

**Nervous Hands, Stolen Kisses, and the Press of Everyday Life:
Touch in Britain, 1870-1960**

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D.Phil History

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Short Abstract

This thesis provides a history of the sense of touch in modern Britain. Seeking out fugitive intimacies and incidental brushes of lover and stranger alike, it argues that far from being a natural constant, what, how, and why people touched, and what they felt when they did, has a history. Through five case studies of different domains – the mind sciences, visual impairment, public transport, law, and commercialized leisure – it explores how these uses changed, and how they transformed Britons’ understandings and experiences of their bodies. Both as a practice and a metaphor, from making space on the bus to keeping ‘in touch’, touch established the distinctions that Britons made between their bodies and the world and themselves and others. In doing so, touch crucially shaped histories of law, labour relations, scientific experiment, education, and love in the early twentieth century. But it also reformulated the very distinctions of selfhood – distinctions of inner self and outer body, person and thing – on which our accounts of modernity are based.

By tracing a history of touch, then, this thesis turns touch into a means of critique. It challenges histories of modernity for which selfhood is a substance rather than produced only through particular social relationships. But it also proposes a new way of thinking about selfhood as an immanent relationship the self has with *itself* through use of the body. Through historically specific ways of touching, early twentieth-century Britons shaped not only their experience of themselves as bodies, but also the boundaries defining

them as selves. Their selfhood was, in short, what they *did* with the body through touch. By exploring the history of touch between 1870 and 1960, this thesis therefore offers an alternative account of British modernity and a way of re-examining histories of selfhood within and beyond modern Britain.

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Long Abstract

This thesis provides a history of the sense of touch in modern Britain. Seeking out fugitive intimacies and incidental brushes of lover and stranger alike, it argues that far from being a natural constant, what, how, and why people touched, and what they felt when they did, has a history. This history transformed not simply the uses to which the body was put, but how Britons experienced and thought about themselves *as* bodies, and, in turn, as selves among others. Both as a practice and a metaphor, from making space on the bus to keeping ‘in touch’, touch established the distinctions that people made between their bodies and the world and themselves and others. In doing so, touch crucially shaped histories of law, labour relations, scientific experiment, education, and love in the early twentieth century. But it also reformulated the very distinctions of selfhood – distinctions of inner self and outer body, person and thing – on which our accounts of modernity are based.

By tracing a history of touch, then, this thesis also turns touch into a means of critique. It challenges histories of modernity for which selfhood is a substance rather than, as other historians convincingly argue, produced only through particular social relationships. But most significantly, it proposes a new way of thinking about selfhood as an immanent relationship the self has with *itself* through use of the body. Through historically specific ways of touching in the tangled streets of Southbank and the alcoved teashops of the City, Britons in the early twentieth century shaped not only their

experience of themselves as bodies, but also the boundaries defining them as selves. Their selfhood was, in short, what they *did* with the body through touch. It was this self-relationship which constituted the basis on which all social relationships – whether gendered, class, generational, or sexual – rested. While this was true before the twentieth century and beyond Britain, it was accentuated in a society newly defined by urban living and newly concerned with the ‘hidden’ neurological conditions of thought. In this society more than ever before, both in the way that people sensed and how they made sense of sense, selfhood was defined by the uses of the body.

This thesis examines how these uses, concepts, and experiences of touch changed in Britain between 1870 and 1960. Through five case studies, it ranges across different but intertwined domains: the mind sciences, visual impairment, public transport, law, and commercialized leisure. It shows how in each domain changes as diverse as rising coal consumption and the emergence of rush hour altered understandings and uses of touch and the intimate relations they structured. My purpose is not to show how the idea of touch developed in any one domain and filtered through to others but rather how the use and concept of touch constituted one another and established ways of sensing that crossed multiple discourses and spaces. For this reason, each chapter hones in on microscale practices, such as the intersection of love letter-writing and aesthetic literature before the Great War, as well as panning out to macroscale developments, such as shifting notions of scientific objectivity. In this way, each chapter shows how the uses and concepts of touch interacted within and flowed between different domains, often through the same individuals.

The first two chapters focus on the changing conception of touch in neurological and educational thought and its interaction with tactile practices in laboratories and schools for the blind. In each domain, I argue, the body was increasingly understood as

mediating the sensations it received. Chapter One traces a century of neurological research into touch, from ‘common sense’ to ticklishness, and its relation to new experimental methods. At the same time, I show how neurological concepts of touch entangled with the researcher’s wider lifeworld, examining how neurologist Henry Head’s epistolary relationship with his fiancé shaped what he did and found in his self-experiments into touch. While Head established a new understanding of touch as a process mediated by the body, by the 1920s neurologists turned away from using their own bodies, and by implication their own relationships, as means of investigating this. In Chapter Two I show how, in the education of blind children, new relations made between sensation and cognition shaped the assumed relation between sensation and political subjectivity. By the 1920s, blind psychologists and educationalists rejected the assumption that touch ‘naturally’ compensated blindness, arguing instead that compensation depended on the mutual shaping of mind and body. Blind activists would later argue that the continued focus on touch as supplementary to vision made blind people ‘supplementary’ to citizenship: included within it only through their exclusion from it. Yet throughout the first half of the century, teachers of blind children, like neurologists, increasingly understood touch as a process transformed by the body mediating it.

The next two chapters explore urban spaces in which touch assumed an especially fraught significance during and after the Great War: the tube and teashops. Although each of these spaces had their peculiarities, and others could have been chosen – cinemas, department stores, enclosed cars – contemporary social commentators like Barbara Drake, J. B. Priestley and Robert Sinclair took them as exemplifying modernity with all its problems and possibilities. Yet this modernity, these chapters demonstrate, was not a particular condition of being in which the self became more abstracted from itself and others but a period in which the very boundaries marking this abstraction became ever

more indeterminate. Chapter Three charts a history of everyday bodily interactions on the Underground. Using hundreds of passenger statements, gathered after the murder of Teresa Lubienka at Gloucester Road station in 1957, it deconstructs the *a priori* notion of personal space by tracing microhistories of tube etiquette, from minding the gap to standing on the right of escalators. It demonstrates that, far from encouraging an experience of intimate *anomie*, the tube shaped and was shaped by the development of personal boundaries that became increasingly difficult to fix. If personal boundaries were increasingly indeterminate on the tube then this was also true of teashops. Here, as Chapter Four shows, waitresses were expected from the mid-1920s to cultivate a particular form of abstract intimacy with customers – yet one which was, as on the tube, both confusingly and conveniently unclear to waitress and customer alike. Through tracing the life of Rector Harold Davidson, tried in 1932 for ‘immoral conduct’ with waitresses, this chapter explores the growing uncertainty over public intimacy in new spaces of commercial leisure, as well as the capitalist conditions underpinning it.

The final chapter turns from the growing social indeterminacy of commuter and consumer spaces to an event in which Londoners were repeatedly reminded of their existence as bodies as well as selves: London fog. Between the 1870s and the Great Smog of 1952, fog accentuated the pedestrian’s awareness of being a sensing subject – one navigating through touch – and sensory object – a body within space. Through its association with crime, fog revealed how law converted the phenomenology of the street into a legal object at the same time as that phenomenology shaped what counted as a legal ‘fact’. I investigate how this process worked during police court trials, arguing that law subsisted only *through* tactile objects and practices enacting it, from minute books to magisterial habitus, even while contemporary jurisprudence argued the reverse.

In following these histories of touch, this thesis critically intervenes in debates surrounding broader trajectories of change in the history of modern Britain. Through refocusing attention on the uses of touch it reorients histories of labour inequality, scientific credibility, legal objectivity, citizenship, and intimacy. But it also calls into question the analytic understanding of selfhood animating much of the wider history of British modernity. Challenging the notion of selfhood as substance it elaborates a history of selfhood as an immanent relationship transformed by the use of the body, from tussles on the tube to letters between lovers. In doing so, it both provides an alternative account of modernity and proposes a new way of thinking about selfhood useful for revising histories beyond those of modern Britain.

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This thesis would not have been possible without the professional and personal support of many different people. I am exceptionally grateful to my supervisors, Matt Houlbrook and William Whyte, whose patience, encouragement, and intellectual generosity sustained and stimulated me throughout. Together, they have broadened and sharpened my thinking in innumerable ways, and kept me going: I could not have asked for more.

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Abbreviations

BBC BBC Written Archives Centre

CRL Cadbury Research Library Special Collections, University of Birmingham

LEP Library of Experimental Psychology, University of Cambridge

LMA London Metropolitan Archives

LPL Lambeth Palace Library

LSE British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics

LTM London Transport Museum Archives

NCW New College Worcester

NRO Norwich Record Office

RLHA Royal London Hospital Archives

TNA The National Archives

TfLA Transport for London Archives

WCAR Wolfson Centre for Archival Research, The Library of Birmingham

WL Wellcome Library

Introduction

‘All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.’

—Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (1848)

How do we know ourselves when all that is solid melts into air? We might think, with Marx and Engels, that we could turn to our sober senses to know what we are and how we relate to others. The senses, we might think, keep us grounded, as bodies that touch and are touched, even when everything else seems to change. And this is true: the very nature of being a conscious body impresses on us the fact that we *have* a body oriented in time and space, one which is affected by the contact, texture, pressure, and temperature of the world around us. But what if our senses were not the antidote to modernity, but its key problematic? Instead of merely affirming our existence as bodies and selves—instead of reassuring us of our bodily and subjective ‘solidity’—our senses *made* this experience and, what is more, were made *by* our use of the body in historically specific ways. Apparently unchanging, touch was historically constituted and constitutive of the body that touched.

This thesis provides a history of the sense of touch in modern Britain. Seeking out fugitive intimacies and incidental brushes of lover and stranger alike, it argues that far from being a natural constant, what, how, and why people touched, and what they felt

when they did, has a history.¹ This history transformed not simply the uses to which the body was put, but how Britons experienced and thought about themselves *as* bodies, and, in turn, as selves among others. Both as a practice and a metaphor, from making space on the bus to keeping ‘in touch’, touch established the distinctions that people made between their bodies and the world and themselves and others.² In doing so, touch crucially shaped histories of law, labour relations, scientific experiment, education, and love in the early twentieth century. But it also reformulated the very distinctions of selfhood—distinctions of inner self and outer body, person and thing—on which our accounts of modernity are based.

By tracing a history of touch, then, this thesis also turns touch into a means of critique. It challenges histories of modernity for which selfhood is a substance rather than, as other historians convincingly argue, produced only through particular social relationships.³ But most significantly, it proposes a new way of thinking about selfhood as an immanent relationship the self has with *itself* through use of the body.⁴ Through historically specific ways of touching in the tangled streets of Southwark and the alcoved teashops of the City, Britons in the early twentieth century shaped not only their

¹ For an excellent introduction to the importance and uses of touch see Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies*, (Oxford, 2007).

² On touch as a point of division and exchange, see Elizabeth Harvey, ‘The Portal of Touch’, *American Historical Review*, 116/2, (April 2011), pp.386-389, and David Linden, *Touch: The Science of Hand, Heart, and Mind*, (London, 2015), c.1. On metaphors as structures of thought and experience see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, (Chicago: London, 2003); Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, trans. Robert Savage, (Ithaca: New York, 2010). On the importance of sensory metaphors in the English language, see Anna Wierzbicka, *Experience, Evidence, Sense: The Hidden Cultural Legacy of English*, (Oxford, 2010).

³ See for example Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*, (Princeton: Oxford, 2007); Matt Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters: The Incredible True Story of Netley Lucas, Gentleman Crook*, (Chicago: London, 2016); Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women’s Experience in Modern War*, (Chicago, 2013).

⁴ This draws on Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies: Homo Sacer IV:2*, trans. Adam Kotsko, (Stanford, 2016), p.54.

experience of themselves as bodies, but also the boundaries defining them as selves. Their selfhood was, in short, what they *did* with the body through touch. It was this self-relationship which constituted the basis on which all social relationships—whether gendered, class, generational, or sexual—rested. While this was true before the twentieth century and beyond Britain, it was accentuated in a society newly defined by urban living and newly concerned with the ‘hidden’ neurological conditions of thought.⁵ In this society more than ever before, both in the way that people sensed and how they made sense of sense, selfhood was defined by the uses of the body.

For the scientists, teachers, and psychologists studying sensation, by the 1920s touch was understood not just as a mediating process but also one mediated *by* bodily transformations only newly being discerned. Across multiple fields, those trying to make sense of touch developed the belief that the body’s mediating influence on stimuli transformed its very perception of those stimuli. Drawing on but redirecting the long history of British empiricism, commentators such as V. Vulliamy, teacher at Swiss Cottage School for the Blind, emphasised the active potential of touch to transfigure as well as transfer the raw material of thought underpinning everything from the body’s awareness of time and space to the scientific concepts and legal formulations through which this was understood. Paradoxically, even while this belief took hold scientists and jurists continued and, in the case of neurology during the 1920s, increasingly championed, the equally long-held belief that their objectivity, their existence as selves able to judge, depended on their abstraction from the concrete procedures on which it depended.⁶

⁵ Henning Schmidgen, *The Helmholtz Curves: Tracing Lost Time*, trans. Nils F. Schott, (New York, 2014), p.4.

⁶ For a compelling contemporary critique of this position, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols: Or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, (Oxford, 2008 [1889]), pp.16-17.

Yet despite this paradox, through everyday urban encounters touch or the deferral of touch redrew the boundaries of the self these experts assumed as given. In new urban spaces like the tube or the teashop traversed by everyone from scientists and magistrates to priests and prostitutes, touch reformulated the relationships people had with their own and other bodies, and with the environment they inhabited. But this reformulation was not, as some historians of modernity have argued, one of the increasing interiorisation and isolation of the self from its own and other bodies. It was rather one in which, by the 1920s, these very boundaries of selfhood became increasingly indeterminate and indeterminable. Particularly in the aftermath of the Great War, the changing uses of touch attendant on changes ranging from suburbanisation and rising mass consumption to the introduction of new rolling stock on the tube made increasingly visible the unstable and uncertain boundaries of selfhood.

Whether in legal discourse or the daily commute, touch was the site at which matter was made and made to matter. It was—and is—central to how we make ourselves in relation to the world and how we make relationships within it. By tracing this history from the late nineteenth century, this thesis offers an alternative account of British modernity. But it also proposes a new understanding of selfhood that is both more historically specific and more generalizable than that of selfhood as substance. Examining the constitutive and self-constituting effects of bodily use compels us to retrace the historical formation of selfhood itself, whether in modern Britain or beyond.

Undoing ‘sensory history’

Where might we look to help us develop a history of touch? Sensory Studies draws on a diverse heritage. In part it stems from the Annaliste tradition of Marc Bloch and Lucien

Febvre, continued by the pioneering work of Alain Corbin in the 1980s.⁷ In part it traces its roots to French phenomenology, social anthropology, and psychoanalysis.⁸ For over three decades it has flourished across multiple disciplines, from history and geography to anthropology and English literature.⁹ Within history, we have accounts of sensation for periods ranging from ancient Syria to modern USA and sometimes, more troublingly, attempts to survey these histories in one sweep.¹⁰ Yet despite the diversity, and notable exceptions, histories of sensation consistently group around a number of key themes. As these themes have cohered, I want to suggest, they have limited rather than broadened the early promise of sensory history to revise central historical accounts by instead partitioning it into a separate field—‘sensory history’—with its own discrete subjects.

⁷ Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France*, trans. J. E. Anderson, (London, 1973 [1924]); Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the Social Imagination*, (London, 1996 [1986]), *Time, Desire, and Horror: Towards a History of the Senses*, trans. Jean Birrell, (Cambridge, 1995), and *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-century French Countryside*, trans. Martin Thom, (London, 1999).

⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, (London: New York, 2002 [1945]); Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, trans. Chris Turner, (New Haven: London, 1989). For an exemplar of the phenomenological turn in architecture, see Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, (3rd edn, Chichester, 2012).

⁹ In anthropology see Constance Classen, ‘Foundations for An Anthropology of the Senses’, *International Social Science Journal*, 49/153, (September 1997), pp.401-412; David Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory*, (Ann Arbor, 2003); David Howes (ed.), *Empires of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, (Oxford, 2005); David Howes, ‘Can These Dry Bones Live? An Anthropological Approach to the History of the Senses’, *Journal of American History*, 95/2, (September 2008), pp.442-451; François Laplantine, *The Life of the Senses: Introduction to a Modal Anthropology*, trans. Jamie Furniss, (London: New York, 2015). In philosophy see Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley, (London: New York, 2008) and Fiona Macpherson (ed.), *The Senses: Classic and Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, (Oxford, 2011). See also the journal *Senses & Society*; Constance Classen (ed.), *A Cultural History of the Senses*, (6 vols, London, 2014); Bloomsbury’s Sensory Studies Series; and www.sensorystudies.org. For journal special issues see *American Historical Review*, (April, 2011); *Journal of American History*, (September, 2008).

¹⁰ For survey approaches see Robert Jütte, *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, trans. James Lynn, (Cambridge: Malden, MA, 2005); Jonathan Reinartz, *Past Scents: Historical Perspectives on Smell*, (Urbana, 2014); Mark Smith, *Sensory History* (Oxford, 2007).

The first of these subjects, particularly prevalent in histories of sound and listening, concerns how sensation both consolidated community and articulated confessional, political, and social divisions within it. Studies by Fisher and Kendrick, for example, examine how sounds like vernacular singing or bell ringing produced sacred and social space delimiting a community, whether in Counter-Reformation Bavaria or Milan. In accounts such as these, the management of when and where certain sounds could be heard was a means by which the elite enforced a particular version of community (Catholic) and reproduced its own power; equally, sound was a way for groups to contest this through for example illicit Lutheran singing.¹¹ The emphasis in these histories, then, is on sensation as a means of constructing community and individual ‘identity’.

In a similar vein, other sensory histories examine how sensation articulated power inequalities between different social groups. These histories trace how an assumed sensory and social hierarchy mutually supported one another in the creation of class, gender, and racial divisions, from nineteenth-century antebellum America to eighteenth-century London. In these accounts, the imagined and experienced ordering of sensation—which sensations were ‘higher’ and which ‘lower’—strengthened the analogous ordering of society, for example in the way race was construed during debates over the abolition of American slavery.¹² At the same time, unruly sensations such as stray scents or sounds,

¹¹ Robert Kendrick, *The Sounds of Milan, 1585-1650*, (Oxford, 2002); Alexander Fisher, *Music, Piety, and Propaganda: The Soundscapes of Counter-Reformation Bavaria*, (Oxford, 2014); Clare Corbould, ‘Streets, Sounds and Identity in Interwar Harlem’, *Journal of Social History*, 40/4, (Summer 2007), pp.859–94.

¹² Mark Smith, ‘Getting in Touch with Slavery and Freedom’, *The Journal of American History*, 95/2, (September 2008), pp.381-391; William Tullett, ‘Grease and Sweat: Race and Smell in Eighteenth-Century English Culture’, *Cultural and Social History*, (DOI: 10.1080/14780038.2016.1202008, 4 July 2016), pp.1-16; Connie Chiang, ‘The Nose Knows: The Sense of Smell in American History’, *Journal of American History*, 95/2, (September 2008), pp.405-416.

could disrupt the social distinctions they were enrolled to enforce.¹³ These accounts therefore trace how sensation both supported and subverted social distinction.

If sensation was a means for ordering social relations then it was also, other accounts hold, a way to order the sacred relation between worshippers, the Church, and the divine. Through sensations such as the smell of incense believers claimed direct access to God: sensation was therefore something both to cultivate and regulate, and became the subject of fierce struggles within and across confessions, particularly during the Reformation.¹⁴ As ever, regulating the sensory relation between worshippers and the divine entangled with the establishment of social and confessional divisions.¹⁵ Although rarely foregrounded in these histories, touch, such as the touch of relics, was a source of knowledge and experience of the divine and therefore a means by which to both enforce and contest Church authority.

An equally rich vein of sensory history focuses less on the construction and contestation of social identities and more on the spaces and technologies conditioning what sensation was historically possible. These histories examine how the very conversion of stimulation into sensation was conditioned by historically-specific modes of attention shaping and shaped by new architectures and technologies, from concert halls to loudspeakers. The emphasis here is on how ways of sensing, for example listening to music, interacted with new media through which sensation was made possible.¹⁶

¹³ William Tullett, 'The Macaroni's "Ambrosial Essences"' Perfume, Identity and Public Space in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, (2014), (DOI: 10.1111/1754-0208.12177), pp.1-18.

¹⁴ Jeffrey Smith, *Sensuous Worship: Jesuits and the Art of the Early Catholic Reformation in Germany*, (Princeton: Oxford, 2002); Matthew Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

¹⁵ Richard Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca: London, 2003), pp.97-119.

¹⁶ Carolyn Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes: Sound, Technology, and Urban Space in Germany, 1933-1945*, (Amsterdam, 2012); Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933*

This focus on historically-specific modes of attention has been most elaborated in urban histories of sensory ‘tolerance’. These histories trace how the progressive planning and regulation of European cities from the eighteenth century encouraged and was driven by lower ‘thresholds’ of sensory tolerance—what intensity and type of sensation city inhabitants tolerated. As city dwellers increasingly feared the effect foul odours had upon their health, they became increasingly sensitive to smell and, as part of a broader intervention in public health, ‘deodorized’ the city.¹⁷ This narrative of the increasing sensitivity to, and decreasing significance of, smell in European cities has since been critiqued—not least because of its telos of an apparently infinitely receding horizon of sensation.¹⁸ Yet it continues in more open-ended accounts examining how city dwellers’ sensory tolerance was both shaped by and shaped their perception of the intensifying clamour of industrialising cities.¹⁹ The best of these accounts embeds the mutual shaping of sensation and urban environment in contemporary understandings of political sovereignty and attempts to make sensation conform to a political ideal—an American republic of equal, virtuous citizens—through city form. But even in as sophisticated an account as this the narrative sometimes slips into the less convincing story of the sensitization of city dwellers exposed to the intensified stimulation of modern urban life.²⁰

Many of these works importantly complicate accounts of religious change, social ordering, constructions of race, technological innovation, and increasing urban

(Cambridge, MA: London, 2002); John Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, (Oxford: New York, 2003).

¹⁷ Corbin, *Foul and the Fragrant*; Emily Cockayne places the change earlier: *Hubbub: Filth, Noise, and Stench in England, 1600-1770*, (New Haven: London, 2007).

¹⁸ Mark Jenner, ‘Follow Your Nose? Smell, Smelling, and Their Histories’, *American Historical Review*, 116/2, (April, 2011), pp.335-351.

¹⁹ Nicholas Kenny, *The Feel of the City: Experiences of Urban Transformation*, (Toronto: London, 2014).

