever hoping to bridge the gap between equivalence and perfect adhesion. Linguistic hospitality is the act of inhabiting the word of the Other paralleled by the act of receiving the word of the Other into one's own home, one's own dwelling.<sup>2</sup>

But the host can never 'capture' the guest in his/her own house, without some degree of violence and violation. And sometimes 'the guest must leave the host in order to remain a guest', as the poet Fanny Howe reminds us. There is an 'untranslatable kernel' in every linguistic transaction which reminds us that host and guest languages are never the same—and never should be.

While this acknowledgment of irreducible difference involves a therapeutic mourning of the fallacy of fusion, it also heralds the challenge of plurality and novelty. It is precisely when two distinct tongues cross that a third can be born. And this natality can be multiple, as mentioned, in the countless and in principle endless translations of the great classics—Greek, Sanskrit, Latin, Hebrew—rendered differently each time into numerous versions of vernacular

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2 Ibid., p. 10 (*Sur la traduction*, Bayard, Paris, 2004, pp. 19–20; cited p. xvi). See also here Walter Benjamin's notion of the 'untranslatable kernel' in 'The Task of the Translator' in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings* Volume 1, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1996 and Marc Crépon's work on the relation between linguistic singularity, translation and hospitality, *Les Promesses du langage: Benjamin, Rosenzweig, Heidegger* (Paris: Vrin, 2001) and *Langues sans demeure* (Paris: Galilée, 2005) where he considers the foreignness even of the mother tongue. I am grateful to Sarah Horton for the Crépon reference.

speech. We do not lament the serial renditions of Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Proust. *Au contraire!* And the same goes for the Bible, from the Septuagint translation from Hebrew into Greek, St Jerome's translation into Latin, and the many subsequent vernacular versions in English (St James), in German (Luther, Buber, Rozensweig) or in French (Chouraqui) etc. With each rendition a new 'semantic surplus' is triggered by the creative collision of separate tongues—something mutually enhancing for both cultures. Think for example of how, in the Septuagint translation of Exodus 3:15 ('I am who may be'), the Greek ontological notion of being (*ontos on*), understood as formal and material substance, is radically transformed by its encounter with the Hebrew notion of God's becoming as historical and eschatological promise. And vice versa. By the time Maimonides is writing his Hebraic-Hellenic metaphysics in *Guide for the Perplexed*, both Greeks and Jews have re-interpreted their respective notions of what it means to be in the world—and that twin revision informs new ways of thinking the person, time, relation, and finitude. After the biblical translation into Greek we can agree with Joyce that 'Greekjew is Jewgreek'. Athens and Jerusalem are never the same.

But careful: translation is not always on the side of the angels. And each transition between linguistic host and guest involves the possibility of betrayal as well as rebirth. Hostility to the Other is as real as hospitality. As Emile Benveniste famously observed in *Language and Indo-European Society*, hospitality and hostility share the same root, *hostis*, which can mean both host and guest, both friend and enemy.<sup>3</sup> Hence the notion of translation as a dramatic human action—a task, a labor, a wager between hostility (reducing host and guest to the same) and hospitality (rightly acknowledging a gap or separation between them). Which is why Antoine Berman speaks of translation as *l'épreuve de l'étranger*—an existential testing or trial of the stranger.<sup>4</sup> This notion of *épreuve* calls in turn for a kind of practical wisdom (*phronesis*). The ability to discern between varying calls and demands of the stranger—as foreigner or immigrant, as alien or refugee, as adversary or invader. Hence the constant dialectical wagering between hostility and hospitality, between vigilance and welcome. A wagering that invites a critical capacity to navigate between diverse perspectives which operates not just *inter*-linguistically (between a native and foreign tongue) but also *intra*-linguistically (between speaking beings within a single language—the mother tongue has many children!) And one might also add,

3 Emile Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des Institutions Indo-Européennes* (Paris: Minuit, 1969) / *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. Jean Lallot (London: Faber and Faber, 1973).

4 Antoine Berman, *L'épreuve de l'étranger: Culture et Traduction dans l'Allemagne Romantique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

with psychoanalysis in mind, a capacity to mediate between one's own conscious and unconscious selves. We can find ourselves aliens within our own *langue maternelle* and within the depths of our own minds. We are, deep down, as Kristeva reminds us, always strangers to ourselves.

