

Richard Kearney on touch: recovering our most vital sense

Abstract

The following is a review of Richard Kearney's new volume *Touch: recovering our most vital sense* (New York: Columbia University Press; 2021), in the context of his recent wave of creative publications on poetics and carnal hermeneutics.

Key words

anatheism; incarnation; excarnation; tact; tactility; synesthesia; theophany; wounding; trauma; wounded healer; carnal hermeneutics; anacarnation; anthropocene; symbiocene; optocentrism; anatechnology

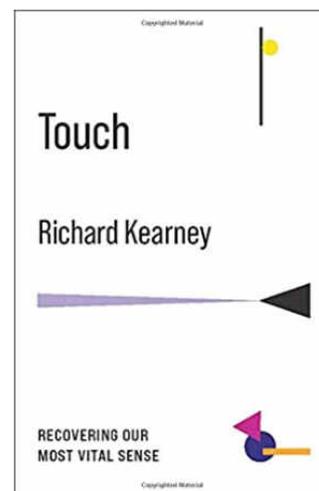
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Richard Kearney introduces his latest volume, *Touch: recovering our most vital sense*, as a book addressing the crisis of touch in the age of simulation and excarnation, informed by digital technology and amplified by the social distancing requested by the C-19 calamity (Kearney 2021: 2). From the beginning, Kearney refers to the present work as a “modest proposal in three movements” namely, understanding the five senses, review of wisdom traditions that shaped our understanding of the body expressed in myth and philosophy, and new ways to recover the joys of incarnation (Kearney 2021: 6). This recovery involves imagining and designing new arts of touch toward a superior reintegration and healing envisioned by a transition, in Richard Louv's vision (2019), from the Anthropocene



of optocentrism, human exceptionalism, and technological domination to the Symbiocene age of holistic tactile communication, ecology of mutualism, interconnection of all sentient beings, return to nature (Kearney 2021: 5-6).

The first chapter (Coming to our senses) establishes the specific intelligence of the body as a tactile sensibility with touch operating through all the senses, and the synesthetic role of tact, the carnal wisdom of tactility, active in touch and all the other senses. Kearney engages in a careful study of the meaning of tact in each of the senses: touch (tact), taste (savvy), smell (flair), sight (insight), sound (resonance). Tactful touch involves a dialectics of reciprocity of a two-way sensibility: active-passive, far-near, distance and proximity, double sensation, reversibility. If dance is the perfect art model for an ethic of tact, the handshake emerged as the first act of civility. By contrast, tactless touch is a denial of reciprocity, thus a denial of the other that is being ostracized and objectified as in the case of the untouchables, the Dalits, in India. In this context, Kearney pauses to recall primal scenes in Greek ancient literature, as well as in today's political world of handshakes that mark the movement from hostility to hospitality, the conversion of enemy (*hostis*) into guest (*hostis / hospes* = "stranger," "foreigner"). Thus from the embrace of Glaucon and Diomonides in Homer's *Iliad* to the handclasps of Mandela and de Klerk, Begin and Sadat, Hume and Trimble, apolitical wager of touch, the choice of welcoming the other, stranger or enemy, enacts Kearney's central notion of hospitality developed in *Anatheism: the return to God after God* (2011), an earlier work, whose ramifications will be followed and touched upon in the present volume. Kearney's central claim that justifies his plea for a return to and recovery of touch is based on the existential significance of synesthetic touch traversing all the senses, as inclusive embodied existential open vulnerability, providing us with carnal intelligence, the most sensitive sensibility, the double sensibility, reversibility, and omnipresence of universal tactility (Kearney 2021:16). These themes of carnal hosting and empathy are taken up again in *Radical hospitality* (2021), where they are applied to a series of practical examples, ranging from narrative exchanges of memories to pedagogical peace experiments.