²⁰ Dell Upton, *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic*, (New Haven: London, 2008).

complexity. Yet through established assumptions about how sensation *works*, much sensory history risks limiting the work that it can *do* to problematize other histories, instead segregating sensory history into a discrete field with its own discrete topics.²¹ Through focusing on three main problematics—identity construction, the contestation of power, and thresholds of tolerance—these accounts perpetuate underlying assumptions about the historicity of sensation that restrict our understanding of its use, both historically and historiographically. As a result, sensory history risks becoming just another topic to add to the historian’s repertoire, in some cases only iterating an earlier cultural history in disguise both in its analytic (a focus on representations) and subject (identity construction).

We might identify three assumptions, explored here through histories of touch, responsible for this self-segregation of sensory history. The most prevalent of these is the claim that the historicity of sensation lies in the changing meaning attributed to what the body senses. Sidestepping discussion of the history of sensation as an experience, or indeed the assumed distinction between meaning and experience itself, these studies overlook historically-specific understandings of the body, instead replicating a nature-culture binary that itself requires historical explanation. Paradoxically, historicising sensation by imagining a cultural ‘filter’ through which experience acquires meaning reifies experience as an ahistorical phenomenon even more. It is this assumption that makes possible Classen’s (strangely location-less) survey of the history of touch from the middle ages to modernity in which touch appears a shifting set of meanings attributed to an object that remains constant.²² In accounts such as these, touch becomes an empty

²¹ Gary Wilder, ‘From Optic to Topic: The Foreclosure Effect of Historiographic Turns’, *American Historical Review*, 117/3, (June 2012), pp.723-745.

²² Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch*, (Urbana, 2012). For invaluable correctives to this problem, see Shigehisa Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine*, (New York, 1999); Mark

container filled with whatever historical process the historian addresses, whether medieval sleeping habits or the rise of the factory system: it becomes an experience invested with new meaning resulting from changes that always occur elsewhere, ‘outside’ of sensation.²³

Second, and overlapping the first assumption, is a focus on touch not as a practice that transforms itself and historical events but as a set of representations. In large part this is due to a disproportionate emphasis on sources mostly restricted to the realm of discourse. Multiple studies examine the medical, theological, philosophical, artistic, and literary discussion of touch, and even the tactility of the texts containing it, but with little sense of how these discussions were embedded in and shaped by particular practices in particular spaces. This leads to some brilliant analysis of the overlaps and gaps between language and bodily experience, but without much consideration of how everyday sensory practices shaped how people understood and experienced touch.²⁴ Even where touch as a lived experience is considered more explicitly, as in Arndt’s account of walking in eighteenth-century London, urban space serves only as a text onto which are projected discussions of touch from periodicals or satires rather than as itself a physical site shaping and shaped by sensation.²⁵

Jenner ‘Tasting Lichfield, Touching China: Sir John Floyer’s Senses’, *The Historical Journal*, 53/3, (September 2010), pp.647-670.

²³ C. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, (New Haven: London, 2006).

²⁴ Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, (Cambridge, 2005); Joseph Moshenska, *Feeling Pleasures: The Sense of Touch in Renaissance England*, (October 2014); Elizabeth Harvey (ed.) *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture*, (Philadelphia, 2002); Sander Gilman, ‘Touch, Sexuality and Disease’, in William F. Bynum and Roy Porter (eds), *Medicine and the Five Senses*, (Cambridge, 1993), pp.198-224; Geraldine Johnson, ‘In the Hand of the Beholder: Isabella d’Este and the Sensual Allure of Sculpture’, in Alice E. Sanger and Siv Tove Kulbrandstad Walker (eds), *Sense and the Senses in Early Modern Art and Cultural Practice*, (Farnham: Burlington, 2012), pp.183-197; Gabriel Josipovici, *Touch*, (New Haven: London, 1996).

²⁵ Ava Arndt, ‘Touching London: Contact, Sensibility, and the City’, in Alexander Cowan and Jill Steward (eds), *The City and the Senses: Urban Culture since 1500*, (Aldershot, 2006), pp.95-104. On the problems of reading buildings as texts see William Whyte,

Thirdly, and most common, is the assumption that a distinction between the meaning and experience of sensation is replicated in one between the sensory and the social. By placing the social in opposition to the sensory, rather than treating this relationship as itself a historical artefact, many histories of touch reduce sensation to a reflection of social change, denying it causative potential. Consequently, understandings and experiences of touch become primarily ‘articulations’ of anxieties or contestations of power.²⁶ In the case of the latter, sensation appears to exist only within a binary of regulation and resistance in which individuals are presented as ‘possessing’ power somehow derived outside of concrete relationships—a problem stemming from not-infrequent references to de Certeau’s notion of ‘tactics’ and ‘strategies’. The risk of splitting the sensory and social is that sensory history becomes a way of rephrasing more familiar histories of social change rather than rethinking them in new, embodied terms.

A history of touch in modern Britain cannot therefore maintain these distinctions between meaning and experience and the sensory and the social if it is to have analytic force. It must ground analysis at one level, recentring the *use* of touch as constitutive of the divisions people drew within and between themselves, and therefore of the relationships that we *turn into* abstract epistemological categories like ‘meaning’ and ‘experience’ or social ones like ‘class’ or ‘gender’.²⁷ It was only through the particular

‘How Do Buildings Mean? Some Issues of Interpretation in the History of Architecture’, *History and Theory*, 45/2, (May 2006), pp.153-177; Leif Jerram, ‘Space: A Useless Category for Historical Analysis?’, *History and Theory*, 52/3, (October 2013), pp.400-419.

²⁶ Alexander Cowan, “‘Not Carrying out the Vile and Mechanical Arts’: Touch as a Measure of Social Distinction in Early Modern Venice”, in Alexander Cowan and Jill Steward (eds), *The City and the Senses: Urban Culture Since 1500*, (Aldershot, 2006), pp.39-59; Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England*, (New Haven: London, 2003). This is despite Gowing’s careful attention to early-modern understandings of corporeality.

²⁷ Latour terms this grounding ‘keeping the social flat’: Bruno Latour, *Re-assembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, (Oxford, 2005), pp.165-172. See also Jerram, ‘Space’, p.402.

ways that travellers arranged themselves on tube escalators or ticket halls, for example, that they experienced themselves as bodies and established boundaries between themselves and others. By showing how these social relationships existed only in and through sensory encounters we can prevent the drift of sensory history from history ‘proper’. Keeping the social grounded in sensory practice keeps the sensory at the centre of historical practice.

Modernity and Matter from 1870: Returning the Body

This turn to practice as the level at which abstract social categories like ‘the state’ exist has been well developed in some histories of British modernity.²⁸ Yet while attending to the spaces and things conditioning action, from bathtubs to gas lights, often these accounts overlook the potential for action itself—the action of particular individuals at particular times—to shape the person performing it. There is another strain of histories of British modernity, equally alive to the necessity of tracing the social through practice, which pays far more attention to how individual actions and particular relationships bring new subjectivities and social forms into being. In these histories, individuals do not merely enact the social through the way they are enabled to wash or walk through the streets; their very selfhood *is* social, and shapes social forms like gender relations or the state.²⁹

²⁸ Patrick Joyce and Tony Bennett (eds), *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History, and the Material Turn*, (London: New York, 2010); Frank Trentmann and Vanessa Taylor, ‘Liquid Politics: Water and the Politics of Everyday Life in the Modern City’, *Past & Present*, 211, (May 2011), pp.199-241; Patrick Joyce, ‘What is the Social in Social History?’, *Past and Present*, 206/1, (2010), pp.213-248.

²⁹ Katie Hindmarch-Watson, ‘Male Prostitution and the London GPO: Telegraph Boys’ “Immorality” from Nationalization to the Cleveland Street Scandal’, *Journal of British Studies*, 51/3, (July, 2012), pp.594-617; Matt Houlbrook, ‘Commodifying the Self Within: Ghosts, Libels, and the Crook Life Story in Interwar Britain’, *Journal of Modern History*, 85/2, (June 2013), pp.321-363; Marcus, *Between Women*.

But missing in both these stories is much consideration of the body beyond being a medium for habit or container for subjectivity and instead as itself a disruptive and disrupted entity in modernity.³⁰ If these histories of modernity redress some of the oversights of sensory history, then sensory history can do the same for these histories by bringing bodies more clearly into view.

By 1870, when this thesis begins, Britain was, we are told, well on the way to becoming modern. Demographic expansion, urbanisation, and the spread and integration of communications and transport networks on a scale never before seen profoundly shaped the ways in which people thought about and interacted with each other and their environment. These changes operated in tandem with the development of bureaucracies, infrastructural systems, and new ways of collecting and collating knowledge designed to reorder social relations newly in question.³¹

But what did this reordering of social relations entail? For historians engaging with the work of urban sociologist Georg Simmel, it meant the increasing intimacy of strangers. With over half of Britain's population living in urban areas by 1871, increasing to three-quarters of the population by 1911, and with an exponential increase in the speed and ease at which it was possible to travel long distances, Britons found themselves at once in closer proximity with strangers and required to develop new ways of managing the relationship.³² This development was not, as Simmel understood it, wholly an

³⁰ Stephen Brooke, 'The Body and Socialism: Dora Russell in the 1920s', *Past and Present*, 189/1, (November 2005), pp.147-177, Seth Koven, *The Match Girl and the Heiress*, (Princeton, 2014), and Matt Houlbrook, 'Soldier Heroes and Rent Boys: Homosex, Masculinities, and Britishness in the Brigade of Guards, circa 1900-1960', *Journal of British Studies*, 42/3, (July 2003), pp.351-388 are important exceptions. See also Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early-Modern Europe*, (London, 1994). For influential works on the body see Drew Leder, *The Absent Body*, (Chicago, 1990) and Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, (New York: Oxford, 1985).

³¹ James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern*, (Berkeley, 2014), p.xi.

³² *Ibid.*, p.24, p.32, pp.35-38.

experience of *anomie*, in which city dwellers developed an attitude of ‘mutual reserve’ and a sensory ‘indifference’ to the rapidly changing stimuli of the street.³³ At the same time as Victorian Londoners developed new social typologies to order the bewildering diversity of their encounters, exemplified by Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851-52), they also ‘repersonalized’ those encounters through new cultural forms like the newspaper matrimonial advert.³⁴ But historians tracing these changes nevertheless emphasise the increasingly abstract—sensory as well as emotional—nature of modern urban encounters. As British cities increased in size and complexity, their inhabitants ostensibly developed a wary attitude towards any form of ‘contact’—especially touch.³⁵

These abstract encounters overlapped with another change ostensibly characterising British modernity: the simultaneously increasing interiority and performativity of selfhood.³⁶ On the one hand, social theorists have identified a trend towards an increasingly individualised, inward-looking self for whom life became a ‘project’ to be cultivated and regulated through continuous self-consultation.³⁷ Particularly since the institutionalisation and popularisation of psychological and neurological discourse from the 1870s, this was a self that learned to govern itself—and

³³ Georg Simmel, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’, in Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (eds), *The Blackwell City Reader*, (Oxford, 2002), pp.11-19.

³⁴ Vernon, *Distant Strangers*, pp.47-48; Harry Cocks, ““Sporty” Girls and “Artistic” Boys: Friendship, Illicit Sex, and the British “Companionship” Advertisement, 1913-1928’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 11/3, (July 2002), pp.457-482.

³⁵ Classen, *Deepest Sense*, p.178.

³⁶ Vernon, *Distant Strangers*, pp.48-50.

³⁷ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, (Cambridge, 1991), pp.75-86. Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930*, (London, 1995). For analogous developments in France, see Jan Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750-1850*, (Cambridge, MA: London, 2005).

whose freedom was conditional on that self-government.³⁸ On the other hand, historians have traced how the anonymising experience of urban life and the spread of new cultural forms like cheap fiction encouraged the development of a competing version of selfhood as an inconstant appearance: one that lacked a stable ‘essence’ and was instead continually performed.³⁹ In both cases, there was an apparently increasing difference between a personal, ‘inner’ self and an ‘outer’ embodied one that touched and was touched.

Most recently, historians have begun questioning these developments, discarding the very concept of selfhood as a form of being, distinct from the media and moments in which it is manifested, and instead tracing its historical emergence through particular social relationships. Drawing on queer theory, psychoanalysis, and narrative theories of selfhood, these historians examine selfhood as itself a social relationship and one enabled by, and contingent on, historically specific cultural forms, from women’s fashion magazines to imitation Savile Row suits. Rather than becoming interiorised or performative (a notion still predicated on the existence of an inner self ‘projected’ outwards) the modern self, in this story, was defined by its contingent relationship with another; a relationship which by the 1920s, Houlbrook argues, was increasingly difficult to fix. While for some historians selfhood in modern Britain became increasingly interiorised and performative, for others it became increasingly dependent on—though

³⁸ Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*, (Cambridge, 1996). This to a large extent overlooks the much longer history of psychology: Fernando Vidal, *The Sciences of the Soul: The Early Modern Origins of Psychology*, trans. Saskia Brown, (Chicago: London, 2011). For a critique of Rose see Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Oxford, 2006).

³⁹ Vernon, *Distant Strangers*, p.49; Michael Saler, “‘Clap If You Believe in Sherlock Holmes’: Mass Culture and the Re-enchantment of Modernity, c.1890 – c.1940”, *The Historical Journal*, 46/3, (September 2003), pp.599-622.

never reducible to—the cultural forms and singular relationships it inhabited: that is, selfhood was realised *through* the social rather than abstracted from it.⁴⁰

Finally, another strain of histories of British modernity examines how, over the long nineteenth century, national and local governments planned cities to encourage inhabitants to reproduce through their everyday habits and encounters a particularly British version of liberal governance. In this version of modernity, planners, politicians, civil servants, and government inspectors directed the technologies of the modern state, from new infrastructures like London's Main Drainage System to institutions like the Post Office, towards what Foucault termed a 'technology of the self'. Through new technologies of lighting, heating, and waste disposal, urban inhabitants were induced to regulate their bodies and their conduct with others in new political, moral, and sanitary ways.⁴¹ In doing so, city inhabitants—in theory at least—became 'liberal' subjects, both

⁴⁰ For works developing this argument through new thinking in queer studies see Matt Houlbrook, 'Thinking Queer: The Social and the Sexual in Interwar Britain' in Brian Lewis (ed.), *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives*, (Manchester, 2013), pp.135-164; Laura Doan, 'Sex Education and the Great War Soldier: A Queer Analysis of the Practice of "Hetero" Sex', *Journal of British Studies*, 51/3, (July, 2012), pp.641-663; and Marcus, *Between Women*. For works animated by psychoanalytic understandings of 'relational' selfhood see Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival and the Great War*, (Manchester: New York, 2009), pp.24-25; Joan Scott, 'The Incommensurability of Psychoanalysis and History', *History and Theory*, 51, (February, 2012), pp. 63-83 elucidates the critical value of psychoanalysis to historical understandings of selfhood. For works developing an understanding of social selfhood through narrative theories of the self see Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters*; Mary Fulbrook and Ulinka Rublack, 'In Relation: The "Social Self" and Ego-Documents', *German History*, 28/3, (2010), p.269; Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, (New York, 2005); Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, (Chicago: London, 1992).

⁴¹ Simon Gunn and James Vernon (eds.), *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain* (Berkeley: London, 2011); James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History*, (Cambridge, MA: London, 2007); Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City*, (London, 2003) and *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State Since 1800*, (Cambridge, 2013); Chris Otter, *Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910*, (Chicago: London, 2008); Tom Crook, *Governing Systems: Modernity and the Making of Public Health in England, 1830-1910*, (Oakland, 2016).

in the sense of being subject to limited political intervention and, the condition of this, ‘free’ to regulate their bodily and social affairs.⁴² For these historians of technological systems, the materiality of the built environment circumscribed and enabled the agency of individuals operating within it, shaping the very relation those individuals had to themselves, others, and ‘the state’ of which pipes, wires, and walls were the material expression. To be modern, in this story, meant to be increasingly caught within, and constituted by, material systems governing people to govern themselves.

Yet here too historians have begun reorienting this history of modernity, refocusing attention on the individuals operating within new infrastructural networks like the telegraph. These histories trace how workers like telegraph boys partially performed the rationalising impetus of a system—in this case efficient and free exchange of information—but at the same time revealed its uneven benefits and inequalities and disrupted that system with their own desires.⁴³ If modernity meant reproducing, through internalised habit, a set of techniques of government, then we are beginning to see that this was always subject to the unpredictable consequences of individual action—particularly the action of bodies that *touched*.

These diverse accounts provide very different histories of modernity. We might identify, though, a guiding division in the literature centred around the question of *abstraction*. Whether discussing gas lighting or guides to walking in the city, the history of British modernity most frequently given is one in which relationships among and between people and things became abstracted over the long nineteenth century. Not only was the self internally divided by a new routine of self-watching, but it also replicated this in its increasingly distanced relationships with others and with things. Indeed, the

⁴² Joyce, *State of Freedom*, p.3.

⁴³ Hindmarch-Watson, ‘Male Prostitution’.

ostensible abstraction of the self from itself enabled and was enabled *by* the internalisation of habits causing its abstraction from other selves and things; from, for example, other passengers in a railway carriage and from the carriage itself.⁴⁴ Paradoxically, it is in those accounts that collapse the social into the material that the material (and individual practice) recedes from view as things enter the history of modernity only insofar as the actions they enable become internalised and cause the further isolation of people from other bodies and things.⁴⁵ A growing literature, by contrast, unpicks this story of modernity by refocusing attention on the individual and its social forms. While earlier accounts of modernity trace the social through the material, often leaving out the people mediating the relation, this literature examines how individual practice was central to the form the social took, disrupting it in unpredictable ways.⁴⁶ What is more, Houlbrook and Doan have reversed the lens altogether, exploring how, by the interwar, selfhood became increasingly invested *in* and distributed across the social, whether in new media like mass publishing or in new relationships where confidence and trust were increasingly in doubt.⁴⁷ Far from becoming abstracted from itself, others, and things, the self was always, and increasingly, a social *relationship*.

This disagreement over the abstraction of selfhood has generated other tensions over the nature of power, temporality, and the body in histories of modernity. For those tracing the internalisation of self-regulatory routines, modernity represents the potential capture of all life—sensory as well as social—within systems of government and self-

⁴⁴ For example, Vernon, *Distant Strangers*, p.36.

⁴⁵ Joyce is the exemplar of this, despite his discussion of ‘making the technical social’: Joyce, *State of Freedom*, c.3. See also Ken Alder, *Engineering the Revolution: Arms and Enlightenment in France, 1763-1815*, (Princeton, 1997).

⁴⁶ Hindmarch-Watson, ‘Male Prostitution’.

⁴⁷ Houlbrook, ‘Commodifying the Self Within’ and *Prince of Tricksters*; Doan, *Disturbing Practices*. See also Michael Roper, ‘Splitting in Unsent Letters: Writing as a Social Practice and a Psychological Activity’, *Social History*, 26/3, (2001), pp.318-339.

government: what Agamben terms the ‘politicization of bare life’.⁴⁸ Alert to the way this argument threatens to reduce humans to political effects of the systems they use, these historians point out the many obstacles to the full politicization of life, from human error to the fact that things simply break.⁴⁹ Yet as often as not this means re-inscribing individuals within the systems governing them by arguing, as Joyce does, that ‘the fact of resistance to and popular negotiation of the state is nonetheless framed by the rules of the liberal game’: freedom is possible only insofar as it is produced by the system in which people are contained.⁵⁰ Such tautologies are counteracted by histories refocusing on the actions of individuals allowing these systems to function.⁵¹ But bringing back actors which are not already hyphenated with networks requires care if we are not also to return to the rational, autonomous actor that earlier accounts usefully pushed beyond.⁵²

Second, those accounts favouring a story of abstraction often present modernity and the selfhood associated with it as an emerging condition of being with a definite telos. Either this telos is ultimately reached—Britain ‘becomes’ modern—or it is perpetually deferred—we become ever more captured by the systems governing us—but in both cases selfhood is considered in terms of ‘more’ or ‘less’ abstraction and, despite differences between accounts, that abstraction attains a distinct form by at the latest 1920.⁵³ This notion of historical time is usefully countered by histories which shift focus from selfhood as a condition of being to a social relationship shaped by particular cultural forms

⁴⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford, 1998), p.4.

⁴⁹ Crook, *Governing Systems*, pp.17-18; Otter, *Victorian Eye*, pp.8-9; Joyce, *State of Freedom*, p.54.

⁵⁰ Joyce, *State of Freedom*, p.30.

⁵¹ Hindmarch-Watson, ‘Male Prostitution’.

⁵² Wilder, ‘From Optic to Topic’, p.730.

⁵³ Vernon, *Distant Strangers*; Joyce, *State of Freedom*. This similarity is despite Vernon’s insightful critique of the nature of time in Joyce’s work: James Vernon, ‘More Secondary Modern than Post-modern: Patrick Joyce and the Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Britain’, *Cultural and Social History*, 13/2, (2016), p.153.

emerging in twentieth-century Britain.⁵⁴ But while convincingly challenging histories of the progressive abstraction of British selfhood, making this move requires us to attend to the differences of these forms in other periods and places before we can make similar arguments about modern selfhood elsewhere.⁵⁵

Finally, and most importantly, for accounts tracing the growing abstraction of selfhood modernity represents a transformation in the relation ‘between’ people and things that is predicated on an ahistorical understanding of people’s sensation *of* things and, additionally, their distinction *from* them.⁵⁶ By assuming an *a priori* distinction between people and things we have forgotten the body, and particularly touch, as historically constitutive of this relation.⁵⁷ It is no wonder we find in some histories of modernity only the abstraction of selfhood on which these inquiries are based. By placing touch at the centre of this story we redress sensory histories which segregate the social from the material while also rethinking those histories of British modernity in which a focus on the material has eclipsed the body that senses it. Instead of tracing the increasing abstraction of the self, attending to touch follows work which understands selfhood as a social relationship. But it also pushes beyond this by recentring the body as a crucial mediator in the relations the self had with itself and others. Much more: it shows how the historical constitution *of* the body, of touch, *constituted* those relationships: relationships that were, I argue, increasingly indeterminate, not distinct, by the 1920s.

⁵⁴ Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.5. For a comparison see Michael Pettit, *The Science of Deception: Psychology and Commerce in America*, (Chicago: London, 2013).

⁵⁶ This contrasts with the exceptional Elaine Hadley, *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain*, (Chicago, 2010).

⁵⁷ Roberto Esposito, *Persons and Things: From the Body’s Point of View*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi, (Cambridge: Malden, 2015), pp.1-6.

Critique of touch; touch as critique

In order to make this shift from the ordering of people and things to the body that mediates between them I provide a critique of touch and turn touch into a means of critique.