It might be noted that Jacques Derrida makes a radical point here about the 'impossibility' of any pure or absolute hospitality to the stranger. Every translation risks some degree of hostility towards the other in so far as it asks the Other to render itself in terms of the same (*my* language, life-world, culture, horizon). As soon as I, qua host, ask my guest, 'who are you?' I am asking a stranger to reply in terms which I can recognize and identify. All hermeneutics in practice involves some mixture of hospitality and hostility—what Derrida calls 'hostipitality'—welcoming the other at the same time as one translates its alterity into something '*like* me'. Though Ricoeur interprets this '*like*' in term of someone similar (*semblable*) rather than the same (*même*), Derrida holds to the strict deconstructive line that any need for similarity is already a compromise on the strangeness of the Stranger (a radicalization of Husserl's phenomenological analysis of knowing others in the Fifth Cartesian Meditation).

So here is the difference. A hermeneutics of translation, à la Ricoeur, involves *conditional* hospitality (which in effect means some measure of interpretive judgment regarding mixed bags of 'hostipitality'), whereas deconstruction invokes a notion of *unconditional* hospitality where one accepts the Other regardless of its origin or identity—human, animal, or divine. Pure hospitality does not ask for IDs or passports; it is not concerned with border controls or contracts but demands pure exposure to alterity, welcoming the stranger 'without why'. If there is a knock at the door you open it without asking in advance if it is a messiah or monster. Once you put hospitality into laws, rules, or norms, you take the daring out of it, the radical risk of undecidability, the yes to all that comes. "Let us say yes to whom or what turns up", writes Derrida in *Of Hospitality*, "before any determination, or anticipation, whether or not it is to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an uninvited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female."<sup>5</sup> In short, absolute hospitality welcomes the stranger independently

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5 Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 77. See also Derrida's discussion of language, translation and cultural identity in *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre ou la Prothèse d'origine* (Paris: Galilée, 1996); *Monolingualism of the Other or The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). For a very illuminating analysis of Derrida's complex reading of hospitality, see François Raffoul, 'Chez Lui, Chez L'autre' in *Les Temps Modernes* on "L'événement déconstruction," July–October, 2012, nos 669–670.

of all legal, political or epistemological conventions; it calls for an impossible leap of faith towards the ‘absolutely Other’—or as Derrida puts it in his typically hyperbolic way: ‘every other is absolutely other’ (*tout autre est tout autre*). The stranger is always, at bottom, absolutely strange. And no stranger is too strange to be included.

Such pure hospitality is, of course, not actually *possible* in terms of everyday practice—where the only feasible form of welcome is always contingent upon this or that condition (and thus never ‘pure’). Absolute hospitality is impossible, but if it did exist it could only do so, Derrida admits, as a blind, mad, mystical dream. Any attempt—which is a daily occurrence—to make the impossible possible is already a matter of betrayal, compromise and contagion. Where hermeneutic hospitality speaks of *conversion* between host and guest, deconstructive hospitality speaks of *contamination*. Which perhaps goes some way to explaining Ricoeur’s claim that the difference between him and Derrida is the difference between the terms ‘difficult’ and ‘impossible’.<sup>6</sup>

But one last word about the implications of linguistic hospitality for narrative exchange, before moving on to our second model of ‘carnal hospitality’.

In an important text, ‘Reflections on a new Ethos for Europe’ (1996 in French/2004 in English), Ricoeur applies his model of linguistic hospitality to what he calls, more specifically, ‘narrative hospitality’.<sup>7</sup> He describes this as ‘taking responsibility in imagination and in sympathy for the story of the other, through the life narratives which concern the other’.<sup>8</sup> In the case of memorials and testimonials, this takes the form of exchanges between different peoples’ histories such that we practice an art of transference allowing us to welcome the story of one’s neighbor, opponent, adversary or forgotten one. For one nation’s narrative of glory is often another’s narrative of suffering and defeat. Victors and victims need to exchange places by exchanging stories—and exchanging stories is already an invitation to change history: to reanimate forgotten stories out of our debt to the dead.

As I have already explored Ricoeur’s ethics of narrative hospitality elsewhere,<sup>9</sup> I will confine myself here to a mention of three main characteristics:

6 Note Paul Ricoeur “Difficult Pardon” in *Memory, History and Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

7 Paul Ricoeur, “Reflections on a new Ethos for Europe,” in *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, ed. Richard Kearney (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 3–14. / “Quel éthos pour l’Europe?,” in *Imaginer l’Europe*, ed. P. Koslowski (Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1992), pp. 107–118.