He continues the analysis of the meaning of tact, as tactfulness for the other four senses. Taste inaugurates carnal hermeneutics in that we taste before we think, I taste therefore I am, *sapio ergo sum*, in a revealing swerve from the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*, a swerve that interrogates once more the rationalist bias in Western tradition from Plato to Descartes.

Kearney adduces foundational myths from ancient Greek and Biblical tradition as witnesses to the primary culture of tasting as theophany: from the strangers revealed as divine in the tasting of Abraham and Sarah's hospitality at Mamre to Jesus's Last Supper (Kearney 2021: 20). Following tactful taste, flair or tactful smell brings with it a power of unlocking buried memories, enabling recognition. Argus recognizes Odysseus through smell; Proust recovers *le temps perdu* synesthetically

through the taste and fragrance of madeleines and linden tea; Camus recovers his childhood self by breathing in the smell of his old school. The art of flair can even be used in medical diagnoses, Jean Lenoir (2006) discovers, as was common in 19th-century France, while preferences and hierarchies of perfumes, smells, fragrances undergo cultural shifts, as Joseph Nugent argues, affecting social conventions (Kearney 2021: 22).

Tactful sight or vision (foresight, hindsight, insight), Kearney shows, is a holistic way of seeing, a type of seeing with the heart into the heart of things affirmed by the fox in Saint-Exupery's *The Little Prince*. In wisdom literature, such a vision is suggested by the absence of literal sight. Examples are numerous from the Elysian rites of initiation to Oedipus, Tiresias, Saul/Paul on the way to Damascus, Cleopas at Emmaus. Experiments in heightened vision were familiar to Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, Allen Ginsberg. Most interesting is the phenomenon of mysterious reciprocity, of seeing and being seen, gazing into nature and being embraced by its gaze, an experience of double vision, or tactile seeing. Kearney adduces Maurice Merleau-Ponty's discussion of Cézanne's synesthetic perception of the trees watching him as he was painting them.

The phenomenon of reciprocity exists as well in resonance or tactful sound. A matter of attention, meditation, rhythm, movement and listening with the ear of the heart, ultimately silence, as in the Benedictine invocation. Authentic listening involves listening with the heart in silence, authentic seeing, seeing with the eyes of the heart in the absence of eyesight. Tactful listening also involves listening to non-humans, whales, horses, dogs and listening to "keener sounds" (Wallace Stevens), sounds of nature, to the body of land and the sea (Kearney 2021: 30). Resonance is healing as Helen Bamber listening to and holding trauma survivors shows in her own witnessing (cf. Belton 2012).

In chapter 2 (Philosophies of touch: from Aristotle to phenomenology), Kearney devotes his attention to the two major paradigms, Platonic and Aristotelian, that have marked Western consciousness while uncovering the significance of the priority of Plato's sight in relation to touch and the other senses. While Plato instituted the radical superiority of vision, the human intellectual soul in contemplation of the Ideas, Aristotle developed a philosophy of touch as the most primordial and intelligent sense. Ironically, Kearney remarks, Christian theology, though defined by the incarnation, with the exception of the voluntarists like Francis of Assisi and the Franciscans and the mystics such as Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, Christian theology has fallen into the Platonic intellectualist temptation of prioritizing sight. The priority of sight will enable hierarchical dualism of mind over body with its senses and emotions mediating the two separate ontological orders. It was only the phenomenological revolution of the return to the senses, Husserl followed by existential phenomenologists, Heidegger, Sartre, Levinas, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and, more recently, feminist existentialists, De Beauvoir, Irigaray and