What is a critique of touch? A critique of touch examines how the concept and experience of touch, rather than either being *a priori*, co-evolved across different spaces and domains of knowledge to become what we know today. It is a history of why, for example, we stand on the right of escalators or mind the gap on the tube. A critique does not entail showing how touch was produced by forces standing ‘behind’ it that were somehow more ‘real’—ideological, discursive, economic, depending on your leaning—but how touch emerged *in* and *through* an evolving constellation of technologies, ideas, buildings, laws, and practices that assemble and reassemble it.⁵⁸ Never pre-given, touch, and the bodily relations it mediated, emerged from the relationship *between* these elements as an evolving ‘*dispositif*’.⁵⁹ For this reason, I track between the Oxbridge college and the tube platform, between neurology journals and cinema flicks, to show how, despite the undoubted distinctions between these, the tactile *dispositif* traversed and combined changes in each—as, of course, people did themselves. Yet, crucially, a critique of touch places the body itself at the centre of the conditions constituting it. Rather than only emerging from relationships within a heterogeneous assemblage of people and

⁵⁸ Giorgio Agamben, ‘What is an Apparatus?’, in Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, (Stanford, 2009), pp.2-3. For this challenge to critique see Bruno Latour, ‘Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern’, *Critical Inquiry*, 30, (Winter 2004), pp.245-246.

⁵⁹ Agamben, ‘What is an Apparatus?’. See also Michel Foucault, ‘What is Critique?’ in Michel Foucault and Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), *The Politics of Truth*, (Los Angeles, 2007), pp.41-81, Gilles Deleuze, ‘What is a *dispositif*?’, in *Michel Foucault, Philosopher: Essays*, trans. Timothy J. Armstrong, (New York: London, 1992), pp.159-168, and Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity*, (Bloomington: Indianapolis, 2013), pp.15-16.

things, touch evolved first through the *use* of the body constituting it *as* one that touched. It was not, for example, only the particular configuration of seats and passengers in a tube car that conditioned the concept and practice of personal space but the very use of touch within that configuration to which a passenger became subject.

In making this argument, we rethink, alongside Agamben, the ontology of sensation. In its new formulation, touch is not a faculty that we possess, a substance, but a *potentiality* perpetually bringing itself and ourselves into being through use.⁶⁰ Contrary to what we might think, it is not because we ‘have’ senses that we are able to sense; it is because we sense, because we sit in a particular way on a bus or walk in a particular way in the street, that we are constituted *as* sensing subjects. Whether as lovers in a cinema or workers on a factory line, through use of touch we at the same time become subject *to* that use and constituted as users—as able to sense—*by* it.⁶¹ That is, the self exists not as a substance ‘with’ senses but as an immanent relationship it has with itself through the use of its senses.⁶² Thinking about touch in this way builds upon existing historical work understanding selfhood as a social relationship but reorients it by showing how this relationship itself depended on the historical constitution of the body. Importantly, the process by which touch brings itself into being by use does not mean it ever finally becomes a faculty that we ‘have’. Rather, it remains ‘conserved’ as potentiality in the newly constituted body, which opens up new possibilities for sensing and, therefore, for self-constitution through use.⁶³

⁶⁰ Giorgio Agamben, ‘On Potentiality’, in Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford, 1999), pp.178-179. For an excellent introduction see Paul Nadal, ‘The Concept of Potentiality: On Agamben’, (<https://belate.wordpress.com/2010/04/04/agamben-on-potentiality/>, 17 February 2017).

⁶¹ Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, p.30.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.54.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.62; Agamben, ‘On Potentiality’, pp.183-184.

Making this move performs an important task. By thinking about the contingent self-constitution of the body through touch—thinking ‘from the body’s point of view’—we place bodies *in relation to* the discourses and material systems that in some accounts of modernity otherwise only constitute those bodies.⁶⁴ We open up a space in which the body stands outside these discourses and systems, and, through its use of touch, continually redraws the relationships between inner and outer, person and thing, which it mediates. This is not to introduce the body as a reified object but to show how it constitutes itself and the relationships that it mediates through historically specific use.⁶⁵ To argue this calls into question those accounts of British modernity in which the analytic abstraction of the self from itself and others prefigures the ostensible history of this abstraction. It instead adds to a growing literature identifying the emergence of selfhood only through shifting social relationships. Yet it also forces us to reconsider accounts within and beyond modern British history—accounts of class, politics, economics, gender, and so on—which overlook the sensory self-constitution of the body itself and the contingency of the social boundaries it mediates. Providing a critique of touch, in short, also entails touch-as-critique.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Citation from subtitle of Esposito, *Persons and Things*. This thinking engages with the turn Foucault made at the end of his career towards examining processes of subjectification that stand in relation to, but are not reducible to, discourses and governmental techniques: Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of the Self and Others II: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-84*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell, (Basingstoke: New York, 2011), pp.8-9. See Stuart Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade*, (Cambridge, 2016), c.6 and Deleuze, ‘What is a *dispositif*?’, p.160.

⁶⁵ Esposito, *Persons and Things*, p.10.

⁶⁶ On historical critique see Joan Scott, ‘History-Writing as Critique’, in Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, and Alun Munslow (eds), *Manifestos for History*, (London: New York, 2007), pp.19-38; Doan, *Disturbing Practices*; and Michel Foucault, ‘For an Ethics of Discomfort’ and ‘What Our Present Is’, in Michel Foucault and Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), *The Politics of Truth*, (Los Angeles, 2007), respectively pp.121-128 and pp.129-143.

This thesis therefore focuses throughout on a single concern: what are the uses of touch? We might think of this from three angles: how and why did the uses of touch change in modern Britain?; how did that use constitute the horizons of sensation and bodies as selves, in turn establishing boundaries from that which was other than self?; and how is this history useful for challenging accounts which treat the self as a substance rather than an immanent—and not only a social—relationship transformed through touch?

The Uses of Touch in Modern Britain

This thesis answers these questions by tracing the evolving concept, practice, and experience of touch in Britain between 1870 and 1960. Through five case studies, it ranges across different but intertwined domains: the mind sciences, visual impairment, public transport, law, and commercialized leisure. It shows how in each domain changes as diverse as rising coal consumption and the emergence of rush hour altered understandings and uses of touch and the intimate relations they structured. My purpose is not to show how the idea of touch developed in any one domain and filtered through to others but rather how the use and concept of touch constituted one another and established ways of sensing that crossed multiple discourses and spaces. For this reason, each chapter hones in on microscale practices, such as the intersection of love letter-writing and aesthetic literature before the Great War, as well as panning out to macroscale developments, such as shifting notions of scientific objectivity.⁶⁷ In this way, each chapter

⁶⁷ This treatment of scale as a lens rather than a series of discrete levels draws on Koven, *Match Girl and the Heiress*; David Aslanian, Joyce Chaplin, Ann McGrath, and Kristin Mann, 'AHR Conversation: How Size Matters: The Question of Scale in History', *American Historical Review*, 118/5, (December, 2013), pp.1431-1472; and Jacques Revel, 'Microanalysis and the Construction of the Social', in Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt (eds), *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer et. al., (New York, 1995), pp.492-502.

shows how the uses and concepts of touch interacted within and flowed between different domains, often, as we shall see, through the same individuals.

The first two chapters focus on the changing conception of touch in neurological and educational thought and its interaction with tactile practices in laboratories and schools for the blind. In each domain, I argue, the body was increasingly understood as mediating the sensations it received. Chapter One traces a century of neurological research into touch, from ‘common sense’ to ticklishness, and its relation to new experimental methods. At the same time, I show how neurological concepts of touch entangled with the researcher’s wider lifeworld, examining how neurologist Henry Head’s epistolary relationship with his fiancé shaped what he did and found in his self-experiments into touch. While Head established a new understanding of touch as a process mediated by the body, by the 1920s neurologists turned away from using their own bodies, and by implication their own relationships, as means of investigating this. In Chapter Two I show how, in the education of blind children, new relations made between sensation and cognition shaped the assumed relation between sensation and political subjectivity. By the 1920s, blind psychologists and educationalists rejected the assumption that touch ‘naturally’ compensated blindness, arguing instead that compensation depended on the mutual shaping of mind and body. Blind activists would later argue that the continued focus on touch as supplementary to vision made blind people ‘supplementary’ to citizenship: included within it only through their exclusion from it. Yet throughout the first half of the century, teachers of blind children, like neurologists, increasingly understood touch as a process transformed by the body mediating it.

The next two chapters explore urban spaces in which touch assumed an especially fraught significance during and after the Great War: the tube and teashops. Although each of these spaces had their peculiarities, and others could have been chosen—cinemas,

department stores, enclosed cars—contemporary social commentators like Barbara Drake, J. B. Priestley and Robert Sinclair took them as exemplifying modernity with all its problems and possibilities. Yet this modernity, these chapters demonstrate, was not a particular condition of being in which the self became more abstracted from itself and others but a period in which the very boundaries marking this abstraction became ever more indeterminate. Chapter Three charts a history of everyday bodily interactions on the Underground. Using hundreds of passenger statements, gathered after the murder of Teresa Lubenska at Gloucester Road station in 1957, it deconstructs the *a priori* notion of personal space by tracing microhistories of tube etiquette, from minding the gap to standing on the right of escalators. It demonstrates that, far from encouraging an experience of intimate *anomie*, the tube shaped and was shaped by the development of personal boundaries that became increasingly difficult to fix. If personal boundaries were increasingly indeterminate on the tube then this was also true of teashops. Here, as Chapter Four shows, waitresses were expected from the mid-1920s to cultivate a particular form of abstract intimacy with customers—yet one which was, as on the tube, both confusingly and conveniently unclear to waitress and customer alike. Through tracing the life of Rector Harold Davidson, tried in 1932 for ‘immoral conduct’ with waitresses, this chapter explores the growing uncertainty over public intimacy in new spaces of commercial leisure, as well as the capitalist conditions underpinning it.

The final chapter turns from the growing social indeterminacy of commuter and consumer spaces to an event in which Londoners were repeatedly reminded of their existence as bodies as well as selves: London fog. Between the 1870s and the Great Smog of 1952, fog accentuated the pedestrian’s awareness of being a sensing subject—one navigating through touch—and sensory object—a body within space. Through its association with crime, fog revealed how law converted the phenomenology of the street

into a legal object at the same time as that phenomenology shaped what counted as a legal ‘fact’. I investigate how this process worked during police court trials, arguing that law subsisted only *through* tactile objects and practices enacting it, from minute books to magisterial habitus, even while contemporary jurisprudence argued the reverse.

In following these histories of touch, this thesis critically intervenes in debates surrounding broader trajectories of change in the history of modern Britain. Through refocusing attention on the uses of touch it reorients histories of labour inequality, scientific credibility, legal objectivity, citizenship, and intimacy.⁶⁸ But it also calls into question the analytic understanding of selfhood animating much of the wider history of British modernity. Challenging the notion of selfhood as substance it elaborates a history of selfhood as an immanent relationship transformed by the use of the body, from tussles on the tube to letters between lovers. In doing so, it both provides an alternative account of modernity and proposes a new way of thinking about selfhood useful for revising histories beyond those of modern Britain.

⁶⁸ See also Gunn and Vernon (eds.), *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain*; David Feldman and Jon Lawrence, *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History*, (Cambridge: New York, 2011).

Chapter One

Love in the Time of Neurology

On the night of 16 January 1903, lovelorn neurologist and physician Henry Head sat down at his desk in his Westmoreland Mansions flat, Marylebone, and began to write. Writing, however, did not come easily. Even as he poured out his thoughts to his lover Ruth Mayhew, Head found her ‘vivid presence’ so tangible that he could scarcely write. ‘Written words,’ he pled, ‘seem poor when offered to the palpitating happy living creature whose touch I feel on my arm, whose joy envelopes me as a cloud.’¹ Three months later that arm would be all but insensible. After a daring operation severing the radial and external cutaneous nerves in his left forearm, Head could feel on his hand neither heat nor cold, the prick of a pin nor the brush of cotton wool; nor could he feel Mayhew’s caress.² By 4 May 1903, ten days after the operation, the affected skin on Head’s hand had flushed crimson and become inelastic and scaly.³ He could feel no touch.

In the five years that followed, Head and the psychologist William Rivers followed a painstaking, often painful, procedure of recording the return of sensitivity to his damaged forearm and hand. The conclusions drawn from these observations, first sketched in published form in November 1905 and elaborated in subsequent experiments and publications until 1920, set what was later eulogized as a dramatic new

¹ Henry Head to Ruth Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/13, 16 January 1903.

² Henry Head and W.H.R. Rivers, ‘A Human Experiment in Nerve Division’, *Brain*, 31, Pt.III, (November 1908), pp.325-326.

³ *Ibid.*, pp.327-328.

course for understandings of touch, and of the nervous system in general. ‘No branch of medicine, except that of tropical medicine, has made such remarkable advance in a single generation as neurology,’ effervesced *The Times*’s obituary of Head in 1940; Head, it continued, had led the vanguard of this advance.⁴ Gordon Holmes, fellow-neurologist and Head’s collaborator for five years, gave a more intimate appraisal: Head combined a ‘rigidly scientific and objective outlook’ with ‘a vivid imagination which at times seemed to carry his ideas beyond the bounds of probability’. Yet ultimately Head managed to tame his wayward thoughts, claimed Holmes, by subjecting his writings ‘to a rigid criticism which assured an accurate and reasoned presentation of the conclusions to which he had come.’⁵

Holmes’s judgement, reflecting also on his own publications, was unequivocal. Head had, despite inner conflicts, managed to curb his ‘imagination’ in the service of ‘reason’. But it also hinted at the impossibility of maintaining this distinction in practice. If Head’s memory of Ruth Mayhew’s touch inhibited his writing, then that memory also at once removed him from his work and became inseparably entangled with it. On 6 May 1903, twelve days after the operation, Head recounted to Mayhew the long evenings of the previous week when, during the ‘monotonous toil’ of writing letters for patients, his thoughts flew to her. ‘Last Sunday walking hand in hand with you [...],’ he wrote, ‘the rushing fierceness of my life seemed to pass away [and] I was no longer a man devoted to the diseased and disordered aspects of life, a fighter who has to pluck the heart out of each moment lest knowledge should escape never to be recaptured, but just a little child walking quietly in the rain down a green hill with my

⁴ ‘Sir Henry Head: Pioneer in Neurology’, *The Times*, 10 October 1940, p.7. See also ‘Sir Henry Head, M.D., F.R.C.P., F.R.S., 1861-1940. Editor of “Brain,” 1910-1925’, *Brain*, 63/3, (1940), pp.205-208, WL, PP/HEA/A.4.

⁵ Gordon Holmes, ‘Sir Henry Head. 1861-1940’, *Obituary Notices of Fellows of the Royal Society*, 3/10, (December 1941), p.683.

hand in your dear warm hand.’⁶ Head’s hold on Mayhew’s hand temporarily transported him from the examination of his own, the need to capture, as Rivers pricked and prodded him, the essence of sensation as it played across his mottled, regenerating skin. A week later the memory of this touch again spirited him away. Yet at the same time Mayhew’s touch haunted Head’s work on his hand like a spectre, never present but often felt, transpiring in what he observed and wrote. Off to Cambridge Head would go that coming Saturday afternoon, ready for more tests on the ‘extraordinary condition’ of his hand. And although Mayhew rarely accompanied Head on these trips neither was she ever fully absent, either from his thoughts or their later ‘reasoned presentation’.⁷

Head’s self-experiment occupies a seminal place in the history and historiography of British neurology; his relationship with Mayhew is also well-documented.⁸ But, perhaps surprisingly, no study has examined the importance of sensation as not only the subject of Head’s research but also the *way* that he produced knowledge and made truth-claims. Head was not the disembodied scientist, conjuring a theory of sensation from which he was mysteriously detached.⁹ Through the several thousand letters Head and Mayhew exchanged between 1897 and 1904 and the ‘rag

⁶ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/14, 6 May 1903.

⁷ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/14, 6 May 1903.

⁸ For overviews of British neurology see F.C. Rose, *History of British Neurology*, (London, 2012), and Stephen T. Casper, *The Neurologists: A History of a Medical Speciality in Modern Britain, c.1789-2000*, (Manchester: New York, 2014). For accounts of Head’s research and relationship see L.S. Jacyna, *Medicine and Modernism: A Biography of Sir Henry Head*, (London, 2008) and Tiffany Watt Smith, *On Flinching: Theatricality and Scientific Looking from Darwin to Shell Shock*, (Oxford, 2014), c.3. See also J.C. Stevens and B.G. Green, ‘History of Research on Touch’, in Lawrence Kruger (ed.), *Pain and Touch*, (San Diego: London, 1996), pp.1-23.

⁹ There is an extensive literature on the emotional and embodied constitution of scientific knowledge. See Ulinka Rublack, *The Astronomer and the Witch: Johannes Kepler’s Fight for His Mother*, (Oxford, 2015); Steven Shapin, ‘The Philosopher and the Chicken: On the Dietetics of Disembodied Knowledge’, in Steven Shapin, *Never Pure: Historical Studies of Science [...]*, (Baltimore, 2010), pp.237-258. I have especially drawn inspiration from Shigehisa Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine*, (New York, 1999).

books' in which they shared criticisms of books and plays, we can trace, often to the day, the ineluctably entangled sensory relation between Head's research and his evolving relationship with Mayhew. But it was not just that Head's understanding of touch shaped and was shaped by his wider lifeworld: the particular *form* this understanding took depended on his particular way of being-in-the-world, both as a scientist and a lover, in the 1900s. Head's theory of touch, which became the reference point for research well into the twentieth century, was marked by a particular—and particularly sensory—conjuncture of love, literature, and neurology in the decade before the Great War.¹⁰ Tracing how Head and Mayhew's relationship interwove with Head's research on touch enables us to explore this broader sensory world of which scientific understandings of touch were always already a part—and with which they had a shifting relation.¹¹

We can glimpse this world particularly in Head and Mayhew's literary interests. 'I have realized lately,' observed Mayhew seven months before Head's operation, 'that there is for me a connection between the sense of touch and that of taste.' When cutting the leaves of her new volume of Walter Pater's *The Renaissance* (1873), Mayhew found that the contact of the steel paper knife with the thick, 'woolly' paper 'brought to my tongue the taste I knew as a child when we loved to put our disobedient lips to the iron

¹⁰ The intersection of neurology and literature is discussed in Laura Salisbury and Andrew Shail, 'Introduction', in Laura Salisbury and Andrew Shail (eds), *Neurology and Modernity: A Cultural History of Nervous Systems, 1800-1950*, (Basingstoke, 2010), pp.1-40. On love, see Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution*, (Oxford, 2013); Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (London, 2003); Timothy Jones and Alana Harris, *Love and Romance in Britain, 1918-1970*, (Basingstoke, 2015).

¹¹ On the entangled relation between the scientist's world and 'world-making', see Jerome Bruner, 'Possible Castles', in Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, (Cambridge, MA: London, 1986), pp.44-54; David Woodruff Smith, 'Science, Intentionality, and Historical Background', in David Hyder and Hans-Jörg Rheinberger (eds), *Science and the Life-World: Essays on Husserl's Crisis of European Sciences*, (Stanford, 2010), pp.1-26.

railings of the Parks at home or liked to suck our pennies'.¹² Head responded by recounting a 'tactile dream' told him by a colleague who was formerly a master in the merchant navy. The colleague had dreamt that he was at sea steering a ship and after waking 'for an appreciable interval felt the wheel in his hands'.¹³ Besides revealing the close attention Head and Mayhew paid to sensory experience, the exchange is even more significant as an embodied and intellectual engagement with the work of authors such as Pater. Pater's emphasis on the primacy of subjective experience of the world and the importance of its reflexive analysis was replicated both in Head and Mayhew's trade in sensations and in Head's introspective observations on his recovering sense of touch. Both were attempts to seize, in Pater's words, 'impressions unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them'; to 'pluck', Head wrote more stonily, 'the heart out of each moment' before it was lost forever.¹⁴ Head and Mayhew's relationship offers us access to this much wider intersection of love, literature, and science shaping and shaped by the concept and practice of touch in the early twentieth century.

We therefore trace in this chapter a dual history. First, of the conceptual understanding of touch as mediator between body and mind and self and world. Second, of the evolving entanglement of this understanding with the bodily and emotional life of the scientists responsible for it. We examine in detail how Head's concept of touch emerged from the interweaving of his experiment and relationship, and how that entanglement of the scientist's ideas and lifeworld itself changed over the longer history of neurology. Through doing so this chapter unpacks the meaning of 'touch' as

¹² Ruth Mayhew, rag book, WL, PP/HEA/E.3/4, October 1902, p.29.

¹³ Henry Head, rag book, WL, PP/HEA/E.3/4, October 1902, p.29.

¹⁴ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, (6th edn, London, 1901 [reprinted 1904]), p.viii, pp.234-236; Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/14, 6 May 1903.

neurologists like Head understood it: as a composite term for sensations of pressure, temperature, muscular sensation, pain, and contact, each with origins in different parts of the body and with different degrees of ‘feeling-tone’. But tracing Head’s life also gives us glimpses of how these different kinds of touch themselves had their own everyday histories – from his dislike of tube car overcrowding when commuting to Whitechapel, to his escape from the stiflingly close streets of London during thick November fogs. Head’s research and life opens onto subsequent chapters like vistas in a forest: providing distinctive aspects of touch and its appearance in everyday life which nevertheless form part of the same, evolving experience.

The Physiology of Touch

Head and Rivers were not the first collaborators to make the scientist’s body a laboratory for touch. If the questions they asked about touch were different from those asked before them, their methods drew upon a well-established tradition of introspective self-experimentation stemming from early nineteenth-century continental experimental physiology.¹⁵ Seventy years before Head’s self-experiment, Ernst Weber, Professor of Anatomy at Leipzig University, and his brother Eduard, Professor of Physics at Halle University, performed a near-identical procedure. Through applying two points of a pair of compasses to different parts of Ernst’s body, the Weber brothers mapped how the threshold for perceiving two simultaneous touches varied considerably across the skin.¹⁶ In a different inquiry, Ernst Weber also measured what minimum change in a stimulus

¹⁵ Kurt Danziger, *Constructing the Subject: Historical Origins of Psychological Research*, (Cambridge, 1990), pp.28-35.

¹⁶ Ernst Weber, *De Subtilitate Tactus* (1834), in Ernst Heinrich Weber, *E.H. Weber on the Tactile Senses*, Helen E. Ross and David J. Murray (eds and trans.), (2nd edn, Hove, 1996), pp.29-30, pp.32-33, p.48.

was required to cause a change in perception: what he called the ‘law’ of ‘just noticeable difference’.¹⁷ These experiments established for the first time an empirical relation between stimulus and sensation that could be mapped on the skin. Weber’s research established touch as a quantifiable entity, operating under fixed laws, to be hunted down, classified, and plotted onto the body.