8 *Ibid.*, 1996, p. 7.

9 Richard Kearney, “The Ethics of Memory” in *Difficulties of Ethical Life*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Dennis Schmidt (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

1) *narrative flexibility*: every story can be told and retold from a plurality of perspectives; 2) *narrative transfiguration*: the historical past can be revisited in terms of unexperienced or unexplored ‘possibilities’, thereby giving a future to the past. Or as Ricoeur aptly puts it: ‘the past is a cemetery of promises which have not been kept’ and narrative hospitality is a way of retelling untold stories so as to realize such promissory notes, ‘bringing them back to life, like the dry bones in the valley described in the prophecy of Ezekiel.’<sup>10</sup> 3) *narrative pardon*: by empathizing with others through the exchange of stories we can work-through and mourn the wounds of the past so as to open a space of charity and gift.<sup>11</sup> This involves moving beyond a reciprocity of exchange to a difficult, almost impossible, order of charity—a leap which transcends the rules and laws of justice in the name of something ‘more’: namely, forgiving the enemy and ‘shattering the debt’. Here law is supplemented by love. And in this step towards a higher poetics of pardon there comes a point where narrative exchange—of histories, memories, testimonies—often needs to be supplemented by an actual exchange of hands. Narrative hospitality calls for carnal hospitality. The textual yields to the tactile. Word becomes touch.

## 2 Carnal Hospitality

Civilization begins with the handshake. Instead of reaching for a sword to smite the stranger one offers one’s hand. The fist becomes an open palm. The *hostis*-enemy becomes the *hostis*-friend.

Such primal scenes of carnal hospitality date back to the origins of time. Think of Homer’s *Iliad* where the arch-rivals Diomedes and Glaucus throw down their spears of enmity to embrace each other rather than repeat age-old cycles of blood revenge. Think of Genesis where Abraham and Sarah offer the three strangers at Mamre bread of their own hands rather than banish them with violence; or where Jacob wrestles with the ‘terrible angel’ at Peniel until his adversary reveals the name of Israel—turning his fratricidal conflict with Esau into an embrace of reconciliation the next day. Or think of the healing hands of Christ, touching the blind and sick, the lepers and lost ones, giving life back to the dead. Other examples of healing touch are scattered throughout wisdom literature, from Euryclea’s bathing of Odysseus’s wound to Baucis and Philo-

<sup>10</sup> Ricoeur, “Reflections”, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Kearney, “Memory in Irish Culture”, in *Memory Ireland vol. 3: The Famine and the Troubles*, ed. Oona Frawley (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014), pp. 148–150.

men offering the hungry stranger (Zeus) food baked with their own hands—a gesture repeated again and again throughout some of the great ‘hospitality’ scenes of Western literature, from Jean-Val Jean and Monseigneur Myriel in *Les Misérables* to the sharing of gastronomical delights in *Babette’s Feast*. The miraculous power of touch and taste, of hand and mouth, is a recurring story finding echoes in some of the historic handshakes of our own time, moments of physical encounter which have transformed wounds of hostility into ‘marvels of hospitality’—recall Mandela and De Klerk, Hume and Paisley, Begin and Sadat, Rabin and Arafat, Gandhi and Mountbatten. One wages war or wagers one’s arm.

Carnal hospitality can operate at several levels of embodied exchange, but it is in *touch* that the most basic act of exposure to others occurs. Phenomenology gives us a hint as to why this might be so when Husserl shows in *Ideas 2* how empathy works through the ‘double sensation’ of touch—a phenomenon of reversibility where touching is also a being touched. This simple insight into the active-passive experience of a hand touching and being touched has been developed by thinkers like Merleau-Ponty with his idea of the body-subject and by Kristeva with her notion of semiotic *reliance*. But the basic idea was already announced by Aristotle in the first work of human psychology, *De Anima*, when he declared that ‘touch is the most philosophical’ of the senses. What he meant by this was that touch is the most ‘universal’ of the senses in that it is operative in all our sensing (light touches the eye, salt the tongue, sound the ear etc.). Touch is always ‘on’. The only parts of a human person that have no tactile feelings are our hair and nails: you can cut both without pain. The tactile-tangible body is the vulnerable body. It is what exposes us to otherness—to the experience of what is different to us. (Water can be cold to a warm body and hot to a cold body). ‘Touch discerns differences’, says Aristotle, using the Greek verb *krinein*, meaning to discriminate carnally between differences and distinctions. The body feels what is hotter and colder than itself better than something at its own temperature. We feel what is *other* than ourselves. Familiarity breeds indifference. Egotism is senseless. The sense of touch is what exposes us to risk and adventure, to novelty and natality—to what is actually happening as we touch and are touched by others (human, vegetal, animal, or divine). That is why Aristotle suggests that the smooth-skinned person is the most sensible because the most sensitive. Wisdom comes from reciprocal feeling, empathy, attention; whereas vices such as gluttony, wantonness, and drunkenness come from the betrayal of such sensitivity: turning our natural propensity for two-way touch into one-way touch—a move resulting in the imposition of *my* feelings on others without being receptive to *theirs*. The hand and mouth are eminently sensitive parts of the body. The open palm and naked lips are