Kristeva, that engaged in redeeming and rehabilitating Aristotle's analysis of touch in *De anima*. As per Kearney's review, touch is for Aristotle the most intelligent sense and simultaneously the most sensitive. In radical opposition to Plato, intelligence is directly linked to, even dependent on, sensibility, thus human perfection is perfection of touch. In clear reversal of the Socratic maxim, it is not intellectual examination but tactility that makes life worth living, "without tactility there is no life worth living" (Kearney 2021: 37). He thus completely reverses Platonic dichotomy and hierarchy. The Platonist main critique of touch has continued to be its lack of mediation, its immediacy, which classified it as the lowest and animal sense. Kearney insists that Aristotle proved this critique completely mistaken: touch is not immediate, its medium (Gr. *metaxu*) is flesh (Gr. *sarx*), thus our first wisdom comes from touch mediated by flesh and our sensing is already a reading, an interpretation, a hermeneutic of the world (Kearney 2021: 36-37). As Kearney shows following the argument of *De Anima*, Aristotle is writing in praise of touch as the foundation of embodied being as integrated psychosomatic being – another definite departure from Plato – as well as a being of nature, in continuous dialogue with the other. Fundamentally, a *metaxic* being is one mediating between inside and outside, self and other, human and non-human. Mediation is facilitated by tactility playing the role of transition, translation in a carnal hermeneutics (Kearney 2021: 38). As per Kearney, there is a continuous flow of information throughout the body: Hermes translates messages, both hermetic and/or hermeneutic, between surface and deep, inner secret wounds and outer signs and scars (Kearney 2021: 45). Most importantly, touch is a portal opening into the world, first site of consent to being and welcome to the other. Flesh is exposed to risk, adventure, and touch. In opposition to the Socratic claim, it is the risk of tactility, the wagering of flesh, that makes life worth living rather than examination of life: in other words, only a fully embodied life, vulnerable, exposed, is a life worth living. That means a life of action, of work and struggle assumed courageously rather than one of passive and detached contemplation.

Husserl's call back to things themselves is a call to pre-reflected experience of the lived body (*Leib*) in touch with felt existence, distinctive from the object body (*Körper*), a thing among others. Husserl follows Aristotle's evaluation of touch as the most primordial mode of relating, also challenging optocentrism and the dualism of mind-body and, after Kant, refers to the dialectic of active-passive aspects as "double sensation" of one who has a body and is a body. Husserl goes beyond Aristotle, Kearney remarks, in that, with him, tangible-tactile flesh becomes the scene of the primordial experience of the other, a crossroads between me and not-me that functions as an agency of intercorporality and empathy. In "tactile incarnation" since the body can be constituted originally only in tactuality, flesh operates in unity with consciousness, and is not opposed to mind, deep mind, intimate mind (Kearney 2021: 46-47).

Following Husserl's rehabilitation of touch and challenge of classical dualism, the existential phenomenologists deepened and extended the shift away from *theoria*. Kearney briefly mentions Heidegger's analysis of fundamental moods, Sartre's description of caress, Levinas's notion of sensibility. He makes a special mention of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who focuses on touch as a chiasm between my flesh and the flesh of the world and applies the phenomenon of touch to healing (Kearney 2021: 48-49). Kearney adduces the feminist existentialists, De Beauvoir, Irigaray and Kristeva, for their interest in tactility as expressed in sexuality, art, and mother-child relationship.

As we are confronted by the continued optocentrism of mainstream academia aggravated by a digital culture of excarnation, Kearney voices an urgent call to endorse a philosophy of embodiment which can promise new arts of touch (Kearney 2021: 52).

The appendix to chapter 2 (The paradox of the uncanny as embodied knowing), refers to a different kind of touch, taking its lead from Heidegger and Kristeva for whom the feeling of the uncanny indicates our way of being in touch with death, our tangible experience of nothingness, our encounter with the abyss as being toward death. Joining Kristeva, Kearney warns that we remain strangers to ourselves until we get back in touch with the other within (Kearney 2021: 55-56).