Yet if touch was quantifiable, physiologists were less certain whether its elements—the sensation felt or its material ‘basis’—represented differences in kind or only degree. In his *Handbuch der Physiologie des Menschen* (1834-40) Johannes Müller, Professor of Anatomy and Physiology at Berlin University, argued that a sensation did not provide knowledge of the external world, only of the effect the world had on nerves themselves: ‘[w]e do not feel the knife which gives us pain, but the painful state of our nerves’. Nerves were therefore not ‘passive conductors’ of impressions of the world but the determinants of those impressions according to the specificity of the nerve itself.¹⁸ Nerves had what Müller called specific ‘energies’ which determined the sensation conveyed. But for Müller it proved impossible to determine *what* and even *where* these energies were.¹⁹ Either nerves with specific energies maintained a sensation’s specificity, or undifferentiated nerves conveyed qualitatively identical sensations which only acquired specificity in the brain.²⁰ Exactly what was specific in the law of specific nerve energies remained decidedly vague because of the mysteriously un-locatable, ineffable nature of nerve energy.

Müller’s law was especially confusing when it came to touch. In the mid-nineteenth century touch was not, like vision or smell, a distinctly defined sensation but

¹⁷ Charles Scott Sherrington, ‘Cutaneous Sensations’, in E.A. Schäfer (ed.), *Text-Book of Physiology*, (2 vols, Edinburgh: London, 1900), II, pp.928-931.

¹⁸ Johannes Müller, *Elements of Physiology*, trans. William Baly, (2 vols, London, 1838-42), I, p.766.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.1065-1067.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.1072.

a catch-all term for a bundle of sensations also known as ‘common sensibility’. Common sensibility, an idea derived from Aristotle, acted as the clearing-house in which the diverse claims made by all of the senses were settled as a unified consciousness.²¹ Müller defined common sensibility more narrowly: no longer was it a centre for co-ordinating sensation but a category embracing the many forms of touch and ‘feeling’. Itching, tickling, pleasure and pain, heat and cold, and sensations of touch ‘in the more limited sense’ all featured.²² Yet even within this narrower definition, the relation between these sensations and with other, ‘proper’ sensations like vision remained for scientists long after Müller an enigma.²³ In 1846 Weber made a further distinction, arguing that touch referred to sensations providing information about the external world and common sensibility to sensations registering changes in the body.²⁴ But still Weber left undefined the relation between different elements included within touch, such as temperature and pressure, and between touch and other senses. Arguing that nerves showed no difference in their ‘mode of conduction’ and therefore that all sensations acquired specificity in the brain, he at the same time claimed that ‘[e]xactly what goes on in our nerves, brain, and mind’ when a sensation occurs ‘will always remain a puzzle’.²⁵ If Weber established touch as something to plot, Müller revealed the conceptual and linguistic difficulties of determining precisely *what* was being hunted,

²¹ Sherrington, ‘Cutaneous Sensations’, pp.969-970. For a return to this idea, see H.H. Price, ‘Touch and Organic Sensation: The Presidential Address’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, NS, 44, (1943-1944), pp.i-xxx. On touch and common sensibility in relation to muscular sensation, see Roger Smith, “‘The Sixth Sense’: Towards a History of Muscular Sensation”, *Gesnerus*, 68/1, (2011), pp.218-271.

²² Müller, *Elements of Physiology*, II, p.1059, p.1087.

²³ See Müller himself: *Ibid.*, II, p.1069; Ulf Norrsell, Stanley Finger, and Clara Lajonchere, ‘Cutaneous Sensory Spots and the “Law of Specific Nerve Energies”: History and Development of Ideas’, *Brain Research Bulletin*, 48/5, (1999), p.457.

²⁴ Ernst Weber, *Tastsinn und Gemeingefühl*, in Ernst Heinrich Weber, *E.H. Weber on the Tactile Senses*, Helen E. Ross and David J. Murray (eds and trans.), (2nd edn, Hove, 1996), p.213.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.158-159, p.163.

and *where* it could be plotted. The conceptual vagaries of touch meant it was not only difficult to grasp, but also to *find*.

Despite these difficulties, later researchers persevered in sharpening the specificity of touch. To a large extent this was made possible by physiologist Hermann von Helmholtz's suggestion, outlined in his *Handbook of Physiological Optics* (1856-1866), that not only senses had their own specific energies but also nerves subserving distinct sensations *within* categories of sense like vision.²⁶ In 1882 and 1884 respectively, physiologists Magnus Blix and Alfred Goldscheider independently separated warmth and cold into distinct sensations with distinct receptors and nerves; these receptors could be mapped onto the body as constellations of warmth and cold 'spots', in between which were interspersed spots sensitive to touch but not temperature.²⁷ Between 1894 and 1896, Max von Frey, Professor of Physiology at Leipzig, argued that pain was not merely the result of excessive stimulation but itself an independent sensation with its own specific receptors, or pain 'spots', on the skin. Von Frey associated these pain spots with those of warmth, cold, and touch identified by Blix and Goldscheider; each spot, he argued, represented a distinct modality of touch with its own specific nerve and nerve ending.²⁸

By 1900, neurologists had therefore arranged touch into a punctate formation. The skin, Liverpool Professor of Physiology Charles Sherrington explained, was like 'a sheet of water wherein grow water-plants, some sunken and some floating'. When an object disturbed the surface of the 'water', this aquatic foliage, the end-organs of the nerves, moved commensurately with the intensity, dimensions, and proximity of the

²⁶ Norrsell, Finger, and Lajonchere, 'Cutaneous Sensory Spots', p.458; David Sinclair, *Cutaneous Sensation*, (London, 1967), pp.4-5.

²⁷ Sherrington, 'Cutaneous Sensations', pp.945-946; Edwin G. Boring, *Sensation and Perception in the History of Experimental Psychology*, (New York, 1942), pp.466-467.

²⁸ E.G.B., 'Max von Frey, 1852-1932', *The American Journal of Psychology*, 44/3, (July 1932), pp.584-586; Boring, *Sensation and Perception*, p.469.

stimulus.²⁹ To a large extent this was a case of scientists finding what they had themselves produced. Through using blunted compasses (aesthesiometers), spring-measures of pressure (bar aesthesiometers) and pain (algometers), metal pencils of different temperature, and filaments of different give (von Frey hairs) scientists established touch as a sense measurable at precise points. Moreover, as psychologist James Sully claimed in his 1872 review of German research on sensation, physiologists who investigated sensation by measuring the effects of external stimuli ‘simply assume the antithesis and connection of the external and internal—which indeed nobody questions.’³⁰ The very method used to examine sensation assumed a commensurable relation between stimulus and sensation that was retrospectively validated by its results.

Yet despite its growing acceptance, the model of touch Sherrington described left many questions unanswered. Still in 1900 neurologists had no clear explanation of the distinction between common sensibility and the other senses, touch included. Was this distinction qualitative or quantitative, and if the latter, was it anatomical, maintained by specific nerves and end-organs, or functional?³¹ At one level this problem was linguistic. Neurologists distinguishing between the perception of things and things themselves inevitably worried whether the words describing sensations, like ‘pain’, encapsulated independent reality or merely their experience of it.³² At another level the problem was conceptual. Neurology predicated on a distinction between self and world struggled when, after Weber’s distinction between common sensibility and touch, that distinction was transposed onto the body itself. This is particularly evident in debates about ticklishness. For Sherrington, tickling resulted when the sensation of ‘light

²⁹ Sherrington, ‘Cutaneous Sensations’, p.921.

³⁰ James Sully, ‘Recent Experiments with the Senses’, *Westminster Review*, 42/1, (July 1872), pp.165-198, reprinted in James Sully, *Sensation and Intuition: Studies in Psychology and Aesthetics*, (London, 1874), citation p.72.

³¹ See especially the confusion over pain: Sherrington, ‘Cutaneous Sensations’, p.966.

³² Kuriyama, *Expressiveness of the Body*, p.77, pp.95-96.

touches' combined with a reflexive 'feeling of shivering' from the muscles. Yet at the same time, tickling caused a very different response from touch, affecting breathing, heartbeat, and the muscles controlling emotional expression. This suggested that tickling combined sensations of touch and common sensibility—of the world and the body—even while appearing to follow a neurological path distinct from touch.³³ Psychologists such as James Sully, by contrast, identified the cause of tickling less in the relation between touch and common sensibility than in the 'mental attitude' towards physical stimulation. But this replaced one conceptual quandary with another, Sully admitting that exactly why we sometimes feel ticklish and sometimes not remained difficult to tell.³⁴

In order to explain the vexed relation between touch and common sensibility physiologists and psychologists turned to a functional, rather than anatomical, model of the nervous system. In this model, exemplified by sociologist Herbert Spencer's *The Principles of Psychology* (2nd edn 1870), the nervous system was not a pre-given network of sensory paths but had evolved and, moreover, itself showed an evolution of complexity and integration as one moved from the periphery to the centre. Psychology therefore traced the successively more complex functioning of the nervous system over phylogenetic evolution and within the individual body.³⁵ Neurologist John Hughlings Jackson developed this idea through his work at the National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic, Queen Square, in the early 1870s. Jackson identified three functional levels of the nervous system, each representing different stages of phylogenetic

³³ Sherrington, 'Cutaneous Sensations', pp.976-977.

³⁴ James Sully, *An Essay on Laughter: Its Forms, Its Causes, Its Development and Its Value*, (London, 1902), pp.56-62. See also Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, (6 vols, Philadelphia, 1897-1928 (1905)), IV: *Sexual Selection in Man*, pp.12-15, and Louis Robinson, 'Ticklishness, and the Phenomena of Tickling', in D.H. Tuke (ed.), *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine* [...], (2 vols, London, 1892), II, pp.1295-1296.

³⁵ Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology*, (2 vols, 2nd edn, London: Edinburgh, 1870), I, p.67.

evolution and degrees of complexity and control. The highest level, the cortex, normally inhibited lower levels but in exceptional circumstances like disease or injury this controlling mechanism broke down and the lower levels allowed to function unhindered.³⁶ In this understanding of the nervous system, sensations registering changes in the body like hunger and fatigue were derived from a lower phylogenetic and functional level of development. Normally kept in check, when sufficiently intense or when higher levels of nervous functioning broke down, they erupted into consciousness.³⁷

Ticklishness from this angle was not just another variant of touch but a different *kind* of tactile sensation altogether. It was, psychologists G.S. Hall and A. Allin wrote in 1897, a remnant of the defence mechanism of ‘primitive organisms’ that had since become redundant but could still be called into consciousness during particular mental states.³⁸ Psychologist Louis Robinson pushed this idea even further through a remarkable experiment at London Zoological Gardens in which the animals were subjected to a thorough tickling. Animals ‘of a lower order’ like armadillos and crocodiles, while sensitive to touch of unarmoured areas, apparently ‘showed no more pleasure at being tickled than does a sensitive mimosa or a snail’. By contrast, animals higher up the evolutionary ladder proved more ticklish in vulnerable areas. Robinson found young chimpanzees ticklish in the same parts as humans, although he struggled against an uncooperative gorilla which sadly, being ‘morose and unwell’, ‘could not be

³⁶ G. York, ‘Hugblings Jackson’s Evolutionary Neurophysiology’, in F.C. Rose (ed.), *A Short History of Neurology: The British Contribution, 1660-1910*, (Oxford, 1999), pp.157-158; J. Taylor, ‘Jackson, John Hugblings (1835–1911)’, rev. Walton of Detchant, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 (<http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2117/view/article/34137>, 12 Dec 2012).

³⁷ Sherrington, ‘Cutaneous Sensations’, p.970, p.984.

³⁸ G.S. Hall and A. Allin, ‘The Psychology of Tickling, Laughter, and the Comic’, *American Journal of Psychology*, 9/1, (October 1897), p.12.

got in the mood'.³⁹ For Robinson, these results suggested an evolutionary purpose for ticklishness. Ticklishness developed, he argued, among animals with sufficient intelligence to require additional tools for defeating their equally intelligent competitors in the fight to reproduce. By encouraging 'mock battles' in an animal's youth, ticklishness equipped it with the strength and tactics for defeating opponents. Humans had once required this ability but it had since become redundant; ticklishness remained as a relic of this earlier age, 'a revelation', Robinson claimed in a statement far exceeding Darwin's own on the subject, 'of man's past habits and history'.⁴⁰

But if ticklishness was an exceptional survivor of an earlier sensibility, how could scientists find broader evidence for this state? How could they examine something either erased or inhibited by newer, 'higher' levels of nervous functioning? The solution came from the hypothesis, popularised by biologist Ernst Haeckel, that an individual human's development recapitulated that of the development of humans as a species: that 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny'.⁴¹ In order to excavate the 'primitive' state half-buried in the nervous system of 'civilized' humans one therefore had only to examine humans themselves at an earlier stage of phylogenetic evolution. What was needed was not zoological comparison of species but anthropological excavation of humans themselves.

Ironically, a zoologist spearheaded this first foray of experimental psychology into the field. In March 1898 Alfred Cort Haddon, Professor of Zoology at the Royal College of Science, Dublin, sailed with a team of physiologists and psychologists to a

³⁹ Louis Robinson, 'The Science of Ticklishness', *The North American Review*, 185/617, (21 June 1907), pp.413- 414.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.414-418. Robinson first outlined this theory in a paper on 'Ticklishness in Little Children' read before the British Association at Oxford. 'Mothers and Children', *The Woman at Home*, (n.d.), p.78. Charles Darwin devoted only a page to ticklishness in his *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London, 1872): p.201.

⁴¹ See Nick Hopwood, *Haeckel's Embryos: Images, Evolution, and Fraud*, (Chicago, 2015).

tiny island in the Torres Strait, the stretch of sea pinned between northern Australia and Papua New Guinea. For Haddon, who had drawn upon the law of recapitulation in his *An Introduction to the Study of Embryology* (1887), Murray Island (Mer) offered the ideal scenario for testing an evolutionary understanding of the nervous system.⁴² First encountering missionary activity only in 1871, the 450 islanders promised to be the perfect ‘primitive’ representatives of an earlier phylogenetic age.⁴³

Primitive did not necessarily mean less sensitive though. Rather, the expedition aimed to test travellers’ rumours that ‘primitive peoples’ possessed exceptional sensory acuity compared with the ‘growing sensory defects’ of civilised humans—especially city-dwellers.⁴⁴ According to Rivers, the islanders were good test subjects because their primitivism made them, in the terms of German physiology, ‘*unwissentlich*’: entirely ‘without knowledge’ that might cloud their judgement when reporting a sensation.⁴⁵ This did not make Murray islanders entirely unproblematic subjects. William McDougall, physician of St Thomas’s Hospital, found it impossible to collect data on heat and cold spots because temporary markings were soon washed away by islanders’ habit of ‘frequent sea-bathing’.⁴⁶ But McDougall did manage to gather enough results in Weber’s test of two-point discrimination for a comparison with English subjects. These

⁴² Henrika Kuklick, ‘Fieldworkers and Physiologists’, in Anita Herle and Sandra Rouse (eds), *Cambridge and the Torres Strait: Centenary Essays on the 1898 Anthropological Expedition*, (Cambridge, 1998), p.168.

⁴³ W.H.R. Rivers, ‘Introduction’, *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits: Volume II: Physiology and Psychology*, (Cambridge, Part I 1901, Part II 1903), Part I: p.2.

⁴⁴ W.H. Winch, ‘Review: *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits: Volume II: [...]*, 1901, 1903’, *Mind*, NS, 13/50, (April 1904), p.274; Georg Simmel, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’, in Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (eds), *The Blackwell City Reader*, (Oxford, 2002), pp.11-19.

⁴⁵ Rivers, ‘Introduction’, p.6; Graham Richards, ‘Getting a Result: The Expedition’s Psychological Research, 1898-1913’, in Anita Herle and Sandra Rouse (eds), *Cambridge and the Torres Strait: Centenary Essays on the 1898 Anthropological Expedition*, (Cambridge, 1998), p.139.

⁴⁶ W. McDougall, ‘Cutaneous Sensations’, *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits: Volume II: [...]*, Part II: pp.193-194.

representatives of civilisation were five men ‘of the educated class’ and a group of working-class inmates in a convalescent home in Cheadle. From the data McDougall made a striking claim: Murray islanders had a threshold of two-point discrimination half that of Englishmen; or, ‘their power of tactile discrimination is about double that of Englishmen’.⁴⁷

The traveller’s tales, it seemed, were true: the expedition’s *Reports* concluded that Murray islanders were equally, if not more, sensitive to stimuli than the ‘civilised’.⁴⁸ But while McDougall understood this in racial terms, Rivers interpreted it as what historian Henrika Kuklick calls an ‘evolutionary adaptation’ to the natural environment.⁴⁹ Rivers suggested that Murray islanders had developed a greater acuity in those sensations, like discriminative touch, essential to survival in the tropics. Although this meant for the islanders a finer touch, it also meant weaker intellectual grasp. For although, Rivers argued, there was nothing to suggest they lacked the intellectual potential of their English counterparts, the demands made on the islanders’ energy by heightened survival senses left little for their ‘intellectual superstructure’.⁵⁰ The comparatively acuter tactility of the islanders proved them throwbacks to an earlier phylogenetic age when the challenges of survival demanded the lion’s share of their energy. Reviewing the *Reports* in 1904, W.H. Winch was thrilled by the conclusion’s implication that sensory ‘development’ was ‘not sporadic [...] but normal evolutionary process’. Sensations, he enthused, could no longer be ‘considered as changeless identities, atoms of solid truth in a world of changing judgments’.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.189-192.

⁴⁸ Kuklick, ‘Fieldworkers and Physiologists’, p.173.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.166-167.

⁵⁰ William Rivers cited in *Ibid.*, p.174.

⁵¹ Winch, ‘Review’, p.277. For a more critical review drawing attention to the problem of language in self-reporting, see E.B. Titchener, ‘On Ethnological Tests of Sensation and Perception with Special Reference to Tests of Color Vision and Tactile

When, in early March 1903, Rivers lunched with Head in Cambridge after five months' research in the Nilgiri Hills in India, the understanding of touch had reached a critical juncture.⁵² Since Weber's experiments in the 1830s, physiologists assumed that what was experienced as a sensation, for example what felt 'hot', correlated with its physiological and anatomical origins in the body: mental impressions established the terms for their own explanation in the body. From Müller's suggestion that there were specific energies for each sense developed the belief that the impulses subserving the various sensations *within* the senses also followed specific anatomical pathways.⁵³ But for a sense as amorphous as touch, entangled with 'common sensibility', it was difficult to determine how many distinct tactile sensations ('modalities') there were. Whether touch could be separated from common sensibility, and, if so, what was 'common' to a sensibility that seemed increasingly to be a thing on its own continued to puzzle. Introspection struggled to resolve this question as it proved difficult to distinguish between a modality 'itself' and the experience of a modality, as well as to formulate a language that maintained the distinction.

The evolutionary understanding of touch offered a potential solution. Implicitly questioning the interpretation that specific nerve energy meant specific nerves for every sensation, the evolutionary model imagined phylogenetic and functional levels between which impulses competed or cooperated, rather than existing in isolation. The nature of those impulses could be distinguished by simple comparison between subjects rather than complicated introspection. But excavators of 'primitive' touch still prodded their subjects hoping to reveal touch spots and still assumed 'specific' pathways for different

Discrimination Described in the Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 55/5, (1916), p.211.

⁵² W.H.R. Rivers, 'Observations on the Senses of the Todas', *Journal of Psychology*, 1/1, (December 1905), pp.321-396.

⁵³ Sinclair, *Cutaneous Sensation*, pp.4-5.

tactile modalities without being precise about what made those pathways or their modalities specific. What researchers did with their hands continued to produce a model of touch as a pattern of spots with specific pathways, even while the change in whom they touched questioned what that ‘specificity’ meant.

Where Head and Rivers stood in this is difficult to tell. Already in 1901 Head and the surgeon James Sherren had studied the return of sensation in London Hospital patients suffering from damaged nerves. Situated on Whitechapel Road, the heart of Jewish migration in the capital, the London’s patients were overwhelmingly poor (a condition of admission) and, as an expression of the whole East End, disproportionately Jewish.⁵⁴ Of approximately seventy thousand Jews in London in 1888, an estimated half of whom were ‘foreign-born’, 90 percent lived in the East End; the vast majority settled in Whitechapel. Local animosity towards Jews significantly increased as persecution in Russia in 1881, 1882, and 1892 drove new waves of Jewish migrants to London.⁵⁵ Privately, Head did not conceal his distaste for Whitechapel’s newcomers, once describing the thronged streets around the hospital during Shabbat as ‘alive with a parasitic race like a sleeping dog with fleas’.⁵⁶ Publicly, his aversion to many of the London’s patients shaped what he believed research on their sensations able to reveal. Head argued that the enormous number of patients passing through the London each year—250,000 outpatients alone by 1910—made it possible to filter out ‘untrustworthy’

⁵⁴ See the interview of would-be patients by the Out-Patient Hall Inquiry Officer described in E.W. Morris, *A History of the London Hospital*, (London, 1910), p.10.

⁵⁵ H. Llewellyn Smith, ‘Influx of Population (East London)’ (written 1888), in Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London: First Series: Poverty*, (4 vols, London: New York, 1902), *III: Blocks of Buildings, Schools, and Immigration*, pp.102-103, p.106, p.113. See also Beatrice Potter, ‘The Jewish Community’, in the same volume. For a visualisation of the estimated preponderance of Jews in the streets surrounding the London Hospital see the map ‘Jewish East London’ (1899) in C. Russell and H.S. Lewis, *The Jew in London: A Study of Racial Character and Present-Day Conditions*, (London, 1900).

⁵⁶ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/12, 5 September 1902.

experimental subjects.⁵⁷ But while most patients were able to answer ““Yes” and “No” with certainty’ to calculated prodding, Head argued that they could ‘tell little or nothing of the nature of their sensations’.⁵⁸ Although never explicit, the way Head described the London’s patients was comparable to Rivers’ description of the limited introspective capabilities and ‘primitive’ nervous systems of Murray islanders. At a time when concerns over urban degeneracy and Jewish migration were at their height, Head interpreted his research on the London’s patients through the same prisms of Spencerian evolution and colonial difference as Rivers did—only this time the ‘colony’ was Whitechapel, in the heart of Empire.⁵⁹ Yet for Head the ostensibly retrograde character of the London’s patients only limited what they might reveal about touch. Precisely because nothing but the ‘simplest introspection’ could be asked of patients, it was necessary to turn to ‘the personal experiences of a trained observer’ to push the bounds of neurological knowledge.⁶⁰

Two months after lunching with Rivers in Cambridge, sailing over a ‘steel-blue sea’ while bound for a holiday in Morocco, Head sat in his cabin aboard the steamship SS *Orotava* testing the sensibility of his hand.⁶¹ Coincidentally, the *Orotava* was one of the same ships that transported soldiers between Britain and South Africa during the Boer War (1899-1902) the previous year.⁶² Then, Head and Sherren had supplemented

⁵⁷ Morris, *History of the London Hospital*, p.17; Head and Rivers, ‘Human Experiment’, p.324.