thresholds of vulnerability. Which is why the kiss and the handshake are paramount symbols of peace and hospitality.

But handshakes are cheap if one does not grasp the risk involved. Peace is empty (mere tokenism) if the hands that meet are not truly in touch. If there is no tact in the contact. By way of illustrating the radicality of hand to hand contact in genuine gestures of hospitality and healing, I will cite the example of Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, a pioneering South African scholar who served on the Truth and Reconciliation Movement in the 1990s and with whom I had the honor of conversing during a visit to Stellenbosch University in May 2017. One story she related to me—as recorded in her book *A Human Being Died That Night*—powerfully exemplifies the principle of carnal hospitality: namely, that the most humane of the senses is ‘touch’, for it alone involves a ‘double sensation’ of touching and being touched, even in the most inhospitable of circumstances.

Here is the story. Pumla resolved, during a sensitive moment in the reconciliation process, to meet Eugene de Kock, a brutal apartheid executioner known popularly as ‘Prime Evil’; he was then in prison. She bore no illusions: “de Kock had not just given apartheid’s murderous evil a name. He had *become* that evil.”<sup>12</sup> Pumla was prompted to meet with this notorious assassin after she heard a widow of one of his victims express a willingness to forgive him after witnessing his testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in September 1997. “I would like to hold him by the hand”, the widow had said, “and show him that there is a future, and that he can still change.”<sup>13</sup> Pumla was deeply struck and interpreted the widow’s readiness to reach out to her husband’s murderer as an astonishing, almost impossible, act of empathy, for the widow was not only shedding tears for the loss of her own executed spouse but for the loss of de Kock’s moral humanity. This raised the crucial question: “Was de Kock deserving of the forgiveness shown to him ... Was evil intrinsic to de Kock, and forgiveness wasted on him?”<sup>14</sup> Or as Augustine would have it: Was it possible to unbind the agent from the act?<sup>15</sup>

12 Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Woman Confronts the Legacy of Apartheid* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), p. 6. I am greatly indebted to Robert Vosloo’s illuminating essay for many of the citations and references below, “Touch Gives rise to Thought: Paul Ricoeur and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela on dealing with the past, mutual recognition and embodied performativity” (in *Debating Otherness with Richard Kearney: Perspectives from South Africa*, ed. Daniël Veldsman and Yolande Steenkamp, Durbanville: Aosis Publishing, 2018).

13 Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night*, pp. 14–15.

14 *Ibid.*, 15.

15 See Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pp. 489–493 cited by Robert Vosloo, “Touch Gives rise to Thought.”

Pumla knew that de Kock's statement of apology at the TRC was certainly part of the pardoning process; but she was also aware of the asymmetry between an avowal of guilt and the act of forgiving the perpetrator, whose words may have an empty ring to them, "adding insult to injury".<sup>16</sup> However, the power and significance of an apology lies, Pumla realised, in its ability "to *perform* and to transcend the apologetic words."<sup>17</sup> The emphasis on embodied 'performance' is crucial here. Why? Because, as Pumla put it, "empathy is what enables us to recognize another's pain, even in the midst of tragedy, because pain cannot be evil. Empathy deepens our humanity ... When perpetrators apologize and experience the pain of remorse, showing contrition, they are *acting as human beings*."<sup>18</sup> During her encounter with de Kock in prison, Pumla was at one point surprised by his tears as he confessed not only his regret at murdering the widow's husband but also his desire to undo the wrong: "I wish there was a way of bringing the (body) back alive. I wish I could say, 'Here (is) your husband.' De Kock confided this, stretching out his arms as if bearing an invisible body, his hands trembling, his mouth quivering, adding 'but unfortunately ... I have to live with it.'"<sup>19</sup> And then the impossible happened—an unthinkable act of carnal transference. Pumla touched his hand. Almost unbeknownst to herself, she found herself reaching out towards him, only to find his hand was clenched as a fist, "cold and rigid." Reflecting back on this gesture afterward, she observed: "This made me recoil for a moment and to recast my act of reaching out as something incompatible with the circumstances of an encounter with a person who not too long ago used these same hands, this same voice, to authorize and initiate unspeakable acts of malice against (black) people very much like myself."<sup>20</sup>