Chapter 3 (Tales of the wounded healer) contains the key message of Kearney's hermeneutical study of touch. Touch plays its most important role in healing as an art of touch through genuine carnal catharsis that brings us to the paradox of the wounded healer. Kearney goes over the principal Greek myths and biblical stories of wounded healers. Odysseus, Oedipus, Chiron and his disciple Asclepius, each of these myths is woven around the paradox or dialectic of wounding and healing grounded in tactile contact. Odysseus returns to Ithaca as a stranger and is recognized in a double catharsis of tale and touch – his scar is touched by his childhood nurse, Euryclea, and his scent is recognized by his dog Argos. Oedipus forfeits his sight in exchange for true vision, and gains touch with his body. Chiron/Keiron (Gr. *Keison*, hand), the wisest and kindest of centaurs, immortal son of the Titan Chronos and the Oceanid Philyra, half-brother of Zeus, was initiated into the art of healing by Apollo. Though master of healing, Chiron could not heal himself but taught the art of touch, music and medicinal herbs, to Asclepius. Chiron-Asclepius have become figures of the art of slow and deep healing of inner secret wounds, a holistic art that addresses deep-seated traumas and brings recovery through resonance between healer and patient: wound speaking to wound, "the deep calls unto deep" [Psalm 42]. By contrast, Hippocrates followed Zeus's model of curing from above, through panoptic detachment and control. It was the latter that Western medicine adopted, another instance of prioritizing sight to the detriment of the animal senses, touch, smell, and taste.

Kearney now turns to the biblical stories of wounded healers, Jacob, Christ, and Thomas, and “anacarnation,” the main core of his study and argument. Jacob’s corps-à-corps combat with the angel of God results in the *coincidentia oppositorum* of his being simultaneously wounded and healed, where wounding itself is envisioned as a condition of healing. A fulfillment of all figures of wounded healers in the Old Testament, Christ’s crucified body becomes the paradigm of healing. So do the pierced heart of *mater dolorosa* and stigmata-bearing saint Francis and Padre Pio (Kearney 2021: 73). Before the cross, throughout his life in the body, even before healing by word, Christ, eminently tangible before and after death, healed by touch, by a laying on of hands (Kearney 2021: 77). The Eucharistic kerygma and promise, “this is my body” a tangible and pathetic body, hiding deep wounds and revealing scars, constitutes the revolutionary meaning of the incarnation and the core of Christian theology. However, the temptation of Gnosticism and excarnation has haunted Christian theology since the beginning. As Kearney notes, the last temptation of Christ is not – as Kazantzakis envisioned – to marry and live merely a human life, but rather the Gnostic temptation to ascend to heaven, and lose touch with the body. Excarnation is a serious and radical temptation, the very betrayal of the Word made flesh: a complete erasure and unbecoming of incarnation. In this context, Thomas’s touch kept Jesus as “infinitely returning stranger – in the reversible guise of host/guest – [and that] is what we might call *anacarnation* [...] [i.e., the] story of endless carnal reanimation, [...] the multiple repeat-act of incarnation in history [...] [that] bring[s] Jesus back to earth in a continuous community of solidarity and compassion.” (Kearney 2021: 77-78) Thomas, the Samaritan woman at the well, the Syro-Phoenician woman at the table, all remind Jesus that his divinity is in tangible humanity, the mystery of the incarnation.

The anacarnational character of Christ means that the cross is not the end of the incarnation, and that the incarnation begins again with the resurrection of the body and not merely the soul (Kearney 2021: 82).

The celebration of touch is witnessed to in the mysticism of ecstatic touch of a Teresa of Avila or John of the Cross, for whom the experience of divine union is tactile, a dialectical *jouissance* of wounding and healing.

In chapter 4 (Healing touch: therapies of trauma and recovery), moving further from a hermeneutics of the wounded healer, Kearney penetrates deeper into the phenomenology of haptic healing events, i.e. events of healing through touch. He points to the psychoanalytic beginnings of trauma therapy whose founder was Freud, a wounded healer himself (Kearney 2021: 85). Kearney proposes an interesting new way of looking at Freud’s grandson Ernst’s experience of his mother’s death, his *fort/da* [away/here] play of presence/absence. Kearney observes Freud’s turn away from an Asclepian healing approach to detached optocentric observation: while Ernst uses both words and touch in his game of far/near, there/here, Freud refrains from reaching out to comfort him, opting instead for a posture of distant observation. From