⁵⁸ Head and Rivers, ‘Human Experiment’, p.324.

⁵⁹ Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-c.1918*, (Cambridge, 1989). See William E. Evans-Gordon, *The Alien Immigrant*, (London: New York, 1903).

⁶⁰ Head and Rivers, ‘Human Experiment’, p.324.

⁶¹ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/14, 3 April 1903 and n.d. (envelope dated 11 April 1903).

⁶² The SS *Orotava* acted as a transport ship for soldiers during the Boer War and was used by Lord Kitchener for his return to Southampton on 12 July 1902. ‘The War’, *The Times*, 6 November 1901, p.8; ‘Lord Kitchener’s Return’, *The Illustrated London News*, 19 July 1902, p.89.

their experiments on London Hospital patients with studies of the recovery of sensibility in soldiers suffering from nerve injuries sustained during fighting in South Africa.⁶³ Now though, Head turned to experimenting on himself; he hoped, he told Mayhew, to complete his investigations before returning home.⁶⁴ For in only twenty-two days he would be lying in a hospital bed himself, his arm tightly bound to a splint, trying to piece together the curious new feelings coming from his red-raw skin.

A Human Experiment in Nerve Division

The testing of Head's sense of touch began immediately. On the day after the operation, 26 April 1903, Sherren found the radial half of the back of Head's hand to be insensible to prick, heat and cold, and unable to discriminate between two compass points. Head did however feel the blunt pressure produced by a finger or pencil. A slither of the affected area was also abnormally sensitive to painful stimuli so that when painfully pricked here Head would cry out and jerk his hand away.⁶⁵ The splint was removed on 23 May and the affected area, which had assumed the appearance of toad skin, was scrubbed.⁶⁶

Already by this time Head and Rivers had put in place a weekly routine of testing in Rivers' rooms in St John's College Cambridge. As a physician in Harley Street and the London, and a lecturer at the London's medical school, Head had an

⁶³ See for example the case of Jamaican soldier L.G.H., wounded by a bullet at the Battle of Tweefontein (Groenkop) on 22 July 1901 and examined by Head and Sherren at University College Hospital on 26 January 1902. Henry Head and James Sherren, 'The Consequences of Injury to the Peripheral Nerves in Man', *Brain*, 28/2, (November 1905), pp.316-319.

⁶⁴ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/14, 3 April 1903.

⁶⁵ Head and Rivers, 'Human Experiment', pp.325-326, p.340; Lett's Rough Diary and Almanac for 1903 ('Day Book'), LEP, (uncatalogued), 26 April 1903 and loose insert at 7 May 1903.

⁶⁶ Day Book, LEP, 23 May 1903, 27 May 1903.

unforgiving schedule that left little time for research.⁶⁷ For this reason, Head travelled to Cambridge on Friday evenings, worked with Rivers over the weekend, and returned to London on Monday mornings. After a morning's work, Head walked or cycled, or whiled away the afternoon on the River Cam. Between 5pm and 7pm Head carried out control experiments on unaffected skin and then marked warmth and cold spots on the damaged area, ready for the next morning.⁶⁸ All experiments were performed in Rivers' rooms in St John's, a set on the top floor of the second court of the college, well away from even the minor distractions of Cambridge. Head would sit at a large table in the low-ceilinged workroom, his bare arm laid before him.⁶⁹ Rivers would sit to his left, variously pricking and prodding him with the familiar tests of touch: von Frey hairs for pressure; the needle-pointed 'algometer' (a modification of the 'algometer') for pressure-induced pain; tubes of hot and cold water and cooled copper rods for warmth and cold spots; and 'carpenter's compasses' for two-point discrimination.⁷⁰ Instead of the 'slum' onto which his London laboratory looked, the set had windows overlooking the court and the Fellows' bowling green of adjacent Trinity College.⁷¹ There, Head wrote, it was possible to give himself over to experimentation.⁷²

Rivers' rooms, filled with academic paraphernalia and isolated from the 'petty worries of a busy life', reified the discrimination that Head endeavoured to test.⁷³ A carefully staged photograph materialized this, re-performing the experimental performance that Head provided for Rivers (and himself) as he observed his sensations

⁶⁷ See the exemplary irony of Head's weekly schedule, stuck onto the rear of a photograph of Head relaxing with his family, stamped 1902, WL, PP/HEA/B.5. Also, Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/12, 25 October 1902.

⁶⁸ Head and Rivers, 'Human Experiment', p.342.

⁶⁹ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/14, 15 May 1903.

⁷⁰ Head and Rivers, 'Human Experiment', pp.347-351.

⁷¹ Henry Head, rag book, WL, PP/HEA/E.3/5, October 1903; Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/12, 5 September 1902.

⁷² Head and Rivers, 'Human Experiment', p.342.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.342.

as well as the academic performance of Rivers' workroom, its books ranged behind the table in unassuming distinction (Fig.1).⁷⁴ In this setting, Head would close his eyes, rest his head on his right hand, and allow his thoughts to wander 'like clouds on a windy day'.⁷⁵ The aim was to achieve a state in which he was at once fully conscious of his sensations and yet fully detached from them as if observing something not of himself:

No one thought must occupy attention permanently and I must entirely detach myself from the idea that experiments are in progress. Suddenly in this flowing sea of thoughts there appears a flash of pain a wave of cold or the flicker of heat. It should appear with the suddenness of a porpoise, attract attention and again disappear leaving the untroubled sea to its onward flow.⁷⁶

Head's task was to seize that momentary impression and relate it to Rivers, who jotted it down.⁷⁷ At times, Head's 'negative attitude of attention' reached such perfection that he entered a trance-like state and, as during the experiments on 26 October 1907, drifted into sleep.⁷⁸ In this somnolent state Head apparently became so detached from his own sensations that he reported them with increasing accuracy up until the moment at which he lost consciousness. Head's ability to double as subject and observer, however, depended on 'absolute freedom from all external appeal to responsible action'.⁷⁹ The slightest inkling of the test employed or whether he had answered wrongly reminded him that he was a scientist as well as a subject and apparently 'roused' him to such 'an intense determination to do better' that he devolved into inferring, rather than merely reporting, his sensations.⁸⁰ Consequently, Rivers was careful to avoid doing anything that might break Head's delicate self-suspension. Every test was prepared beforehand to

⁷⁴ On the theatricality of Head's relation to Rivers during the experiment, see Watt Smith, *On Flinching*, pp.149-150.

⁷⁵ Head and Rivers, 'Human Experiment', p.343; Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/16, 27 November 1903.

⁷⁶ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/16, 27 November 1903.

⁷⁷ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/14, 15 May 1903.

⁷⁸ Head and Rivers, 'Human Experiment', p.345, p.353.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.353-354.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.343.

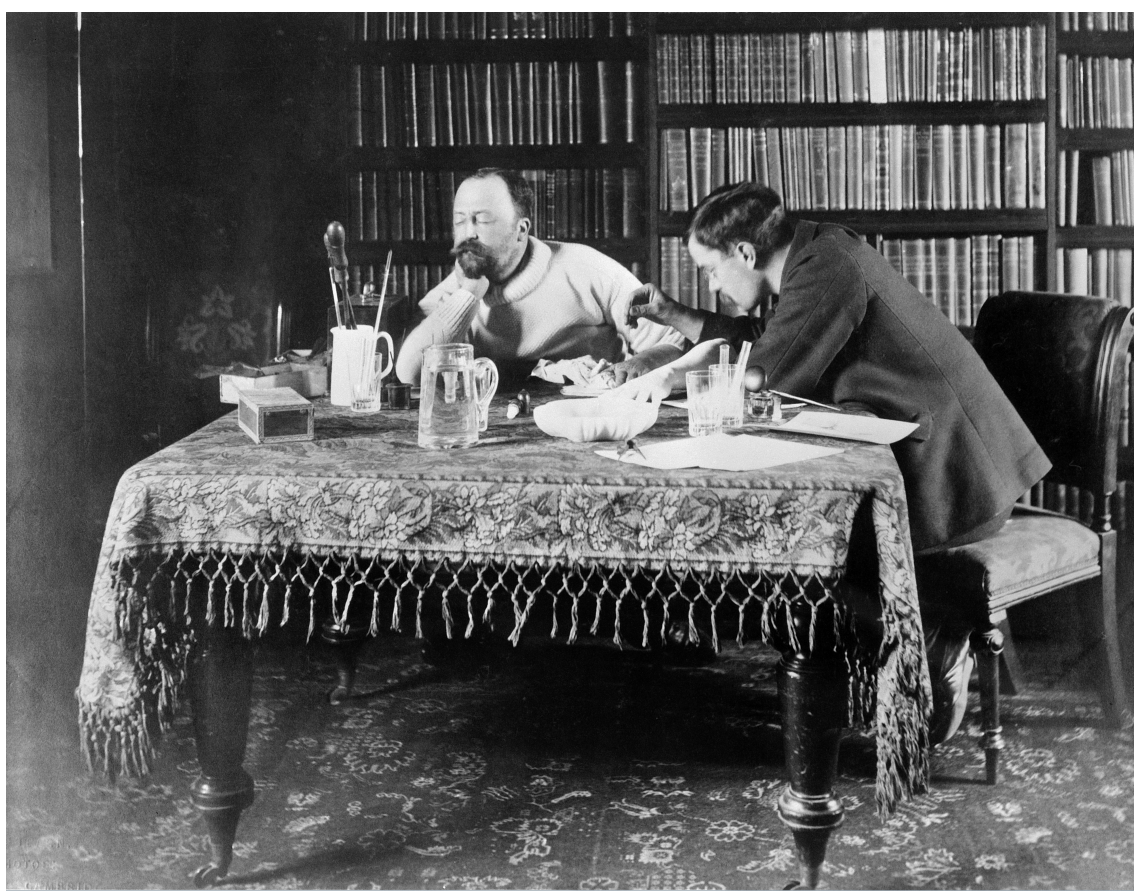


Fig.1 W.H.R. Rivers and Sir Henry Head experimenting on nerve functioning, c.1905, WL, L0026128.

prevent apparently innocent sounds like the ‘clinking of ice against the glass’ or ‘removal of the kettle from the hob’ from revealing the experiment.⁸¹

Head described this method of introspection as fundamentally different from that of earlier researchers. ‘[T]he day of the *a priori* psychologist is over as far as sensation is concerned’, he announced. ‘A man can no longer sit in his study and spin out of himself the laws of psychology by a process of self-examination’.⁸² Head’s self-examination, he claimed, was different. Head confined himself to simple tests which provided ‘measurable results’ and were therefore comparable with those of other researchers.⁸³ Introspection was to be a replicable method, not one which, intrinsically unique to its practitioner, was carried solely by the authority of the researcher performing it. More importantly, the results of Head’s self-observations were recorded as ‘a function of the test employed’ rather than of the sensation being tested: ‘light touch’, for example, was expressed in terms of ‘results obtained with “tactile” and “pressure” hairs’; ‘painful pressure’ in terms of results from the algometer. Rather than self-report using the normal ‘descriptive terms’ for sensations, Head was to respond in terms which did not presuppose what was being tested.⁸⁴ As we have seen, this non-interpretive report required Head to suspend himself as an observer at the same time as observing himself. Although Head’s most accurate results apparently correlated with his greatest self-detachment, ultimately his introspective method rested on Head shuffling *between* the roles of subject and scientist.⁸⁵ The benefit of this approach, Head argued, was that sensations were not taken as *a priori* but rather as potentially more complicated in cause than effect. By reading towards a sensation rather than backwards from it,

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.343, p.345.

⁸² Henry Head cited in Jacyna, *Medicine and Modernism*, p.123.

⁸³ Henry Head, ‘Introduction’, in Henry Head, *Studies in Neurology*, (2 vols, London, 1920), I, pp.3-4.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁸⁵ Watt Smith, *On Flinching*, pp.144-146.

Head's method allowed him to detect 'a multitude of physiological transformations' between stimulus and sensation that 'could not be discovered by [traditional] introspection'.⁸⁶ No longer was a sensation the explanation of its origin but the thing to be explained.

For a long time, though, there was not much to explain. Weeks after the operation Head felt only pressure or pressure-induced pain.⁸⁷ Only after eight weeks, on 20 June 1903, did sensitivity to pricking begin to return, and still then Head was insensitive to 'light touch'. Sensitivity to extreme temperatures returned next, an area of the affected part on the forearm detecting cold on 15 August and heat on 3 October, but intermediate temperatures had no effect.⁸⁸ At this stage of recovery, sensations were poorly localised and disproportionate to stimuli, any stimulus below 24°C producing 'an explosion of cold' regardless of its intensity.⁸⁹ Only many weeks later was Head able to discern subtle differences between sensations of the same kind, to localise them and differentiate their intensity and position on the skin. Sensitivity to cotton wool wisps and the two points of a pair of compasses returned 365 days after the operation, on 24 April 1904, and to moderate temperatures between 5 and 26 June 1904.⁹⁰

For Head, such distinct feelings at widely separated times suggested that the changes he reported represented the recovery of discrete functional *levels* within the nervous system. What is more, the ability of each of these levels to operate independently suggested they were anatomically, as well as functionally, separate.⁹¹ Head's recovery, he argued, was stepped too distinctly to suggest that a sensation was

⁸⁶ Head, 'Introduction', pp.9-10.

⁸⁷ Henry Head, W.H.R. Rivers, and James Sherren, 'The Afferent Nervous System from a New Aspect', *Brain*, 28/2, (1905), pp.99-116, reprinted in Head, *Studies in Neurology*, I, p.58.

⁸⁸ Head and Rivers, 'Human Experiment', pp.340-342.

⁸⁹ Head, Rivers, and Sherren, 'Afferent Nervous System', pp.58-59.

⁹⁰ Head and Rivers, 'Human Experiment', pp.340-342.

⁹¹ Head, Rivers, and Sherren, 'Afferent Nervous System', p.61.

directly connected to a stimulus and that nerve regeneration was a case of re-wiring the connection. Instead, Head posited that the peripheral nervous system was divided into three levels, each of which recovered at different speeds. The first, ‘deep sensibility’, served pressure and pressure-induced pain and was intact after the operation, indicating its separation from the shallow cutaneous nerves that had been severed. The second, which recovered from 20 June 1903, detected temperature extremes and pricking pain; its sensations, which radiated widely and were poorly localised, often caused reflexive responses. Head named this level ‘protopathic’. Finally, the third level to recover, from 24 April 1904, detected ‘light touch’ and ‘finer grades of temperature’; this was the level at which accurate localisation and discriminative responses became possible, including the discrimination of two points on the skin and minor differences in temperature. This Head named ‘epicritic’.⁹²

Yet if each stage of recovery represented different functional levels of the peripheral nervous system, and if each cutaneous level detected different qualities of the same stimuli, then the cutaneous levels had to interact for stimulus to progress to sensation. Head argued that as nerve impulses travelled from skin to brain they combined with impulses of the same kind from another level. The incipient ‘sensation’, at first divided between impulses, became simpler as those impulses integrated *en route*. Whereas impulses began as protopathic or epicritic, Head wrote, as soon as they reached their first synaptic junction in the spine those impulses of the same modality were combined and sorted into pathways serving the four conventional modalities of touch: pain, heat, cold, and touch. It was just like the ‘central office of a newspaper’, where ‘the various accounts of the same event, arriving by telephone, by tape, or by telegraph,

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp.61-63.

are co-ordinated and distributed according to their subject matter'.⁹³ Through this analogy Head anticipated C.R.W. Nevinso's painting *Amongst the Nerves of the World* (1930), which transposed the 'newspaper office' of the central nervous system onto the 'nerve centre' of Fleet Street (Fig.2). Here the web of telephone and telegraph lines depicted the clash of information, itself standing in for the sensory chaos of the street below, that Head located at the spinal synapse: the world of the nervous system now the nervous system of the world.⁹⁴ While some impulses combined, others, Head argued, competed, inhibiting competitors from travelling further. The clearest evidence for this was given by the sharp switch from protopathic to epicritic sensibility during Head's recovery. For Head this indicated that epicritic sensibility was not merely a later stage of recovery but an independent system that normally inhibited protopathic sensibility.⁹⁵ Far from travelling unhindered from skin to brain, tactile impulses underwent 'profound transformations' as they competed and combined to form sensations.⁹⁶

The significance to this theory of Rivers' work in the Torres Straits and Jackson's theory of the evolution and dissolution of nervous functioning is unmistakable. Like Jackson, whose annotated volumes of the journal *Brain* Head acquired sometime after 1894 and himself annotated, Head conceived of the functional and anatomical segmentation of the nervous system in evolutionary terms.⁹⁷ Sensation, he argued, was for the earliest organisms 'originally a vague undifferentiated state'.

⁹³ Head, Rivers, and Sherren, 'Afferent Nervous System', p.63; Head and Rivers, 'Human Experiment', pp.442-443.

⁹⁴ See Gül Inanç and Michael Walsh, 'Amongst the Nerves of the World: C.R.W. Nevinso's Visions of Post-war London, 1919-1929', *The London Journal*, 32/2, (2007), pp.172-174.

⁹⁵ Head and Rivers, 'Human Experiment', pp.444-445.

⁹⁶ Head, 'Introduction', p.11.

⁹⁷ *Brain*. Collection of volumes owned and annotated by John Hughlings Jackson, subsequently owned and annotated by Henry Head, 1879-1894, RLHA, RLHPP/HEA/2/1-16; Head, 'Epilogue', in Head, *Studies in Neurology*, II, p.801. See also Charles S. Sherrington, *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System*, (London, 1906), p.2, p.8

From this state sensory organs of increasing complexity evolved in distinction from one another. At the same time, distinct ‘sensory levels’ within the nervous system gradually emerged, the interaction between these levels perfecting the integration of nerve impulses travelling to the brain.⁹⁸ Under normal circumstances the epicritic level acted as a ‘control’ on the protopathic level, either inhibiting protopathic impulses or combining them with its own and so modulating their effect. Only during nerve damage, caused by disease or injury, or when protopathic impulses were especially intense, for example during a burning hot stimulus, was this epicritic control lifted and protopathic impulses allowed to register as sensations.⁹⁹

Head’s conclusions, and not only his results, were evidently also a function of the test employed. If reading backwards from a sensation assumed its *a priori* existence, then reading towards it presupposed a complex integration of impulses which it was the self-observer’s task, at different stages of recovery, to discriminate. Moreover, if this method presupposed a certain discriminating nous, then it also meant Head would discover, through careful self-observation, the progressive return of his own capacity to discriminate. From the moment his nerves were severed until Rivers’ last prod, 167 days of testing later, on 13 December 1907, Head was always going to discover himself as a discriminating observer; what his self-observations crystallised was an understanding of this in evolutionary terms. Head’s practice of recording observations in a ‘day book’ shaped and was shaped by this formulation. In the earliest stage of Head’s recovery the day book contained entries by Rivers, Sherren and other London Hospital staff as well as by Head himself. The notes varied from scribbles of procedures to lengthy accounts of Head’s hand and forearm. Gradually, though, Head became the dominant voice on his own condition, peppering the day book with terms like ‘light touch’ and

⁹⁸ Head, ‘Introduction’, pp.10-11.

⁹⁹ Head and Rivers, ‘Human Experiment’, pp.446-449.



Fig.2 C.R.W. Nevinson, *Amongst the Nerves of the World*, 1930, Museum of London, 129189.

‘protopathic’ that suggested it was not entirely true that he restricted himself to soberly reading towards sensations or refrained from interpreting them.¹⁰⁰ By transposing the temporality of Head’s recovery into spatial form—converting days into pages—the day book also encouraged a conception of the nervous system as something that was spatially and temporally differentiated: stages of recovery became functional levels and moments in evolution. In this way, the day book became a plan of the nervous system from skin to brain as well as a condensed history of human evolution itself (day zero: 9.30am, 25 April 1903).¹⁰¹

This mutual conditioning of method and conclusion was in turn reinforced by the ordering of Head’s subsequent experiments. In papers published between 1906 and 1918 Head extended his investigations through studying sensory disorder caused by nerve damage in the spine and brain.¹⁰² Head found that just as there were two functional levels in the nervous system’s periphery so there were two in its centre. The thalamus, he argued, correlated functionally and phylogenetically with the protopathic level in the skin. It received impulses that caused pleasure or pain (like extreme temperatures) and that reported on the body’s condition. The cerebral cortex, by contrast, correlated with the epicritic level. It received impulses that allowed discrimination; the ability to localise stimuli, to differentiate between them, and to spatially position oneself. And just as the epicritic level modified or inhibited impulses

¹⁰⁰ Day Book, LEP, Loose insert at 7 May 1903 (dated 29 April 1903); 11 May 1903; 19 May 1903.

¹⁰¹ On the interplay between the materiality of scientific notebooks and the knowledge they form see Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *An Epistemology of the Concrete: Twentieth-Century Histories of Life*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian, (Durham: London, 2010), pp.244-245.

¹⁰² Henry Head and Theodore Thompson, ‘The Grouping of Afferent Impulses within the Spinal Cord’, *Brain*, 24, (1905), pp.116-340; Henry Head and Gordon Holmes, ‘Sensory Disturbances from Cerebral Lesions’, *Brain*, 34, (1911-12), pp.102-271; Henry Head, ‘Sensation and the Cerebral Cortex’, *Brain*, 41, (1918), pp.57-253, all reprinted in Head, *Studies in Neurology*, II.

from the protopathic, so the cortex did for the thalamus.¹⁰³ In the same way, then, that Head's introspection allowed him to read from the outside in, his experiments were ordered to progress from periphery to centre, replicating the functional and phylogenetic divisions of the nervous system they discovered. The ordering of Head's experiments recapitulated the recapitulation they apparently revealed—something Head consolidated by slightly rearranging that order to form an 'orderly sequence' from skin to brain when his papers were collected as *Studies in Neurology*.¹⁰⁴ Both the day book and Head's collected papers performed an archaeology of sensation—strictly, an archaeology *within* an archaeology of sensation—that produced the strata they uncovered and the discriminating observer that was their prerequisite.