This was no cheap grace, no act of facile sentiment. If anything the strange unpredictable moment signaled an event of 'impossible hospitality'. Pumla's encounter with de Kock left her with a certain guilt at having experienced an instant of empathy, making her wonder if she had not "crossed the moral line from compassion, which allows some measure of distance, to actually identifying with de Kock."<sup>21</sup> The encounter also had an impact on de Kock him-

16 Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, "Remorse, Forgiveness, and Rehumanization: Stories from South Africa," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 42, no. 1 (2002): (pp. 7–32), p. 13.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 16. The larger citation is from Vosloo's "Touch Gives Rise to Thought."

18 Gobodo-Madikizela, "Remorse, Forgiveness, and Rehumanization," p. 20.

19 Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night*, p. 32.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

self. During one of their later meetings, he confessed: “You know, Pumla, that was my trigger hand you touched.”<sup>22</sup> This chilling admission left Pumla with a mixture of feelings. On the one hand, she felt vulnerable, angry and invaded, while on the other she recognized that de Kock’s statement might also carry an underlying subtext: “My action may well have been the first time a black person touched him out of compassion. He had previously met black people only as enemies, across the barrel of a gun or, for those who were on his side of the firing line, as comrades in murder. Perhaps de Kock *recognized my touch as a kind of threshold crossing*, a new experience for him.”<sup>23</sup>

But such a liminal crossing was far from self-evident. Pumla was painfully aware of the contradictions involved in touching the ‘trigger hand’; yet in that moment of carnal exchange she did not withdraw her hand. She made a wager in the impossible possibility of a shared humanity. “His world was a cold world”, she realized, “where eyes of death stared accusingly at him, a world littered with corpses and graves ... But for all the horrific singularity of his acts, de Kock was a desperate soul seeking to affirm to himself that he was still part of the human universe.”<sup>24</sup>

What is so revealing about this ‘trigger hand’ episode is that it was Pumla’s carnal experience of de Kock’s remorse which reciprocally triggered her ability to acknowledge his humanity.<sup>25</sup> That momentary gesture of pardon—or grace?—worked, it seems, because both de Kock’s remorse and Pumla’s empathy were *carnally performed* rather than *conceptually calculated*. It was less about cognition than recognition, less about speculation than sensibility. “A genuine apology”, as Pumla subsequently concluded, “focuses on the feelings of the other rather than on how the one who is apologizing is going to benefit in the end. It seeks to acknowledge full responsibility for the act, and does not use self-serving language to justify the behavior of the person asking forgiveness. It must communicate, convey, and *perform* as a ‘speech act’

22 Ibid., p. 39.

23 Ibid., p. 42. For a similar act of almost impossible transference and pardon, see the moving account of Eric Lomax’s meeting with his former torturer in a Japanese prison of war camp, Eric Lomax, *The Railway Man: An OPW’s Searing account of War, Brutality and Forgiveness* (New York: Norton, 1995).

24 Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night*, p. 39.

25 Ibid., pp. 67–68. See our analysis of such critical carnal encounters with the stranger/other/enemy in Richard Kearney & Brian Treanor (ed.), *Carnal Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015); Richard Kearney & Kascha Semonovitch (ed.) *Phenomenologies of the Stranger* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011); Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (London and NY: Routledge, 2003).