now on, concerns for the risks of transference and countertransference will rule out forms of intimacy between analyst and analysand in trauma therapy. Interestingly, a new era in trauma studies that emerged in the 1980s was pioneered by several women scientists, Helen Bamber among them, who devoted her healing work of listening to and holding World War II concentration-camps survivors (cf. Belton 2012). Kearney also mentions James Hamblin's therapeutic for healing the body through touch, recorded in *If bodies could talk*, and brings up the new Asclepian attitude toward touch in trauma healing that Peter Levine and Dominique Meyniel called forth as the ethic of tactile therapy. Levine maintained that it is unethical not to touch (Kearney 2021: 85), Meyniel set up code 1993 that rules it is "forbidden not to touch patients" (Kearney 2021: 105). Bessel van der Kolk's therapeutics of touch, elaborated in *The body keeps the score* (2015), endorses Asclepian therapies of breathing, moving and touching, and invites patients to participate in an interactive haptic healing process (Kearney 2021: 85). Kearney adduces Van der Kolk's therapeutic of interoception, or reintegrating trauma as the collaboration between the emotional brain and the rational brain. Healing the disconnection between the mental and somatic brain and restoring their collaboration is the goal of trauma therapy (Kearney 2021: 98-99). The collaboration or its collapse have been considered in theories of attachment as per John Bowlby and attunement as Donald Winnicott, Antonio Damasio, Tiffany Fields – the latter also the founder of *Touch Research Institute* for adults with chronic pain, pregnant women, and the elderly in hospices (Kearney 2021: 102-104).

This section of chapter 4 concludes on a personal note in which Kearney endorses Asclepian holistic healing by referring to his own battle with depression with the help of traditional disciplines and activities involving engagement of the body, Iyengar yoga, shiatsu massage, pranayama, swimming, fishing, walking, spending time in the company of horses and his retriever Bella, and pilgrimages from Vézelay Abbey to Santiago de Compostella (Kearney 2021: 106). At this point, Kearney takes a step forward towards what he calls a "commons of the body" emerging in a collective public and private trauma therapeutics. A commons of the body becomes relevant in truth and reconciliation projects that invoke common memory and human contact as they bring together in a communal space victims and perpetrators. South Africa, Rwanda, Northern Ireland are evoked. Deeply touching moments of forgiveness and mutual healing, turning handguns into handshakes, are called forth – such as Pumla Goboda touching the hand of a criminal executioner (Kearney 2021: 106-108). The healing arc of trauma therapy is thus being completed in the healing gesture of the victim's touch of the perpetrator (Kearney 2021: 109).

Moreover, the commons of the body includes the animal world as well. Kearney enters the topic in the Appendix (Reconnecting with the Animal). Somatic therapy involves work with the animal brain (mammalian and limbic brains), as well as with animals, horses, dogs and dolphins in particular. Kearney calls forth Richard Louv's ecopsychological studies of healing through mutual attunement between

humans and animals, trees, bodies of land and water. He reiterates his endorsement of the desirability of our advance towards the Symbiocene envisioned by Louv as “an age of therapeutic connectedness between all sentient beings, going beyond the Anthropocene of contemporary excarnation and encompassing novel practices of reciprocity and redistribution. An age ‘where wilderness survives, albeit in newer forms and in unexpected places, where we live in balance with other life.’” (Kearney 2021: 111)