Head continued the archaeological theme by interleaving day book entries with photographs recording his changing condition. Sometimes Head used photographs to record a measurement of touch. Rivers would, for example, touch Head and Head would mark on a life-sized photograph the point he felt touched.¹⁰⁵ Sometimes, though, Head used photographs to record a measurement of touch *and* to calibrate that measurement at the same time. At the end of each Sunday sitting Rivers marked the points at which Head was sensitive to cold onto a 5cm² chequerboard inked on Head's hand. When Head returned to London, photographer and radiographer at the London Hospital Ernest Wilson took life-sized photographs of Head's hand and smaller-scale ones of his forearm (Fig.3). The next weekend Head marked out what he felt as cold spots on his hand and Rivers tested them; these were then compared with results from previous photographs and if there were found to be any cold spots 'missing' then Rivers tested

¹⁰³ Holmes, 'Sir Henry Head', pp.674-676. See also Holmes's defence of these findings in Gordon Holmes, 'Disorders of Sensation Produced by Cortical Lesions', *Brain*, 50, (1927), pp.413-427, reprinted in Gordon Holmes and Charles G. Phillips (ed.), *Selected Papers of Gordon Holmes*, (Oxford, 1979), pp.278-292.

¹⁰⁴ Head, 'Introduction', p.3.

¹⁰⁵ Day Book, LEP, 17 May 1903.

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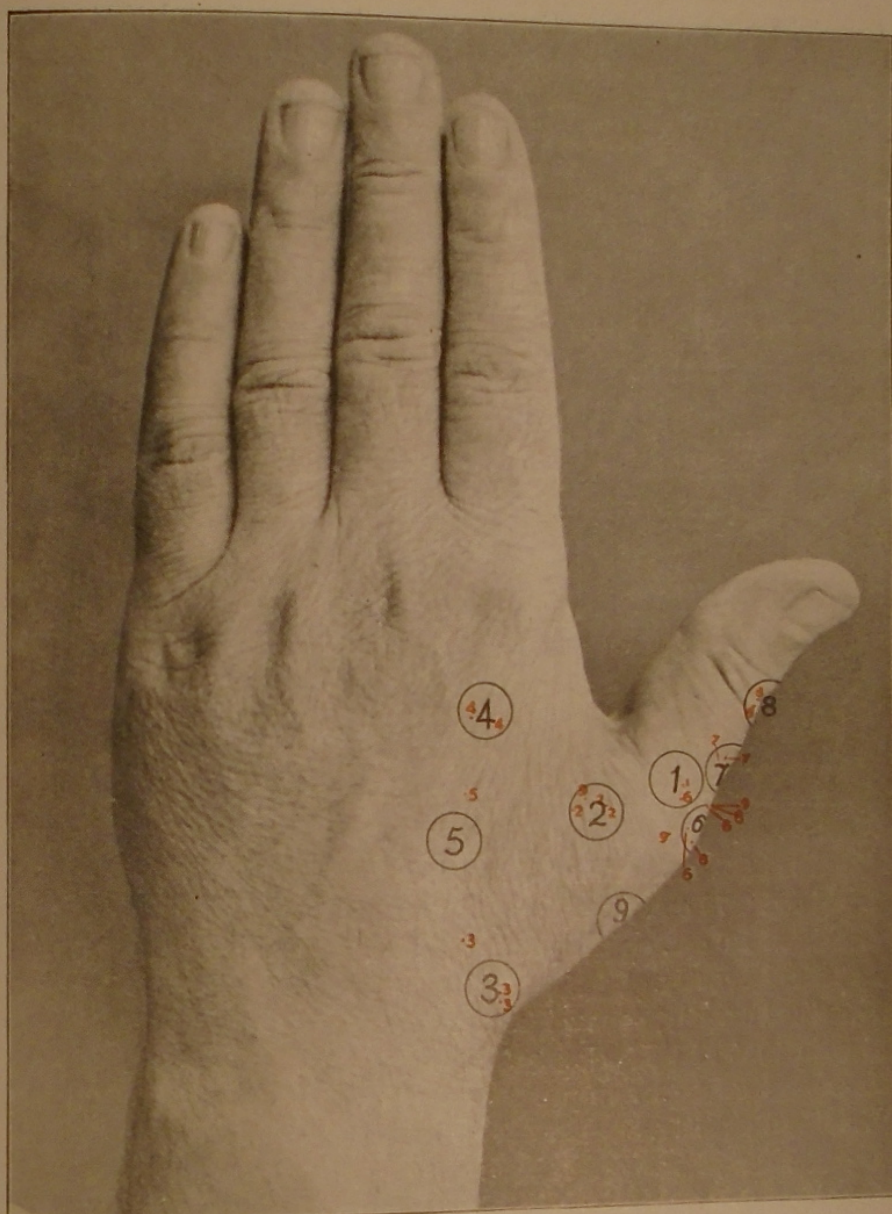


FIG. C3.

Reduced to two-thirds the natural size (May 17, 1903).

Certain spots were marked on a life-sized photograph of H.'s hand. These are shown by black numbers within a circle of 1 cm. in diameter.

H. was given a similar photograph and marked upon it in each case the spot he thought R. had touched.

The photograph showing the spots stimulated and that showing H.'s localisation have been combined; the marks made by H. are printed in red. Thus, for instance, a red 3 shows the spot marked by H. as the locality of a stimulus applied by R. to the area marked with a black 3.

The order of stimulation is given in the text.

Fig.3 Henry Head's hand, 17 May 1903, in Henry Head, *Studies in Neurology*, (2 vols, London, 1920), I, p.251.

Head again.¹⁰⁶ In this way, what Head saw and what he felt mutually supported each other, his sense of touch bound up with its visual representation on the skin and in photographs that at once catalogued and calibrated it.

This had troubling implications for Head's new method of introspection. For contrary to Head's efforts to read towards a sensation that was 'simpler than its constituent elements', by calibrating his self-reports through their photographic representation Head assumed a direct, visualizable correspondence between what he felt and what caused that feeling in the skin.¹⁰⁷ Despite claiming to do the opposite, Head's self-reports worked within a particularly turn-of-the-century visual semiotics that assumed, like the clues in a Sherlock Holmes mystery or the physiognomic quirks of a criminal, that external, visible signs possessed a secret bond with an internal, invisible reality.¹⁰⁸ And, just as the indexicality of the photograph—the direct physical relation between a negative and the object imprinted on it—seemed to give the criminal's mugshot added veracity, so it naturalised and replicated the indexical relation between sensations and touch spots on the skin that it apparently only represented.¹⁰⁹ Photographing cold spots gave the impression that impulses did not, in fact, only acquire specificity in the spine but, from their very origin, directly corresponded with the sensations they caused: the old theory of specific nerve energies. Head counteracted this impression by arguing that cold spots detected only extreme cold and therefore represented only protopathic sensibility. But, as his critic Francis Walshe later argued,

¹⁰⁶ Head and Rivers, 'Human Experiment', pp.345-346, p.350. On Wilson, see 'Mr Ernest Wilson', *The Times*, 4 March 1911, p.11.

¹⁰⁷ Henry Head, 'Appendix: Some Criticisms of Our Work', in Head, *Studies in Neurology*, II, p.831.

¹⁰⁸ Carlo Ginzburg, 'Clues: Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes', in Umberto Eco and Thomas A. Sebeok (eds), *The Sign of Three: Dupin, Holmes, Pierce*, (Bloomington, 1983), pp.81-118; Ronald R. Thomas, *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science*, (Cambridge, 1999).

¹⁰⁹ See Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism*, (Ithaca: London, 1996).

this necessitated speculating a separate anatomical route for epicritic sensibility that was implied but nowhere located—let alone photographed.¹¹⁰ The method of recording Head's archaeology of sensation worked against his effort to perform it; paradoxically, it required the invention of an unrepresentable anatomy to meet the demands of a theory it was unable to fulfil.

These inconsistencies did not stop Head's conclusions from becoming, for some, textbook knowledge.¹¹¹ But they hinted at frayed edges which, picked at in the next three decades, threatened to unravel his theory entirely. In 1942 the editor of *Brain*, in which Head published all of his findings and which he himself edited until 1925, published the most comprehensive of these critiques, clinically exposing the illogicalities required by a theory struggling to maintain the original idea of a divided sensibility in the skin. Why, Francis Walshe asked, would impulses be divided between protopathic and epicritic levels if, as soon as they reached the spine, they were sorted into modality-specific pathways for heat, cold, pain, and touch which erased the distinction?¹¹² And if epicritic impulses inhibited or modified protopathic ones at the nervous system's periphery, then what need was there for the cortex to perform the same function at its centre?¹¹³ Even more perplexing was Head's explanation of what happened to impulses once they departed the spine. As well as positing specific pathways for the four touch modalities, Head also argued that tactile localisation and two-point discrimination had their own privileged routes to the brain. While it was

¹¹⁰ F.M.R. Walshe, 'The Anatomy and Physiology of Cutaneous Sensibility: A Critical Review', *Brain*, 65/1, (1942), pp.54-55.

¹¹¹ Major Greenwood Jr., *Physiology of the Special Senses*, (London, 1910). See also the first edition of Walter R. Brain and Eric B. Strauss's *Recent Advances in Neurology* (London, 1929), pp.237-273, John S.B. Stopford, *Sensation and the Sensory Pathway*, (London, 1930), Martin Flack and Leonard Hill, *A Textbook of Physiology*, (London, 1919), pp.591-592.

¹¹² Walshe, 'Anatomy and Physiology', pp.54-55.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.58.

possible to *think* of those qualities separately from one another and from the objects they reported on, it was absurd, Walshe argued, to treat them as *things* themselves, with their own physical existence and private nerves. Localisation and two-point discrimination were judgements *about* things touched, and were materially inseparable from both their objects and the sense of touch of which they were a part. To argue otherwise was the same as speculating ‘pathways for truth or beauty’; equally ‘figments of the observer’s mind’.¹¹⁴ If Head’s introspection tautologically discovered the discrimination required to perform it, then his conclusions necessitated the invention of ‘speculative anatomical structures’ and bizarrely incompatible ‘physiological processes’ in order to maintain the illusion.¹¹⁵

In short, Head got carried away. While arguing that tactile sensations were abstractions distilled from the complicated transformation of impulses, he also maintained a specific correspondence between sensations and stimuli that his introspective method aimed to refute. Readers journeying up Head’s nervous system consequently found themselves teetering between nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories of touch, rather than propelled into the new era promised.

‘To Her without whose touch the strings would have been mute’

Sometime in April 1903, just before Head’s operation, Head and Mayhew engaged to marry.¹¹⁶ The couple had met almost eight years earlier, in August 1895, and from 1897 kept a weekly correspondence. Throughout this period meeting unobserved proved a constant dilemma. While Head’s work kept him in London and Cambridge, Mayhew,

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.59.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.61.

¹¹⁶ Jacyna, *Medicine and Modernism*, p.167.

daughter of the Chaplain of Wadham College, remained with her parents in Oxford where she worked as an Assistant Mistress until becoming Headmistress of Brighton High School for Girls in 1899. While they managed to meet at the Head family house in Buckingham or a play or exhibition in London, for both these meetings were all too brief; Head's self-experiment, which required regular weekend trips to Cambridge, would prove only another obstacle.¹¹⁷

Of the operation itself, Head only told Mayhew four days after, on 29 April 1903, but Mayhew was quick to reassure and encourage, writing of him 'whom it is so wonderful and new [...] and strange to call mine in any sense.'¹¹⁸ Over the same months, Head and Mayhew read and corresponded on Henry James' *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), a novel that for each of them refracted and amplified the circumstances of their own relationship. The book told the story of Kate Croy and Merton Densher, deeply in love but wary of marriage due to Densher's modest earnings. Despite opposition from her family and her own limited finances, Croy nevertheless resolves to marry Densher using whatever means necessary. The rest of the novel unfolded the increasingly testing decisions the couple make in pursuit of marriage. After reading the 'preface' repeatedly, Mayhew wrote to Head 'that though I produce nothing, my way is that way.'¹¹⁹

Whether Mayhew's statement referred more to the form or content of the novel, James' actual preface, written several years later for the New York Edition of his works, throws light on what she may have meant. James' intention had been to present two

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.154-159.

¹¹⁸ Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/14, 4 May 1903 and 29 June 1903.

¹¹⁹ Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/13, 24 March 1903. Thirteen years later Mayhew (by then Ruth Head) gathered together her favourite sections from James's novels and published them as *Pictures and Other Passages from Henry James*, (London, 1916). She wrote that, of all the qualities of the heroines in James's novels, for her the one that had the most enduring influence was 'their capacity for receiving mental impressions'—a capacity Henry Head equally treasured. pp.v – vi.

lovers ‘consumed by a sense of their intimate affinity’ and so ‘impatient of barriers’ to their marriage, and yet also each ‘with qualities of intelligence and character’ to enable them to deepen that relationship and extend its possibility.¹²⁰ Just as Croy was sure of her match with Densher and, despite all obstacles, determined to marry, so Mayhew, after six years of courtship and still no end in sight, persevered with Head. With Head choosing to focus on unpaid research rather than his Harley Street practice, marriage was for him and Mayhew, as for Croy and Densher, ‘before them like a temple without an avenue’.¹²¹ In *The Wings of the Dove*, Densher consequently faced ‘the question of whether it were more ignoble to ask a woman to take her chance with you, or to accept it from one’s conscience that her chance could be at the best but one of the degrees of privation’.¹²² Head’s comments on the novel are fewer than Mayhew’s, but he clearly asked himself the same question. Returning late one evening to an empty flat after a long day at the laboratory, Head wrote to Mayhew of his aching loneliness and the torment that it was caused by his own decision to continue work that did not pay and that itself caused such ‘toil & care’.¹²³ Mayhew’s response was assured. That Head’s work was for him his ‘chosen mistress’ she knew and accepted. The separation it caused was as unavoidable as Head’s research was intrinsic to his life and was to be welcomed as unreservedly: ‘Forgive my writing this – it came to me who formulate so rarely as the slow hot tears pressed themselves out, and almost hid your writing from my wet

¹²⁰ James composed prefaces for each of his novels when they were collected in a New York Edition published between 1907 and 1909. Henry James, ‘Preface to “The Wings of the Dove”’, in Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*, (New York: London, 1934), p.303.

¹²¹ Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, (London, 1902), p.51.

¹²² *Ibid*, p.54.

¹²³ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/16, 6 November 1903.

eyes.’¹²⁴ And so Mayhew and Head, apart for the while, wrote, even when writing was near impossible.

Over the course of this correspondence Head’s relationship with Mayhew entangled with the self-experiment simultaneously unfolding. Touch in and through their letters overflowed into touch practised, felt, and thought about in Rivers’ Cambridge study.¹²⁵ In part this was because Head wrote to Mayhew about his research in letters that themselves materially stood in for the touch so often denied them. Head and Mayhew were, in line with many contemporaries, acutely aware of correspondence as a figurative and literal mediation construable in bodily terms; an emotional and physical touch that both enabled and disrupted relationships.¹²⁶ But it was also because of the peculiarly self-referential nature of his discourse *as a lover* who spoke not only to another but also to another imagined by himself and therefore ultimately to himself.¹²⁷ While Head’s letters spoke *about* his investigations into touch, and vicariously mediated his own touch of Mayhew, they were also a way of speaking which touched *upon* the self that spoke. This self-address of a lover’s discourse, in which the writer explains *and* interprets how they feel to and through another imagined as much as real, is therefore comparable to the self-experiment in which Head believed he both felt and observed himself feeling. Rather than a ‘psychological activity’ or a ‘performance’ of and to the self, readings focused respectively on the legibility of authorial intention or

¹²⁴ Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/16, 7 November 1903.

¹²⁵ On letters as a means by which writers and recipients mutually constitute one another, especially bodily, see Seth Koven, *The Match Girl and the Heiress*, (Princeton: Oxford), pp.184-185, pp.230-237. Koven importantly draws attention to the ways that narratives of bodies establish intimate relationships at the same time as intimacy transforms those narratives. For an essential account of Head and Mayhew’s correspondence as a ‘process of mutual representation’, see Jacyna, *Medicine and Modernism*, pp.169-184.

¹²⁶ Kate Thomas, *Postal Pleasures: Sex, Scandal, and Victorian Letters*, (Oxford, 2012), pp.4-9.

¹²⁷ Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard, (London, 2002), p.1, p.3.

instrumentality of correspondence as a means of ‘self-fashioning’, letter-writing was a process through which Head and Mayhew *received* the feeling they at the same time expressed.¹²⁸ This feeling Head and Mayhew understood in the particular sensory and, implicitly, sexual terms of fin-de-siècle aestheticism and literary realism, particularly of Walter Pater and Henry James. Head’s letters were, like his self-experiment, an extended meditation on what he felt and how that feeling worked, a meditation that bled between correspondence and experiment.

Writing to each other every week enabled Head and Mayhew to share their lives even when apart. But it also provided a particularly material way to stay ‘in touch’, the letters at once substituting the physical contact denied their correspondents and, by their existence, marking the absence of that contact.¹²⁹ For both, the letters were unique traces of the other and, as traces, tangible signs of their absence; for Head, Mayhew’s letters were in particular markers of her distinction from other women and of the alienation he felt in her absence.¹³⁰ One month into his self-experiment Head wrote to Mayhew of his recent trip to Cambridge, during which he stayed ‘in the ugly and cheerless rooms of a first year undergraduate’:

On the mantelpiece stood his sister, as she was presented, looking exactly like every other girl who ever made her bob to the queen, the Bishop of London and Wellson, the late head master of Harrow, in one frame, flanked on either side by Sophie Fulgarney [Vanbrugh] covered with a scrawled autograph – Among these offensive household gods stood your dear letter making the social,

¹²⁸ Michael Roper, ‘Splitting in Unsent Letters: Writing as a Social Practice and a Psychological Activity’, *Social History*, 26/3, (October 2001), pp.318-339; For an account of letter-writing as a ‘performance’ that nonetheless remains open-ended, see Matt Houlbrook, “‘A Pin to See the Peepshow’: Culture, Fiction and Selfhood in Edith Thompson’s Letters, 1921-1922’, *Past and Present*, 207, (May, 2010), p.221, pp.226-228.

¹²⁹ See also Thomas, *Postal Pleasures*, p.30; Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival and the Great War*, (Manchester: New York, 2009), p.49.

¹³⁰ On letter-writing as a substitute for absence which simultaneously re-establishes it, as well as the social difference it mediates, see Koven, *Match Girl*, pp.251-252.

religious and artistic impulses of this youth seem increasingly crude & repulsive.¹³¹

Irene Vanbrugh played Sophy Fullgarney (Fig.4), a guileful yet good-hearted Bond Street manicurist engaged to a similarly dissembling ‘professional “palmist”’, in Arthur Pinero’s *The Gay Lord Quex* at the Globe Theatre in Wych Street in April 1899. The play followed Fullgarney’s attempts to thwart Lord Quex, an apparently reformed roué, in his courtship of her young foster-sister Muriel Eden using whatever means necessary, however deceitful.¹³² Reviewers were both disturbed and electrified by the play’s moral ambiguity. While questioning the licenser’s laxity they praised, often in the same review, Vanbrugh’s artful revelation of her character’s contradictions. Fullgarney was ‘the ill-born, shrewdly-virtuous, meanly-enthusiastic, calculatingly-friendly type of girl sprung from the lowest rung of the lowest middle-class’, explained the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and although the play was in bad ‘taste’ Vanbrugh played her part faultlessly.¹³³ Beyond the reviews, though, *Lord Quex* became the touchpaper for a vigorous debate over morality in theatre. According to Thomas Hardy, the Bishop of Wakefield denounced it as ‘the most immoral play of the century’.¹³⁴ Three years after, in the autumn before Head stayed in the undergraduate’s rooms, it resurfaced as the subject of a fierce exchange in *The Times* between Pinero and former president of the Institute of Journalists Sir Edward Russell, who found its ostensible amorality more

¹³¹ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/14, 22 May 1903.

¹³² ‘The Theatres’, *Daily News*, 10 April 1899, p.8.

¹³³ “‘The Gay Lord Quex’”, at the Globe’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 April 1899, p.1. See also ‘Pinero’s New Play’, *Lloyd’s Illustrated Newspaper*, 9 April 1899, p.1, ‘Globe Theatre’, *Morning Post*, 10 April 1899, p.6, and ‘The Morality of Lord Quex’, *The Era*, 13 May 1899, p.17.

¹³⁴ Letter from Thomas Hardy to Florence Henniker, 13 April 1899, in Evelyn Hardy and F.B. Pinion (eds), *One Rare Fair Woman: Thomas Hardy’s Letters to Florence Henniker, 1893-1922*, (London, 1972), pp.78-79; John Russell Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama, 1824-1901*, (Cambridge, 1980), p.150.



Fig.4 Sophy Fullgarney (Irene Vanbrugh) in *The Gay Lord Quex*, 1899, in Irene Vanbrugh, *To Tell My Story*, (London, n.d. [1949]), facing p.29.

worrying than any suggested immorality.¹³⁵ For Head, *Lord Quex* had a more personal meaning. While the photographs of Fullgarney crowded out the other ‘household gods’, they jarred with Mayhew’s letter.¹³⁶ Celebrated photographically, Fullgarney’s moral and social ambiguity was for Head a foil for Mayhew’s qualities, sign of the undergraduate’s vulgarity, and, by implication, testament to his own taste—in women as well as theatre. Head’s comment on Vanbrugh’s ‘scrawled autograph’, an addition to her photographs that, through its very denial, confirmed their reproducibility, only accentuated the contrast with Mayhew’s letter as a sign of her distinction and a unique, tangible trace of her hand.¹³⁷

Head and Mayhew’s correspondence did not materially mediate their relationship only at the time it was sent. Through its sorting, storing, and re-reading it enabled them to temporally as well as spatially bridge the distance between them, in turn reconfiguring that distance through the re-encountered traces of their entire relationship. One October evening in 1902, Mayhew was rifling through old envelopes when she lost herself in Head’s letters from four years earlier. She knew them well, Mayhew thought, but at the same time discovered in them ‘quite new and strange things’, finding the Head she now valued—a man of ‘crystal sincerity’ who weighed every word—in the Head she had then overlooked. The letters allowed her to ‘live again’ her life with Head, ‘coloured and various and glowing’; and yet, like all repetition, they required her to live it differently, in turn also reshaping her relationship

¹³⁵ ‘The Institute of Journalists’, *The Times*, 4 September 1902, p.8. For the ensuing exchange between Russell and Pinero: ‘Sir Edward Russell and “The Gay Lord Quex”’, *The Times*, 5 September 1902, p.6; 9 September 1902, p.8; 10 September 1902, p.10; 12 September 1902, p.5; 13 September 1902, p.14.

¹³⁶ On the enthusiasm for ‘household gods’ see Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions*, (New Haven: London, 2006).

¹³⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature: A Conversation on Photography*, trans. J. Fort, (Stanford, 2010), pp.23-25.

at the moment of writing.¹³⁸ Re-reading the traces of her past relationship did not entail only reliving it; it also entailed re-reading the self that remarked upon it, and the relationship of which it was *presently* a part.