that expresses a desire to right the relationship damaged through the action of the apologizer.”<sup>26</sup> In short, the act of *double performativity* embodied a dual acknowledgment of common humanity between self and stranger, forgiver and executioner, peace-maker and criminal. Or as Pumla herself put it: “When remorse is triggered in the moment of witnessing ... the perpetrator recognizes the other as a fellow human being. At the same time, the victim, too, recognizes the face of the perpetrator not as that of a ‘monster’ who committed terrible deeds, but as the face with enough humanity to feel remorse.”<sup>27</sup> Such moments of forgiveness—to the extent that they are humanly possible (which is perhaps why Ricoeur calls them ‘miraculous’)—lie in the search “not for the things that separate us—but for something common among us fellow human beings, the compassion and empathy that bind our human identity.”<sup>28</sup>

So we might ask again—why the importance of hands? Triggering or counter-triggering, acting or suffering, criminal or reconciling? What most strikes me about Pumla’s account is her witness to a kind of practical wisdom which operates at the level of the body, a discerning sensibility which functions at the level of skin and flesh, nerve endings and sinews, complexion and touch. This embodied knowing is prior to reflective knowing, a form of tact within contact, of savvy in the original sense of tasting and testing what is apt and appropriate, what is true and just. Whence the etymological lineage of savvy from *savoir-savourer-sapere-sapientia*. It is a matter of primal embodied wisdom operating in the three senses of sense/*sens*—sensation, orientation and meaning; three senses which mark every genuine encounter between self and stranger.<sup>29</sup> When the carnal powers of savvy and tact, of flair and taste, actually work, it is not impossible, at special times, for enemies to become friends, for strangers to become guests, in short, for hostility to be transformed into hospitality.

26 Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night*, pp. 98–99.

27 Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, “Trauma, Forgiveness and the Witnessing Dance: Making Public Spaces Intimate.” *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 53, no. 2 (2008): (pp. 169–188), pp. 176–177.

28 Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *Dare We Hope? Facing our Past to find a New Future* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2014), p. 1, also p. 35. One might ask here why a similar miracle of remorse and empathy did not occur between SS officer, Adolph Eichmann, and his benign jailor (Captain Less) around the famous holocaust trial in Jerusalem, as scrupulously documented by Hannah Arendt in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Viking, 1963).

29 See our development of this kind of embodied knowing in Kearney & Treanor (ed.), *Carnal Hermeneutics*.

But the matter is not a simple one. Handshakes are easily perverted or abused as ceremonial clichés, malevolent contracts, devious strategies or power plays of privilege. Who has the right to shake hands with whom? To what purpose and with what motives—open, hidden, or ulterior? The steel fist in the silk glove? Think of the infamous handshakes of Hitler with Petain, of Stalin with Ribbentrop, of Putin with Assad. Or the bone crunching grip of Trump with rival national leaders? And what of the recent xenophobic ploy, used by certain European politicians, to denigrate marginal minority groups (orthodox Jews or Muslims for example) whose religious convictions prevent them from shaking hands with certain people? The ostensibly ‘universal’ gesture of handshaking was here used as a partisan ruse to exclude persons on the basis of religious and cultural differences.<sup>30</sup>

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30 Handshakes can be deformed from gestures of hospitality into ones of hostility, but I would suggest that this is a precisely a *betrayal* of the original intent of this carnal gesture in most if not all cultures. Different cultures may have different ways of performing and interpreting the mutual exchange of vulnerabilities (the disarmed bare hand to hand can be replaced by a locking of arms or a touching of heads, feet or lips). And of course there are different rules for such exchanges dependent on gender, age, class, culture etc. In that sense, the paradigm of the handshake as gesture of hospitality should not be viewed as the imposition of a Greek or European ‘universalist’ normative event, but rather as a fundamental human gesture of trusting the stranger (which in all Indo-European languages, as we saw, carries the double semantic possibility of enemy *or* friend, host or guest). Such a disarming gesture, however hermeneutically applied in difference cultures or circumstances, is always reciprocal qua double sensation but not necessarily symmetrical: the genuine welcome of the other as stranger (*hostis*) is precisely an acknowledgment of his/her irreducible alterity (if anything one might speak here of a symmetry of asymmetry). That is precisely why *hostis* can mean enemy or friend for one never knows for sure beforehand; one only comes to know through the tactile exposure and exchange of open hand on open hand: hence the character of risk and a wager. ‘Chancing your arm’, or ‘chancing your hand’. In other words, the genuine handshake does not entail a reduction of the other to the self, of guest to host, of stranger to same. Such a reduction would indeed signal a universalist assimilation of alterity into a symmetry of sameness (which Levinas, Derrida, Ricoeur all reject). Ricoeur rightly insists that hospitality is not an exchange between *même* and *même*, but between *semblable* and *semblable*—*soi-moi comme un autre*, not *entant que l’autre*. The *comme/as/als* signals a gap, difference or *écart*. And not just for Derrida and Ricoeur, but for Merleau-Ponty too where (pace Derrida’s accusation of haptocentrism in *Le Toucher*) the chiasm of flesh always and everywhere retains what Merleau-Ponty calls an irreducible ‘diacritical gap’. That is precisely why Merleau-Ponty insists on the notion of ‘diacritical sensation/perception’ in *Le Monde Sensible et Monde de l’expression*. Otherwise *la chair* simply absorbs otherness—strangeness—difference into a totalising fusion. Which is precisely what happens in rape, torture, molestation, harassment or, to turn political, the Trump or Putin handshake. In these carnal betrayals, two-way double sensation (sensitive to the other, receptive to their needs, desires, fears, wounds, differences, haecceities) is travestied as one-way sensation (insensitive to