Chapter 5 (Reclaiming touch in the age of excarnation) reviews the questions, concerns, research, findings, and conclusions of a seminar Kearney offered at Boston College, “Image and Eros in the digital age of the eclipse of the touch, excarnation, and simulation.” He remarks on the irony of our materialistic culture of body image mutating into its immaterialist opposite and losing touch with the body (Kearney 2021: 111; 114). From private to public life, to communication, e-commerce, academia, medicine, global conflict, and entertainment – all the domains of our life have been touched and radically transformed by digital technology. From vicarious voyeuristic sex, false selves, and false news products of social media, electronic assaults of reverse porn, meddling into politics, Kurzweil’s dystopia of cyborg brain implants and singularity, telemedicine, and drone, screen to screen and psy-ops wars, to gaming hyperreality – in all these instances the eclipse of the tactile and the reign of the eye of the cyber panopticon deny embodied life and eliminate the double sensation, two-way sensibility, the reciprocity principle of incarnate eminently touchable being. In a Gyges’s ring thinking experiment universalized, responsibility and moral conscience are lost behind the screens. However, Kearney is not a nihilist and does not stop here, he neither falls into posthumanist apocalyptic desperation, nor does he withdraw into nostalgia for the past. As his seminar concluded with students’ proposing new arts of collaboration between code and flesh, he proposes “ana-technology,” digital reuse, digital technology putting itself in question, to invent new ways of getting back in touch with the body and the world (Kearney 2021: 129-130). Digital action for democracy is just one example of relating the virtual and the lived experience as a project in empathy. The 2019 tree experiments with haptic vests, or the embrace experiments with haptic pro-theses are other ventures in haptic technology for the amplification of touch by digital technology. Such projects, Kearney argues, transcend Platonic and postmodern dualism of sight versus touch, artificial versus tactile intelligence, and provide a new mode of being in which real and simulated worlds no longer compete but cooperate, exploring mutually enhancing symbiosis. Kearney maintains that designing new ways of collaboration between digital and tactile therapies adds another layer to the task of the symbiocene of healing the whole person and planet (Kearney 2021: 131).

In Coda (Touch and the Coronavirus) Kearney considers the effects of the C-19 imperative of social distancing on our senses – touch, taste, smell – thus on our ontology as embodied beings and self-identity. What immediately transpired was the

centrality of touch (Kearney 2021: 133), “the irradicable desire for tangible contact” (Kearney 2021: 139). The pain of lockdown that imposed optocentrism and excarnality as *modus vivendi et operandi* provoked both inner crises and creative responses to the imperative need to find alternative modalities to get in touch. Among the reflections commissioned by media outlets in the early stages of the pandemic, he mentions Leila Slimani’s on the power of skin, in *Le Monde* (2020), and Julia Kristeva’s plea for touch as our most vital sense in *Corriere della sera* (2020) (Kearney 2021: 137). In the interview with Stefano Montefiori, Kristeva refers to the revelatory and sobering effects of the pandemic: life became visible in its fundamental vulnerability and fragility of embodied being, solitude as loneliness, intolerance of limits, and repression of mortality (Kearney 2021: 137). Kearney and Kristeva share similar concerns about the effects of the global pandemic and have a message of hope for a postpandemic world that calls forth “a new art of living that will be complex and daring” (Kearney 2021: 138). Kearney’s final remarks focus on this new art of living that involves digital initiatives of integrating touch and the other animal senses. Telehaptic hybrid experiments merging the virtual and tactile body and multi-sensory events challenge dualisms and transition from the old world and consciousness to the new.

In the following succinct exposé I will attempt a critical contextualization of *Touch* in relation to some of the other recent volumes from *Carnal hermeneutics* to *The art of anatheism*, *Richard Kearney’s anatheist wager*, and *Imagination now: a Richard Kearney reader*.