The mundane details of how Mayhew collected, tied, and boxed their letters were as important to this process. Dreading that, should the worst happen, their correspondence fall into the hands of her legally ‘unscrupulous’ mother, Mayhew left it to Head in her will and carefully set about sorting it into a state appropriate for a ‘precious heritage’.¹³⁹ ‘It was extraordinarily interesting: I sat on a stool on the hearth rug and all around me they lay, long envelopes and little ones and here I read a bit and there I paused to think [...] and though I worked really hard I had not ended till after eleven, when there lay around me 20 packets various in length and thickness, all tied by their seasons, and fastened with green ribbon [...]’¹⁴⁰ Mayhew stored all the packets in a large Korean box. While enabling Mayhew to reconfigure her relationship through re-reading its past biography, sorting the letters also allowed her to do so through an imagined *future*. Mayhew wrote that, while bundling Head’s letters, she often wondered what she could have said in her own and whether, in decades’ time, they might put their collections together and read them as one. The thought chilled her: ‘I could bear it perhaps when I was very old – but I am not quite sure.’¹⁴¹ Yet by imagining them re-reading their letters together, by temporarily closing the gap the letters mediated while Head and Mayhew lived apart unmarried, Mayhew was able to tell a story about their love that was otherwise not possible at the time of writing.¹⁴² By imagining them remembering their relationship *in the future*, Mayhew embalmed the present into a love

¹³⁸ Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/12, 7 October 1902. See also Koven, *The Match Girl and the Heiress*, pp.229-230.

¹³⁹ Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/12, 7 October 1902.

¹⁴⁰ Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/12, 30 November 1902.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, pp.216-217.

story even before it was complete, tying it together through anticipatory memory and judicious use of green ribbon.

While comparing their feelings with those of their earlier letters, Head and Mayhew also continually reformulated their relationship through corresponding on the letters of others. These published letters provided a language and examples through which Head and Mayhew could configure their evolving relationship, though they could destabilise as much as strengthen the part that Head and Mayhew's own correspondence played in maintaining 'contact'. When re-reading Head's letters, Mayhew came across one commenting on the letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett. Like Head and Mayhew's correspondence, these were written while the couple were courting and were first published in 1899, the same year as Head's letter. Mayhew found that re-reading Head's letter 'frightened me terribly'. Head spoke, she wrote, 'with such harshness of poor E.B.B.'s incoherency and their ridiculous attitude towards each other, at their age too when she was 40 and he was 34'.¹⁴³ At the time Head wrote the letter, he was 38 and Mayhew 33. Both, like Browning and Barrett, corresponded on each other's poetry, and Mayhew, like Barrett, still lived with her parents.¹⁴⁴ Correspondence on the Browning-Barrett letters provided Head and Mayhew with a foil to their own relationship and its epistolary touching.

But as a tangible object with its own biography, Head's letter exceeded its original meaning every time it was thumbed and re-read.¹⁴⁵ Reading Head's comments in 1899 Mayhew had felt 'a pang'; 'Now [in October 1902] it is something worse.

¹⁴³ Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/12, 7 October 1902.

¹⁴⁴ Marjorie Stone, 'Browning, Elizabeth Barrett (1806–1861)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2008 (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3711>, 4 October 2016).

¹⁴⁵ This repeats the hermeneutic 'distanciation' of the text itself: Paul Ricoeur, 'The hermeneutical function of distanciation', in Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, trans. John B. Thompson, (Cambridge, 1981), pp.131-141.

Especially tonight because it has I fear been self-indulgent in me to write to you so often and so fully and you may all the time be blaming harshly my middle-aged folly.’¹⁴⁶ If anything, Head felt the reverse was true. In August 1902, he had written approvingly on another love letter, this time between Gustave Flaubert and ‘Madam X’, in which Flaubert claimed, Head glossed, that women ‘confid[ing] some personal experience to a man’ most feared ‘anything more than polite interest’ from him, lest his expression reveal she has actually told ‘the Truth’.¹⁴⁷ Mayhew strenuously disagreed with this statement, claiming that Flaubert only meant that ‘every story will be flavoured by the personality of the narrator, however crystal clear her mind.’ ‘The aim of an educated women, when she talks,’ Mayhew wrote, ‘is to record sincerely what she has observed, enjoyed or in any way made her own. She does not wish to be conceited nor egotistical, but she wishes her words to reflect truly her thoughts.’¹⁴⁸ Head’s writings on the love letters of others showed a different, at times cruel, assessment of sincerity between lovers from that of Mayhew. But just as important was the way that, as objects, they nudged his relationship with Mayhew into new patterns every time they passed through her hands.

As with all their correspondence, Head and Mayhew’s letters on the correspondence of others were as significant for what they *did* as for what they said. Indeed, Head was particularly attentive to how telling a story threatened that which was told. ‘To keep a diary,’ he told Mayhew, ‘is foolish: for the very act of writing down that which has been felt changes its colour.’¹⁴⁹ One way that Head and Mayhew tried to avoid this effect of writing, especially frustrating to the lover consequently unable to express love without attenuating it, was to keep a shared scrapbook (or ‘rag book’) in

¹⁴⁶ Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/12, 7 October 1902.

¹⁴⁷ Henry Head, rag book, WL, PP/HEA/E.3/4, August 1902.

¹⁴⁸ Ruth Mayhew, rag book entry, WL, PP/HEA/E.3/4, August 1902.

¹⁴⁹ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/13, 9 January 1903.

which they compiled extracts and reviews of plays watched and novels read.¹⁵⁰ Through rag books, Head wrote, he and Mayhew were able to keep ‘a double diary without the crudity of attempt at mutual analysis’. Rag books offered a medium through which Head and Mayhew could, although apart, enter into the same community of feeling, its oblique expression revealing that feeling better than ‘any [...] individual outpourings’.¹⁵¹ Yet because Head and Mayhew also directly discussed their responses to plays and books the rag books became, as Jacyna suggests, a form of mutual self-constitution which continued that of their correspondence.¹⁵² This was especially because both favoured works with a heavy emphasis on self-analysis, particularly analysis of sensory impressions.¹⁵³ By reproducing and discussing plays and literature, Head and Mayhew could keep in touch—emotionally and physically—in a way at once less and more intimate than the frequent declaration of love could achieve.¹⁵⁴

Yet how, and for how long, this indirect touch supplemented the absence of the other depended on two very different temperaments. When, on the evening of 10 November 1902, Mayhew sat down with the volume of Pater that had sparked a vivid tactile memory of her childhood, she turned to the essay on eighteenth-century art historian Johann Winckelmann. The closing lines, she wrote to Head, gave her ‘such strong intellectual excitement, I might have been talking with some wonderful new friend or [...] with some enchanting old one.’ In these lines (actually those of Pater’s conclusion rather than his essay on Winckelmann) Pater expanded on Victor Hugo’s

¹⁵⁰ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, p.93.

¹⁵¹ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/13, 9 January 1903.

¹⁵² Jacyna, *Medicine and Modernism*, p.185.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.214-222.

¹⁵⁴ For the exchange and discussion of literature through correspondence, see Houlbrook, “‘A Pin to See the Peepshow’”, pp.236-239.

statement that ‘we are all under sentence of death but with an indefinite reprieve’.¹⁵⁵ With this in mind, ‘our one chance’, Mayhew enthusiastically cited Pater, ‘lies in expanding our interval of reprieve, in getting as many pulsations as possible in the given time.’¹⁵⁶ For Pater, this ‘quickened sense of life’ could be achieved through appreciation of art but also—the passage Mayhew cited for Head—from the ‘ecstasy and sorrow of love’.¹⁵⁷ Four days later, inspired by Mayhew’s letter, Head drew up his chair to the fire and read Pater’s essay on Winckelmann. Delighting in Pater’s ‘long sensuous senses [sentences]’, Head told Mayhew, his pleasure was ‘inextricably mixed up with my feeling for you – it was through you that I came to understand that beauty in his writing which is not intellectual.’ Reading Pater’s essay that evening was ‘as if you [Mayhew] had been with me & had gone.’¹⁵⁸ A few evenings later Mayhew conjured their meeting once again, this time reading her copy of Winckelmann alongside ‘parallel passages’ in a work by nineteenth-century poet Johann Eckermann.¹⁵⁹ Echoing Head, Mayhew also felt as though she and he ‘had been really talking together.’ But although Mayhew agreed that shared reading brought the other into presence, she felt that this only accentuated an absence which Head, it stung her to say, did not also feel. ‘All your content in your quiet contained room is that I have been with you, and that I am gone – all my sorrow is that you are not by me here [emphasis in original].’¹⁶⁰ Through words

¹⁵⁵ Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/12, 10 November 1902. Hugo’s statement, came at the beginning of his *The Last Day of a Condemned Man* (1829), a novel narrating the thoughts of a man sentenced to execution. Victor Hugo, *The Last Day of a Condemned Man*, trans. Christopher Moncrieff, (Richmond, 2009), p.42.

¹⁵⁶ Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/12, 10 November 1902.

¹⁵⁷ Pater, *The Renaissance*, p.238.

¹⁵⁸ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/12, 14 November 1902.

¹⁵⁹ Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/12, 17 November 1902. Pater derived some of his material on Winckelmann from Eckermann’s *Conversations with Goethe in the Last Years of His Life*, (1836), first published in English in 1839. See Pater, *The Renaissance*, p.185, and the relevant passage in Johann Eckermann, *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann*, trans. John Oxenford, (London: Toronto, 1930), p.173.

¹⁶⁰ Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/12, 17 November 1902.

not their own, Head and Mayhew transported themselves into each other's presence.¹⁶¹ Through their letters, they reproduced this spectral tangibility of the other, calling them as witnesses of the previous meeting. Yet for Mayhew even this double encounter marked the absence of, rather than substituted, the real presence of Head at her side.

Mayhew expressed this longing for touch through the figure of a wound. In a particularly melancholic letter, she described the feeling of separation as 'like a wound that bleeds always,' a wound only 'healed' by 'your hand in my hand'.¹⁶² Writing three weeks into Head's self-experiment, Mayhew made her emotional wound the counterpart and effect of Head's damaged hand. Still tender from the operation, Head's hand kept him busy with research, prolonging his absence and Mayhew's own tender state resulting from it. Head's reply, written the day before the splint was removed from his arm, was cautiously considered. 'He bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree,' Head cited from W.B. Yeats.¹⁶³ While recognising the pain that their separation caused Mayhew, it was, Head wrote, precisely because Mayhew already *knew* he was aware of this pain that she revealed it to him so openly.¹⁶⁴ By exposing the wound caused by their separation, Head implied, Mayhew only half-forgot that she was not alone in her struggle.

Yet Mayhew not only attributed her 'wound' to Head's absence but also to the condition of his red-raw hand. A few days after Head's operation he and Mayhew spent a Sunday afternoon wandering the Tate Gallery. The whole time, Mayhew recollected in a letter to Head, she could not stop herself from looking at the black and red marks dotting Head's hand. Although only ink crosses recording Head's sensibility, they were

¹⁶¹ Houlbrook, "'A Pin to See the Peepshow'", p.236.

¹⁶² Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/14, 16 May 1903.

¹⁶³ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/14, 22 May 1903. The lines, paraphrased by Head, are from Yeats' 'Down by the Salley Gardens', first published under this title in his *Poems* (1895).

¹⁶⁴ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/14, 22 May 1903.

‘so like real wounds’ that Mayhew felt an upsurge of pride and helplessness. To Mayhew, Head appeared ‘helpless, cut and wounded that others should have in this dark world less pain,’ and while this sparked in her a strong longing to help him it equally pained her that their separation made this impossible.¹⁶⁵ For both Head and Mayhew, the marks on Head’s hand were signs. For Head, they signified sensation ‘beneath’; for Mayhew, they signified, as the loved one’s body signifies to the lover scrutinizing it, the origin of her love for Head—and the suffering it caused.¹⁶⁶ But while Mayhew understood her pain as caused by helplessness, it derived as much from the fact that Head’s pain did not *depend* on her. Mayhew’s wound was constituted by Head’s precisely because his did not stand in relation to her, either caused by her absence or healed by her presence.¹⁶⁷

More than this, Mayhew’s pain at her separation from Head owed as much to the persistent suspicion that Head was not similarly affected. Attempting to account for this difference, both pointed to differences in the sensory power of their memory. For Mayhew, writing in October 1903, it was ‘curious’ that Head only thought of her outside his ordinary hospital work, and then only as an image rather than a tangible presence. ‘To me,’ she wrote, ‘you are a voice speaking, hands holding, a presence enfolding, [...] and I cannot get at what I must be to you. Do you really never feel me in absence? Why the texture of your grey coat is the reallest [*sic*] thing to my fingers.’¹⁶⁸ In an effort to explain an apparently equivocal experience of separation, Head reassured Mayhew that when they were apart he could still vividly ‘see’ her. But he admitted that he could ‘never recall the touch of your hand, or the immense security of holding you in

¹⁶⁵ Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/14, 4 May 1903.

¹⁶⁶ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, p.71.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.57-58.

¹⁶⁸ Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/16, 8 October 1903. Mayhew was responding to Head’s letter of 5 October 1903.

my arms'. 'Only once,' he wrote, 'have I recaptured this feeling as I lay half asleep some few days ago. For it would seem that as you never see but in sleep so to me touch can only return in non-waking consciousness.'¹⁶⁹ This weak tactile memory not only shaped Head's relationship with Mayhew but also the results of his self-experiment occurring at the same time. 'H.'s mental processes,' his 1908 article reported, 'are based upon visual images to a remarkable degree.' While Head could easily recall 'the memory-picture of an object' he was entirely unable to recall Rivers' touches once passed.¹⁷⁰ Yet, as we have already seen, when Head drifted into sleep during testing, exactly four years after he had done the same thinking of Mayhew, his sense of touch progressively improved. Head's self-experiment elaborated his sensory experience of Mayhew in her absence, each condensing and transforming the other and the discourse of separation—physical and temporal—through which they were understood.

This intertwining of Head's self-experiment and his relationship with Mayhew did not result only from the feel of letters or from figures of touch. It was also made possible by the way the lover's discourse returns to the one speaking it. Addressed as much to a constructed lover as to the 'real' one named on the envelope, this discourse touches upon its speaker, plumbing their feeling, in the same way that Rivers' touch enabled Head to unearth the hidden depths of sensation.¹⁷¹ Head's discourse of love could do nothing *but* amplify and be amplified by his self-experiment into sensation, both addressing and exploring another that was, inseparably, himself. This mutual reinforcement of love and neurological self-experimentation was comparable to other entanglements of neurology with languages of selfhood before the Great War,

¹⁶⁹ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/16, 9 October 1903.

¹⁷⁰ Head and Rivers, 'Human Experiment', p.343.

¹⁷¹ Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, pp.73-74.

particularly spiritualism and Pentecostal revivalism.¹⁷² But particular to Head's correspondence with Mayhew and his self-experimentation was how both, in different but intertwined ways, entailed Head occupying a space *between* explanation and interpretation, subject and observer.¹⁷³

Head's chequered hand became the site where these thoughts and feelings from his relationship and research interacted. On 21 July 1903, 87 days after the operation, Head reported that his arm was finally recovering.¹⁷⁴ The previous day his whole forearm and much of his hand had responded to pricking, though they remained insensitive to heat and cold.¹⁷⁵ Mayhew was delighted, willing the time when she might 'sit on your left side as happily as on your right, without the chill feeling that the arm I am so proudly holding is only half-sensate'.¹⁷⁶ For Mayhew, Head's arm and hand were representative not only of a physical but also an emotional inequality of feeling between them. In the same letter, she wrote how it was 'such a terrible devastating thing to care so much,' especially when her care met with Head's silent 'reproof'. Tortured by the fear that her care would 'disgust' Head, Mayhew could equally not stop herself from telling him how all of her worries as a headmistress paled into 'supreme indifference [...] compared with the littlest finger of that Man's [Head's] most precious hand.'¹⁷⁷ For Mayhew, Head's hand was a sign of their differing sensibility and a symbol of the care that she dared not, yet still did, speak.

For Head too, the condition of his hand was inextricably linked to his relationship, his ability to sense and his feeling for Mayhew intertwining with and

¹⁷² Rhodri Hayward, 'Neurology and the Resurgence of Demonology in Edwardian Britain', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 78/1, (2004), pp.37-58.

¹⁷³ On this subject-object position in Head's self-experiment, see Watt-Smith, *On Flinching*, pp.149-150.

¹⁷⁴ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/15, 21 July 1903.

¹⁷⁵ Record for 20 July 1903 in Head and Rivers, 'Human Experiment', p.340.

¹⁷⁶ Mayhew to Head, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/15, 22 July 1903.

¹⁷⁷ WL, PP/HEA/D.4/15, 22 July 1903.

informing one another. Despite attempting a ‘negative attitude of attention’ while working within the secluded rooms of St John’s, Head could not stop thoughts of Mayhew from erupting in his mind and scrambling what he felt under Rivers’ touch. On 27 November 1903, Head reported to Mayhew:

No, dearest, you did not guess the curious way in which you were brought into my ‘Dämmer zustand’ as I sat with closed eyes on Sunday under the tests of Dr Rivers – ‘Vision qui dérange, Et trouble l’horizon de ma raison’. Now have you guessed? If not I will tell you tomorrow when we are together.¹⁷⁸

Elaborating his earlier claim that he was most perceptive during ‘non-waking consciousness,’ Head related a moment during testing when, in a state of ‘Dämmer zustand’—half-sleep or semi-consciousness—visions of Mayhew suddenly seized him.¹⁷⁹ If semi-consciousness normally improved his tactile acuity, this time it entirely disrupted his ability to achieve an attentive inattention to his own sensations. Citing the love poetry of Paul Verlaine, concerned with the lover’s passive reception of flickering sensations, Head implied that Mayhew’s unexpected presence, a potentially erotic presence that could only be related in person, disordered the ‘horizon’ of his ‘reason’.¹⁸⁰ It was ‘as if,’ Head wrote, ‘we had been standing side by side watching the sea together – and my longing towards you made me neglectful of the stimuli that flashed into

¹⁷⁸ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/16, 27 November 1903.

¹⁷⁹ Head derived the concept ‘Dämmer zustand’ from German psychiatry, especially that of Richard von Krafft-Ebing, who outlined the concept in his *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie* (1888). Krafft-Ebing described it as a ‘psychical twilight’ in which the conscious individual’s senses became dim and consciousness of time and space was thrown into confusion. D. Hack Tuke (ed.), *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine* [...], (2 vols, London, 1892), I, p.325. See also Hugo Lang, *A German-English Dictionary of Terms Used in Medicine and the Allied Sciences*, Bertram Abrahams (ed.), (London, 1905), p.90.

¹⁸⁰ On the erotic subtext of Head’s citation of Verlaine see Watt Smith, *On Flinching*, p.150. The citation is from Verlaine’s ‘À Clymène’, first published in *Fêtes Galantes* (1869), Paul Verlaine, *One Hundred and One Poems by Paul Verlaine: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Norman R. Shapiro, (Chicago, 1999), p.52. Susan Taylor-Horrex, *Verlaine: Fêtes Galantes and Romances Sans Paroles*, (London, 1988), pp.38-40.

consciousness so preoccupied was I with the warmth of your presence.’¹⁸¹ In November 1903, Head for the first time began detecting sensations of heat at definite spots in his hand and forearm.¹⁸² But as his mind wandered, these were displaced by the altogether more tangible ‘warmth’ of Mayhew’s unexpected presence.

This bond between Head’s sense of touch and his imagined touch of Mayhew also worked the other way. On 8 March 1904, the same day on which Head posted their banns of marriage, Head wrote to Mayhew of the ‘fiasco’ of his last visit to Cambridge when, during particularly miserable weather, he developed a ‘steaming head cold’. ‘The sensation of my hand went all to pieces: to the compass test I felt worse than a fortnight before & I was lamentably wrong over delicate shades of heat & cold.’ Head’s sorry condition, he continued, not only disrupted his sensations but also his ability to articulate feelings for Mayhew; the ‘physical misery’ seemed to ‘paralyse’ him, preventing him from ordering his thoughts of her just as these thoughts had imposed themselves on his sensations the previous November.¹⁸³ For Head and Mayhew, the physical condition of Head’s hand signified the condition of feeling existing between them. More than this, however, their letters hinted at an ineluctable tie between what Head felt for (and of) Mayhew, what he felt in his hand, and the ways in which his discourse as a scientist and a lover conceptualised both, each folding into the other.¹⁸⁴

The connection Head made between the sensibility of his hand and his feeling for Mayhew was not merely rhetorical. As Head wrote of his experiments in his love letters and sensed Mayhew’s presence in his experiments, the feel of the carpenter’s compass and of Mayhew’s caress, and the language reporting them, became not only

¹⁸¹ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/16, 27 November 1903.

¹⁸² Head and Rivers, ‘Human Experiment’, p.374.

¹⁸³ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/18, 8 March 1904.

¹⁸⁴ This exemplifies the ‘body biographies’ theorised in Koven, *The Match Girl and the Heiress*, c.4.

analogous but constitutive. On the evening of Saturday 23 May 1903, 29 days after the operation, Rivers removed the splint from Head's forearm. The following day, the pair mapped the borders of Head's almost total loss of sensitivity to touch, prick, heat and cold, the results of which Ernest Wilson photographed on Monday 25 May.¹⁸⁵ Apart from a curious triangular area banding his wrist, which appeared sensitive to wisps of cotton wool, Head could feel barely anything.¹⁸⁶ Yet what Head found most remarkable was the way this condition of feeling intruded on, animated, and expressed his feelings in areas of life apparently far apart from his investigations in Rivers' workroom. Writing on the evening of Sunday 24 May, Head informed Mayhew of a curious discovery. Head had long been aware, he wrote, that his poetic composition followed a familiar pattern. A poem would begin forming in his head 'last thing at night' and evolve during his dreams. By breakfast it would be gone, but then gradually return as he walked to the station to catch the Underground to Whitechapel. He had 'always suspected that the lyrical stage in the early morning was physical' but now the proof came with his 'dead arm'. 'For during the period on Saturday morning when I knew both by my internal feelings and by the fact that the lines were coming rapidly that my mood was lyrical the left arm glowed and tingled exactly as it did when you came into your room on the Wednesday after my operation.'¹⁸⁷ At this key moment in his self-experiment, Head became acutely aware of how his tactile sensations, feelings for Mayhew, and lyrical mood mutually supported and signalled one another.

If this entanglement of feeling shaped how Head thought about his poetry, then it also shaped his understanding of the nervous system. The connection Head made between his condition a month after the operation and his poetic and emotional

¹⁸⁵ Day Book, LEP, 23 May and 25 May 1903.

¹⁸⁶ Head and Rivers, 'Human Experiment', pp.328-330.