So there is, I suggest, a hermeneutic responsibility to discern between handshakes—those that express genuine hospitality and those that mask hostility. A hermeneutics of suspicion (regarding hidden motivations, interests, and intentions) needs to supplement a hermeneutics of affirmation (regarding aims of peace, pardon, and hospitality). And what is true of the handshake is equally true of other carnal gestures of hospitable portent. Think of the kiss as act of love or betrayal (the treacherous kiss of Judas, the abusive kiss of the sexual predator). Here the ‘double sensation’ of touch is replaced by a one-way sensation of violence inflicted on victims irrespective of their sensitivity or integrity. Think also of the sharing of food: an act of hospitable feasting can degenerate into a tyranny of forced consumption punishing those who reject what is offered—the Torah tells of Israelites murdered because they refused unclean food; and the sharing of bread and wine can also be an act of poisoning or treason (e.g. Judas at the last supper). Even the carnal act of so-called ‘love making’ can degenerate into harassment or rape. Not all coupling is loving (two way touching). And one might also add, finally, the ‘laying on of hands’—a potent gesture of healing hospitality in many spiritual and therapeutic contexts, but also an act of heinous manipulation in the hands of false gurus like Jim Jones, David Koresh, or Charlie Manson.

Indeed some might wish to mention here the more complex question of touch in the psychoanalytic controversy concerning transference and countertransference, especially as it pertains to the early debates between Freud, Jung, Spielraum, and Reich. Carnal transference is a delicate matter—though I think that in Freud’s own experience verbal transference was even more of a problem (e.g. Dora’s case, where he imposed his own narrative account on his young patient). Words can be just as erotic as touch—as the annals of seduction show from Don Juan and Casanova to *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and Kierkegaard’s

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the other, untouched and untouchable re their singular alterity). This is why we need a hermeneutics of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) to ‘discriminate’ and ‘discern’ between the various implicit intentions, motives, presuppositions of each and every unique handshake or other kind of symbolic touch. Hence Aristotle’s insistence that touch is the most ‘philosophical’ of the senses because ‘touch knows differences’ (it discerns, *krinein*)—unlike the other senses which can be unilateral: you can see without being seen, hear without being heard etc., but you cannot touch without being touched—even though you are free to deny/betray/negate this fundamental carnal receptivity, as Aristotle recognized in his examples of wantonness, drunkenness or lust where one imposes oneself on the other. And if it is true that Aristotle talks of touch as the most ‘universal’ of the senses, he does not mean this in the sense of a hegemonic universalist norm but only in the sense of a sensation operative in all the other four senses too. There is always an ethical duty to ask the hermeneutic question: *Where do you touch from and what is the handshake for?*

'Diary of a Seducer'. Verbal seduction is often as charged as a physical caress. Which is why hermeneutics is also about knowing when *not* to speak or when *not* to touch. It invigilates the limits of the sayable and tangible. Sometimes it is best to remain silent and place a compassionate hand on a shoulder or arm. Other times it is wiser to suspend any direct contact and pursue the 'talking cure'. These fine distinctions are crucially important. We need a 'pedagogy of tact' regarding modalities of contact. Especially as it relates to controversial contemporary misunderstandings regarding behavioral codes between the sexes.