With *Touch* Kearney fulfills the promise made at the end of “The wager of carnal hermeneutics,” the opening chapter of *Carnal hermeneutics*: engaging in a diacritical hermeneutics of flesh is a challenging task of diagnosis in the age of excarnation, of interpreting “the carnal signs of our time as evinced in the increasing digitalization of the body, and virtualization of our needs of communication and community” (Kearney 2015: 56). As per Kearney, the diacritical hermeneutics of flesh is going along with the deconstructive hermeneutics of touch, the feminist hermeneutics of the body, and the theological hermeneutics of incarnation, one of the orientations for a continuing conversation of carnal hermeneutics. Eco-phenomenology, bio-diacritics, and dia-phenomenology constitute other domains of this newly emerging hermeneutical orientation. What is the diacritical hermeneutics of the flesh? Kearney retrieves Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s notion of diacritical perception in *Le monde sensible et le monde de l’expression* (1953) that describes a “new mode of expressive sensibility” and involves the “crossing of sensation and language” (Kearney 2015: 42). As “structured language in its nascent state,” perception is diacritical, sensing meaning as it emerges in the intervals, gaps, absences between the infra-things of our experience (Kearney 2015: 43). Kearney takes Merleau-Ponty’s notion further and proposes diacritical hermeneutics as carnal hermeneutics, a reading of symptoms, entailing a grammar of interpretation across

distance, gaps, and differences, healing the tear separating reason and sensibility, theoretical/divine and animal senses, logos and flesh, self and other, inner and outer. As such carnal hermeneutics is a form of deep healing of consciousness and body.

In *The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics*, Kearney sets up the philosophical foundations for diacritical hermeneutics of the flesh with an emphasis on healing in the age of excarnation. In the “Introduction: from head to foot,” Brian Treanor and Richard Kearney define carnal hermeneutics and sketch a manifesto. Carnal hermeneutics attends to the “surplus of meaning arising from our carnal embodiment, its role in our experiencing and understanding and its engagement with the world” (Kearney 2015: 1). The authors remark on the carnal turn in hermeneutics that “ranges across a wide spectrum of interpretation, from head to toe, sky to earth, sacred and sublime to tactile and terrestrial” (Kearney 2015: 1). Its ground is the body, embodied being, embodied life, incarnation, word is flesh, text is body and body is text (Kearney 2015: 2).

In *The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics*, Kearney “illustrates the core principles of carnal hermeneutics, and charts a hermeneutical genealogy of touch from Aristotle’s discovery of flesh (*sarx*) as medium (*metaxu*) to the revolutionary analyses of embodiment in the more contemporary works of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Ricoeur” (Kearney 2015: 2). Since “savvy” applies to both “savor” and “savoir,” taste and knowledge, hermeneutics is called to embrace sensory orientation together with intellectual understanding. The phenomenon of excarnation exhumes docetic ghosts of Gnosticism in a seemingly unwelcoming climate of full-fledged materialism. Kearney remarks on the irony of this phenomenon, however with him the irony does not turn sour, his observation does not become lamentation as with Baudrillard, who could identify perversity in the transparency of evil or the actualization of our perennial desires of spiritual freedom from the burden of flesh and immortality. Like many melancholic thinkers, William James and Gaston Bachelard among others, aware of the abyss, Kearney chooses not to tarry on the dark side, but to kindle the hope of healing and reintegration. And like Ficino, who wrote an entire therapeutics for the use of melancholic scholars of the occult and deep thinkers as a recantation for having criticized Saturn the planet-god of melancholy, Kearney cultivates a jovial intellectual attitude in times of major cultural crises of consciousness and calamities such as the death of God, contemporary excarnation or loss of touch with ourselves, and global pandemic. His therapeutics ranges from anatheism to anacarnation and anatechnology to the Symbiocene. The present volume is a sui generis enactment of the art of anatheism strictly at the level of embodied existence defined primordially by tactility. If anatheism, conceived as a return to god after the loss of god, has been explored across domains of hermeneutics, philosophical theology and literature, art, including social and political manifestations, anacarnation enacts a return to carnality, flesh, body, after the loss of carnality, flesh, body. While Kearney defines his field of hermeneutic exploration as Western philosophy, beginning with Plato and Aristotle

and the Judeo-Christian tradition, the god of anatheism and the body of anacarnation become imaginatively fully present in the Incarnation and Eucharistic sacrifice and promise. Even more significantly, anatheism and anacarnation coincide and become one in crucial moments and primal scenes. God returns incognito as a neighbor and a stranger and is revealed in a touch, tasting of food. Since touch is characterized by universality and synesthesia, the touch may be that of Thomas, now envisioned as a teacher and healer rather than simply a disciple of Jesus, the touch of erotic ecstasis that transfigured mystics like Teresa, that of the icon's gaze operating the ontological transformation of the believer venerating it; the touch-taste-gaze of the Eucharistic elements themselves. Outside the strictly theological narrative, anatheism enables finding God in the moment of willful courage and decision to welcome the stranger with hospitality and not hostility, the moment of *metanoia*, of change of mind and heart, of leaving the past behind and risking it all: in a handshake or embrace of a stranger, of an enemy, of the other in whatever form that other may be. In the risk of hospitality, it brings forth theophany: in the tasting of food, the touch of the embrace, God returns, appears in the other. The wager of anatheism becomes one with the wager of flesh. Anatheism is enacted by anacarnation.

What begins to emerge from Kearney's review of the destiny of touch in phenomenological perspective (chapter 1), Western philosophy and biblical narrative (chapter 2) is tactility as the defining character of life as embodied existence: with Aristotle, Kant, Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the existential feminists, the truth is that "I am my body." Here Kearney comes in close proximity to Michel Henry's central notion of the body subjective, a notion which was reached by thinking through both Meister Eckhart's metaphysics as psychology and Maine de Biran's pathetic thinking with the body, with its flesh and moods. As in the incarnation, dualism is overcome, transcended. The body is subjective, and, for Kearney as well as for Henry, the bodies will be raised. Arguably, our increasing digitalization of the world and of ourselves has resulted in excarnation, the reversal of the incarnation, and the vanishing of the physical reality of the body.

Theologically that means a Gnostic and docetic reversal of the incarnation, the betrayal of the Word made flesh, in extremis, a docetic Jesus laughing from the cross. Kearney recalls scenes of Jesus being reminded of his mission, initiated into the life in the body, retained on earth, preserving the open wounds and scars from disappearing in a glorious body, called back to earth after the cross. Incarnation does not end with the cross, but continues in the resurrection: anatheism and anacarnality. Existentially, excarnation causes a tear at the heart of being, a deep wound in need of healing, a healing that must be as deep as the wound itself restoring our animal senses, the outcome of a collaboration between the emotional brain and the rational brain, and whose patron is Asclepius, disciple of Chiron, the wounded healer, not Hippocrates, Zeus' disciple. In Asclepian tradition, healing involves slow, subterranean work, deep listening and resonance between wound and wound. A

considerable part of the therapeutic involves a reawakening of the body, by working with the hands, deep conscious breathing, and attentive movement. Myth and real healing merge in the practice of palliative practice of Michael Kearney, Richard Kearney's brother.

Kearney envisions haptic healing of the wounded body of humanity at private and public levels, in the cave of Asclepius and in events of truth and reconciliation sharing. The next step is healing the wounded commons of the body, bringing back in touch and harmony human and non-human embodied beings, inhabiting together and sharing bodies of earth, water, air. What comes next, once the life world is restored, is the redemption of digital technology itself: anatechnology. Kearney's hospitable vision does not leave out nor overcome in a Hegelian gesture of sovereignty, but rather provides conditions for the possibility of all-inclusive collaboration and harmony. Anatechnology is the ultimate gesture of generous hospitality toward the other, the defining mark of the Symbiocene. Kearney's theopoetic hermeneutic of the forgotten sense of touch complements Heidegger's anamnesis of Being, and of the moods of nonbeing and nothingness, as well as Bachelard's poetics of reverie in its retrieval of our poetic imagination of earth, water, fire, and air. A common drive or spirit ensouls and breathes over both: that of retrieving a dream of the bliss of being whole, reintegrated into the life world, that welcomes technology itself: for Kearney, the age of the Symbiocene.

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