We could also cite here some Scriptural examples of tact and contact. The Risen Christ's *noli me tangere* is as carnally hermeneutic as his bidding Thomas to put his finger in his wound. There is touch and touch, as Jean-Luc Nancy suggests when he argues that Jesus's final meeting with Mary Magdalene was not a total absence of touch (certain paintings he analyses show Mary brushing Christ's garments or skin with her hand) but rather a warning not to 'grasp' or 'possess'. He was asking her not to hang on to him but to allow him to be other, a passing stranger (*hospes*), so that she, in turn, could be liberated into the extended love of the disciples (where he sends her in his last farewell). There are different ways of touching or not touching God's hand—as we know from Michael Angelo's Sistine Chapel. Just as there are different ways of shaking hands with the devil. Carnal hermeneutics is about trying to tell the difference.

As we know from phenomenology, there can be touch by contact and touch at a distance. Being in the vicinity or presence of someone can be deeply 'touching' even if one never makes literal physical contact. A handwave can be a handshake by other means. And no less powerful for that in the right circumstances. It's all a matter of carnal hermeneutics in the end—discerning right ways of touching and not touching, of saying and not saying, of speaking and being silent. The right relations with the right persons in the right times and places. Knowing how to be far and near, absent and present, foreign and familiar in right measure. Otherwise there is no real distinction between hosts and guests. No separation, no gap, no risk, no wager, no *épreuve de l'étrange*. No otherness to acknowledge and embrace. Which is why carnal hospitality is always a task, never a *fait accompli*.

### 3 Conclusion

Commenting on one of Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's exchanges during the TRC, Archbishop Tutu remarked: "We should all be deeply humbled by what we've heard ... Now we've got to turn our backs on this awful past and say: life is for

living”.<sup>31</sup> “After such knowledge what forgiveness?” asks T.S. Eliot. And we might add: *After such forgiveness what knowledge?* For if there is knowledge, what kind of knowledge is it? Cognitive or embodied or both? And what do we *do* with it? Do we go on remembering, revisiting and reworking through wounds, setting the record straight? Or do we decide to forgive and forget? There are handshakes that signal a readiness to recall and others which signal a time to let go. This is a key problem not only for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa but for other truth tribunals and memorials in post-traumatic communities throughout the world.<sup>32</sup> And there are many. There is much hermeneutic work to be done. For deep wounds to be touched and real healing to happen.

31 Cited in Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), p. 30.

32 I think it is no accident that one the most powerful testimonies to the traumas of Apartheid—*Country of My Skull*—was written by a south African poet, Antjie Krog. Poetry and art have a way of combining the powers of linguistic and carnal hermeneutics. And I am also reminded here of Atom Egoyan’s extraordinary testament to the Armenian genocide in his film *Ararat* as well as countless writers, artists, and film makers who have kept the memory of the holocaust alive—Amos Oz, Paul Celan, Claude Lanzmann, Stephen Spielberg, Art Spiegelman—all observing Primo Levi’s plea to ‘keep retelling the story of Auschwitz so that it can never happen again’. But we must also honor Adorno’s question—‘after Auschwitz who can write poetry?’—acknowledging the *limits* of narrative catharsis. (Is not speechlessness sometimes the most appropriate response to horror?) And yet one cannot deny the indefatigable call of healing. It does not go away. History needs story to combine carnal affect with cognitive understanding—the double power of catharsis. Why? In order to bring the past back to life again, so that we can ‘*feel* what wretches feel’, *empathize* with the pain of the persecuted and be *struck* by the terror of it all. Or to repeat the lesson of Aristotle’s *Poetics*: we often need a poetic plot to reconfigure past sufferings into a meaningful act of affective catharsis—an imaginative revisiting of our innermost ‘passions’ (*pathema*) of pity and fear. Otherwise there would be no purgation, no reckoning, no release—just a bare chronicle of facts: irresistible fatality. Story and history need each other for unspeakable wounds to become visible scars: signs on our flesh to be tested and tasted, felt and embraced. For archive to become art. Art is a matter of both feeling and knowing—of being touched as well as being instructed. Cathartic healing needs both. In sum, a double hospitality of word and flesh is necessary for deep traumas to be worked through and real peace to take place. For a further development of these themes see my “A Hermeneutics of Wounds,” and Elizabeth Corpt’s “Encountering the Psychoanalyst’s Suffering: discussion of Kearney’s ‘A Hermeneutics of Wounds,’” in *Unconscious Incarnations*, eds. Brian Becker et al. (New York: Routledge, 2018).

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