¹⁸⁷ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/14, 24 May 1903.

sensibility found its way into his publications through one particular concept: ‘feeling-tone’. Before Head’s self-experiment, neurologists unsure whether pain was a quality of sensation or a sensation itself spoke of ‘affective tone’. All sensations, Sherrington argued in 1900, had affective tone, a quality of being ‘agreeable’ or ‘disagreeable’ that varied with the intensity, duration, and quality of stimuli. But while affective tone was shared by all sensations, it was particularly strong in sensations referring to the body: the four types of cutaneous sensation, particularly ‘pain spots,’ and, above all, the ‘inner’ sense of common sensation.¹⁸⁸ Adapting this model, Head concluded from his self-experiment that ‘feeling-tone’ varied between what he believed to be functional *levels* of touch: protopathic sensations were intensely affective, epicritic sensations less so. A pin point dragged over his tender hand, for example, caused an unpleasant feeling that was exceptionally intense and diffuse compared to one dragged over an undamaged area.¹⁸⁹ For Head, tactile sensations of different levels were therefore always already imprinted with *psychological* qualities of varying degree, ‘lower’ levels of touch imbued with greater affective qualities than ‘higher’ ones.

In this way Head gave anatomical form to musings tying his tingling arm, still at an early protopathic stage of recovery, to a rush of poetic and amorous feeling. Indeed, Head hinted at this thinking in his letter five years earlier. While his arm flared up when a new poem announced itself, seeing the completed version, Head wrote, left his arm ‘quiet’ and was ‘obviously only intellectual’.¹⁹⁰ If Head’s lyricism was connected with the protopathic sensibility of his arm, then the appreciation of the final poem must have been connected with another, more ‘intellectual,’ sensibility, a sensibility Head later termed ‘epicritic’ and directly associated with sensory and intellectual discrimination.

¹⁸⁸ Sherrington, ‘Cutaneous Sensations’, pp.966-969, p.1000.

¹⁸⁹ Head and Rivers, ‘Human Experiment’, pp.422-429

¹⁹⁰ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/14, 24 May 1903.

Through connecting his sense of touch with his poetic composition and love for Mayhew, Head made his body a sign for his emotional and literary states and discovered in it a *structure* subtending them. Sixteen years after making this observation to Mayhew, Head completed the connection. In 1919 Head published *Destroyers and other Verses*, a poetry anthology including the poem so intertwined with Head's 'feeling-tone' that weekend in May 1903. Head dedicated the anthology 'To Her without whose touch the strings would have been mute'.¹⁹¹ In the same way Head found in his sense of touch a physical sign and structure for his poetic creativity and love of Mayhew, so in Mayhew's touch, physical and emotional, he found the source of his poetic creativity and, over two decades, the neurological understanding of touch presented in his *Studies in Neurology* the following year.

How did Mayhew understand the entangled relation between her writing and Head's touch as it played out in and through their correspondence? Although performing no self-experiments, in 1918 Mayhew published her first novel in which she too reflected on and recreated the many levels of Head's epistolary touch. *A History of Departed Things* traced the lives of sisters Charlotte and Bettina, daughters, like Mayhew, of an Oxford don, and of Bettina's unhappy marriage to a doctor named Francis. In time Bettina falls for a consultant and scientist named Lucas Beck, a thinly veiled version of Head, whose maternal grandparents were surnamed 'Lucas' and 'Beck'. Like Mayhew and Head, Bettina and Beck exchange and correspond on literature. Indeed, the novel itself is constructed as a series of letters that closely recreate exchanges between Mayhew and Head, so becoming a fictional re-telling of their own correspondence.¹⁹² In this way Mayhew, by now Ruth Head, performed the re-reading

¹⁹¹ Henry Head, *Destroyers and other Verses*, (London, 1919).

¹⁹² This summary draws on Jacyna, *Medicine and Modernism*, pp.190-194 and Ruth Head, *A History of Departed Things*, (London, 1918).

of their correspondence that she imagined in 1902. Beck/Head did not, ultimately, come off well in this re-reading. Mayhew depicted him as a man so preoccupied with work that Bettina eventually draws away, a contrast to Mayhew's own claim in November 1903 that she accepted science as Head's 'chosen mistress'. *A History of Departed Things* implicitly suggests that Head's decision to postpone marriage while completing his self-experiment, and his occasional inability to separate what he felt for Mayhew from how he conceptualised feeling, were often difficult for Mayhew. But evidently for Mayhew, too, corresponding entailed a simultaneous explanation and interpretation of feeling, an interpretation continued through its re-telling so that the distinction between letters and novel blurred.

On 28 April 1904, Head and Mayhew married in St Marylebone Church, a short walk from Head's Westmoreland Mansions apartment. A year and three days after Head's operation, Head's forearm and hand had shown the first signs of epicritic recovery four days previously.¹⁹³ Echoing this healing, on the day before the wedding Head wrote his 'last little letter' to Mayhew, 'clos[ing] a series of letters,' and the metaphorical wound it had mediated, into which he had poured his 'best thoughts'.¹⁹⁴

Conclusion: The Uses of Touch

Despite decades of meticulous research, the understanding of touch presented in *Studies in Neurology* did not go unchallenged. From the publication of 'A Human Experiment in Nerve Division' in 1908 through into the 1920s, neurologists and psychologists criticized Head for irresolvable inconsistencies, illogical leaps, and for subordinating

¹⁹³ Head and Rivers, 'Human Experiment', p.342.

¹⁹⁴ Head to Mayhew, WL, PP/HEA/D.4/18, 27 April 1904.

observation to the abstractions of an overactive imagination.¹⁹⁵ Yet even later research that seemed to move away altogether from Head's methods and conclusions maintained, in a radical new form, some of the crucial insights into touch he first outlined in 1905. By reading these later developments in the light of Head's findings we can begin to explore the ways in which touch was reconceived as a spatial and temporal *quality* and in turn related to the sensation *of* space and time and to the mind perceiving it. For us, this reconceptualization points the way to our own rethinking of what touch 'was', how it threaded through different domains of life—from the scientific to the romantic—and how we might trace its historical evolution.

Although damaging, early critiques of Head's findings did not discredit them entirely. Besides textbooks repeating his theory with little comment into the 1930s, some neurologists continued to find it useful for their own research. As late as 1939, Cambridge physiologist Yngve Zotterman argued that nerve fibres of varying thickness conveyed impulses roughly distinguishable along the protopathic/epicritic divide formulated by Head.¹⁹⁶ Head's theory of a divided nervous system also found its way into disciplines beyond neurology, from William Rivers' explanation of psychoneurosis to Vernon Lee's investigations into affective responses to music.¹⁹⁷ Within neurology,

¹⁹⁵ Wilfred Trotter and H. Morriston Davies, 'Experimental Studies in the Innervation of the Skin', *Journal of Physiology*, 38/2-3, (February 1909), pp.134-246; Walshe, 'Anatomy and Physiology of Cutaneous Sensibility', p.67, p.74, p.78; Harvey Carr, 'Head's Theory of Cutaneous Sensibility', *Psychological Review*, 23/4, (July 1916), pp.262-278; Wilfred Trotter, 'The Insulation of the Nervous System', paper delivered at the British Medical Association in July 1926 and reprinted in Wilfred Trotter, *The Collected Papers of Wilfred Trotter, F.R.S.*, (Oxford: London, 1941), pp.47-70.

¹⁹⁶ Yngve Zotterman, *Touch, Tickle, and Pain*, (2 vols, Oxford, 1969-71), II, pp.10-12, pp.73-75.

¹⁹⁷ W.H.R. Rivers, *Instinct and the Unconscious: A Contribution to a Biological Theory of the Psycho-Neuroses*, (Cambridge, 1920), pp.119-121; Vernon Lee to Ruth Head, WL, PP/HEA/B.16, 18 October 1925; Vernon Lee, *Music and Its Lovers: An Empirical Study of Emotion and Imaginative Responses to Music*, (London, 1932), p.123, pp.130-134; On Lee's 'psychological aesthetics' see Phyllis F. Mannocchi, 'Paget, Violet [Vernon Lee] (1856-1935)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford

however, research moved in different directions. While Head's early critics contested his conclusions, none questioned the validity of self-experimentation. Even into the 1920s, some neurologists continued examining sensation as if what was felt set the terms for its own explanation, an explanation best derived by stimulating touch spots ostensibly correlating with specific sensations.¹⁹⁸ Yet in the same years as Head's self-experiment, technological advances in observation and recording apparatus allowed neurologists to begin directly examining the property of nerve impulses and fibres themselves. Sensations could be broken into constituent elements, detaching the object of study—touch—from its method of examination—and from researchers themselves. In the shift from introspection to electrophysiology, touch as an object became, if never distinct from the scientists observing it, no longer overdetermined by their subjectivity.

In the same year as Head published 'The Afferent Nervous System from a New Aspect' (1905), Cambridge physiologist Keith Lucas published a far less-discussed paper on the effect of electrical stimulation on the muscle fibre of a frog. Lucas found that increasing the charge entering the muscle fibre caused the amplitude of muscular contraction to increase in sharp jumps. This suggested, Lucas concluded, that the contraction amplitude increased only when additional fibres were stimulated, and therefore that, once stimulated, individual fibres responded to the maximum extent: their response was 'all-or-none'.¹⁹⁹ For this work, Lucas could only guess about impulse activity from the indirect evidence of muscular contraction. But in 1912 Lucas, also a director of the Cambridge Scientific Instrument Company, turned his attention to the capillary electrometer, a device used for measuring the electrical activity of the heart.

University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2008
(<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35361>, 19 Oct 2016).

¹⁹⁸ Walshe, 'Anatomy and Physiology', p.83.

¹⁹⁹ Alan J. McComas, *Galvani's Spark: The Story of the Nerve Impulse*, (Oxford, 2011), pp.64-65.

The electrometer was a glass tube with a mercury meniscus that moved in response to the voltage passed through it; the amplitude and duration of the response was recorded on a photographic plate. Lucas adapted the capillary electrometer to account for the much smaller and faster impulses of nerve fibres, the effects of which it had been unable to accurately photograph.²⁰⁰ For the first time able to ‘observe’ nerve impulses themselves, Lucas created the mechanical version of Head’s ‘negative attitude of attention’: the photographic capture of the impulse in flight. In 1925 neurologists Edgar Adrian and Yngve Zotterman built on Lucas’ findings, using a triad valve amplifier to amplify impulses in order to prove that what Lucas had surmised for bunches of nerve fibres was also true for individual ones: once an impulse was triggered it travelled at full amplitude, regardless of additional stimulation. There was therefore no qualitative difference in impulses, which had an ‘all-or-none’ relation to their stimuli and varied only in number and frequency.²⁰¹

Adrian and Zotterman’s investigations transformed the relationship between neurologists, instruments, and touch as a method and object of study. In electrophysiology, the object of study—the single nerve fibre carrying impulses subserving touch—continued to shape the terms under which it was examined, just as that examination—the photographic representation of electrical potential—delimited the conditions under which touch emerged as an object.²⁰² Yet no longer, as had been the

²⁰⁰ McComas, *Galvani’s Spark*, pp.69-71; M.J.G. Cattermole, and A.F. Wolfe, *Horace Darwin’s Shop: A History of The Cambridge Scientific Instrument Company, 1878-1968*, (Bristol, 1987), pp.62-63. The Whipple Museum of the History of Science, Cambridge, holds the original instrument (Wh.2723) also described in the Cambridge Scientific Instrument Company’s List No.124, ‘Some Physiological Apparatus’, July 1913, (CSI.150).

²⁰¹ E.D. Adrian, ‘The Activity of the Nerve Fibres: Nobel Lecture, December 12, 1932’, in Nobelstiftelsen, *Nobel Lectures: Physiology or Medicine, 1922-1941*, (Amsterdam: London, 1965 [1932]), p.295; Zotterman, *Touch, Tickle, and Pain*, I, pp.219-221; McComas, *Galvani’s Spark*, pp.102-103.

²⁰² Rheinberger, *Epistemology of the Concrete*, pp.218-220.

case in Head's self-experiment, was touch so closely entangled with the instrument delimiting it that each simply reproduced the other. No longer did the neurologist's experience of touch, and their use of touch in experiments, predetermine the concept of touch they were able to formulate. In Adrian and Zotterman's work, touch consequently assumed a very different role and meaning than in Head's self-experiment. By detaching touch as an object of inquiry from what scientists felt, if not from what they did, electrophysiology established that nerve impulses were qualitatively identical. Consequently, the impulses subserving sensations could not be explained in terms of 'feeling-tone', only in terms of their frequency and route to the brain.²⁰³ By challenging the neurologist as the ground for knowledge, electrophysiology turned attention from the *quality* of impulses subserving touch to the spatial and temporal *arrangement* of those impulses on their route to the brain.

But while throwing it into question, electrophysiology at the same time recaptured some of the crucial tenets—and contradictions—of Head's model of touch. In 1929 physiologists Herbert Gasser and Joseph Erlanger established a direct relation between the conduction rate and diameter of nerve fibres. Gasser and Erlanger showed that thick, rapidly conducting fibres responded best to touch and that thinner fibres of slower conductivity responded best to thermal stimuli.²⁰⁴ In 1939 Zotterman extended this supposition, arguing that even impulses subserving tickling had their own 'specific nerve fibres'.²⁰⁵ Together, these investigations suggested that, although impulses were non-specific, nerve fibres themselves maintained the specificity of a sensation, just as Head had argued for impulses grouped at the spinal cord into their respective touch

²⁰³ Walshe, 'Anatomy and Physiology', p.84.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.90.

²⁰⁵ Zotterman, *Touch, Tickle, and Pain*, II, pp.68-74; Yngve Zotterman, 'Touch, Pain and Tickling: An Electro-Physiological Investigation on Cutaneous Sensory Nerves', *Journal of Physiology*, 95/1, (February 1939), pp.26-27.

modalities.²⁰⁶ Yet parallel research told a different story. In 1929 psychologist John Nafe published his ‘quantitative theory of feeling’. Directly challenging suggestions that qualitatively distinct impulses or fibres maintained the specificity of a sensation, Nafe argued that this function was performed by the temporal and spatial *pattern* of impulses subserving touch.²⁰⁷ Through focusing on variations in the frequency of impulses and their distribution across fibres, Nafe’s theory suggested, an infinite variety of sensations could be accounted for without the need for corresponding anatomical variation.²⁰⁸ Later histology seemed to confirm the conjecture, revealing that touch ‘spots’ were in fact clusters of nerve endings which produced patterns of impulses convening on a single nerve fibre.²⁰⁹ If research after 1920 seemed to confirm Head’s speculation that impulses combined to follow specific anatomical pathways, then it also corresponded with his other, apparently contradictory, claim that they competed with and inhibited other impulses travelling parallel paths, in turn undergoing dramatic modification *en route* to the brain.

While Head’s research was increasingly discounted, it established new ways of thinking about touch arising from this contradiction. By the 1940s, neurologists no longer conceived touch as a pre-given map to be plotted onto the skin but a process to be caught in motion, a process with a newfound spatial and temporal dimensionality.

²⁰⁶ Walshe, ‘Anatomy and Physiology’, pp.90-91.

²⁰⁷ John Paul Nafe, ‘A Quantitative Theory of Feeling’, *Journal of General Psychology*, 2, (1 January 1929), pp.199-211.

²⁰⁸ D.C. Sinclair, ‘Cutaneous Sensation and the Doctrine of Specific Energy’, *Brain*, 78/4, (1 December 1955), p.609. Edgar Adrian and Charles Sherrington later extended this focus on patterns in their explanations of the physiological basis of sensation in the brain. E.D. Adrian, *The Physical Background of Perception*, (Oxford, 1947), p.81 and *Sensory Integration*, (Liverpool, 1949), pp.15-16; Charles Sherrington, *Man on his Nature*, (Cambridge, 1940), pp.223-225.

²⁰⁹ G. Weddell, ‘The Anatomy of Cutaneous Sensibility’, *British Medical Bulletin*, 3/7-8, (1945), p.171; G. Weddell, D.C. Sinclair, and W.H. Feindel, ‘The Significance of Multiple Innervation of Cutaneous Pain “Spots” in Relation to the Quality of Pain Sensibility’, *Nature*, 160/4053, (1947), pp.27-28.

Touch not only dotted the body's surface but inhered within a configuration of impulses and fibres beneath it, whether at successive physiological levels or through star-like patterns briefly illuminating a web of fibres: 'skin sensation,' wrote physiologist George Bishop in 1946, 'is more than skin-deep.'²¹⁰ Touch was also functionally dependent on transformations of different temporalities, whether the deep-time of phylogenetic evolution or the duration of a change in the electrical potential of a single nerve fibre. If touch was recast in spatial and temporal terms then this also, Head argued in 1919, recast understandings of how humans *perceived* space and time themselves.²¹¹ The series of photographs Ernest Wilson took of Head's recovering hand and the photographs Lucas took with the capillary electrometer not only made visible the newly conceived dimensionality of touch but also the tactile basis *of* space and time.

Yet most significantly, Head's research revealed the always-entangled relation between the concept, practice, and experience of touch as it played across his reading, relationship, and research. Head's understanding of touch emerged *in* and *through* the instruments on Rivers' worktable, Pater's 'sensuous' sentences, and the feel of Mayhew's hand on a rainy Sunday afternoon, an entanglement Head himself consciously explored. While this relationship shifted in the new field of electrophysiology, it remained true that touch—in all its aspects—inhered in the ever-evolving *use* of the body within and beyond the laboratory. Head's research not only invested in touch a radical new spatial and temporal contingency; it showed the concept

²¹⁰ George Holman Bishop, 'Neural Mechanisms of Cutaneous Sense', *Physiological Reviews*, 26/1, (January, 1946), p.78.

²¹¹ Henry Head, 'The Physiological Basis of the Spatial and Temporal Aspects of Sensation', in A.N. Whitehead, Oliver Lodge, J.W. Nicholson, Henry Head, Adrian Stephen, H. Wildon Carr, 'Symposium: Time, Space, and Material: Are they, and if so in what Sense, the Ultimate Data of Science?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes, II: Problems of Science and Philosophy*, (1919), pp.77-86.

of touch itself emerging in a multitude of everyday gestures and spaces, compelling us to look far beyond the wards of the London Hospital or the rooms of Oxbridge colleges.

Chapter Two

Educating the Senses:

Learning to See in Schools for the Blind

1 September 1873: shooting season. On a farm near Sandsend, a tiny fishing village where the North Yorkshire Moors meet the North Sea, 28-year-old Alfred Hirst waded through a field of barley, gun cocked. On hearing a scurry of partridges he raised his gun, closed his left eye, and waited. But instead of seeing the usual flurry of feathers he could barely make out the partridges against the sky. After an unsuccessful trip to an optician in Whitby, Hirst was informed by a London ophthalmologist that he had ‘amaurosis, or atrophy of the optic nerve.’ By Christmas Day 1874 the disease had spread to his left eye, and he found himself ‘practically blind.’¹ Yet despite this setback, Hirst launched himself into his business affairs with even more energy. A partner in a Huddersfield wool-stapler’s firm, on 2 September 1881 Hirst boarded an Orient Line steamer to Melbourne, Australia, to purchase wool for the company direct from source.² Far from hindering his business, blindness, it seemed, made wool-buying considerably easier. ‘So thoroughly did I maintain, and even more improve my ability to judge the various classes of Colonial wool,’ Hirst wrote, that when in Melbourne he ‘bought no fewer than 10,000 bales, with results that gained for me some kudos in the Melbourne papers, and, what was of far more

¹ Alfred Hirst, *My Dark World*, (London, 1898), pp.3-5.

² ‘English Shipping’, *The Age*, 18 October 1881, p.1 (supplement); ‘Shipping and Commerce’, *Leader*, 7 January 1882, p.22; ‘Mr Alfred Hirst’, *The Times*, 30 August 1913, p.9.

importance, the cordial praise of my partners.’ All of this Hirst accomplished independently, depending only on his secretary and heightened sense of touch.³

Hirst published this story in *The Sunday Magazine* on 19 April 1897, and it was widely reported in the Australian press before the British and Foreign Blind Association reprinted it as a pamphlet a year later.⁴ For the BFBA, Hirst’s story provided an instructive message to sighted and blind readers that blind people could overcome any obstacle presented by blindness, even though the Association undercut this, in an appeal to contemporary stereotypes, by entitling the pamphlet *My Dark World*. Prefacing the pamphlet was a photographic portrait of Hirst (Fig.5). It is difficult to know what to make of this photograph. On the one hand, it was an effort by Hirst, as the article was, to ‘recover’ a body whose narrative had been taken from him by an ophthalmologist and by his own inability to see who he was.⁵ On the other, it was doubly disempowering, Hirst unable even in his pose to return the gaze of photographer or spectator, his hands awkwardly half-shoved into too-tight pockets. Was it the case that Hirst derived agency from a photograph that depended still on his agreement to pose, even if it reproduced the sensory inequality that he aimed to contest?⁶ Or are we as viewers enjoined to perform what theorist Ariella Azoulay calls a kind of ‘civic’ looking that returns to Hirst the citizenship of which he was photographically dispossessed?⁷ What did the photograph do

³ Hirst, *My Dark World*, p.5.

⁴ See for example ‘About the Blind’, *The Advertiser*, 26 October 1898, n.p. Hirst remained a folk legend in the Australian press until at least his death in October 1913: ‘The Early Days of the Sydney Wool Trade’, *The Sydney Wool and Stock Journal*, 21 August 1908, pp.6-7; ‘Colonial Wool Trade’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 October 1913, p.9.

⁵ G. Thomas Couser, *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life-Writing*, (Madison, 1997), p.10; Seth Koven, *The Match Girl and the Heiress*, (Princeton, 2014), c.4.

⁶ On photography as a ‘contract’ requiring its subject’s agreement at some level, see Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, (New York, 2008), c.2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.14.



Fig.5 Alfred Hirst, in *My Dark World*, (London, 1898), facing p.1

for the body that could never acknowledge it but that had apparently more than compensated for this impossibility?

These are thorny questions. But they highlight for us the entangled relation between touch, vision, and citizenship in both the representation of blind people and blind people's relation *to* visual representations as these evolved from the late nineteenth century.⁸ The portrait of Hirst suggests a distribution of power that, if never controlled by any participant, nonetheless remained highly unequal.⁹ Yet by Hirst's own account this sensory and civil inequality was compensated by a sense of touch that allowed him to contest it both in print and business. Through noting the admiration his successful ventures in the Australian wool market earned him from business partners, Hirst showed the potential for touch to compensate for blindness and guarantee his continued value as an economically productive citizen. This he demonstrated also through typing the article himself, which became material proof of the potential for touch to keep blind people participants in public debate. Emphasising the potential for touch to stand in the place of vision retained the place of blind people themselves within the civil sphere. For this reason, Hirst noted the ease with which he learned Braille—being able to read and write it within three days—and his proficiency at typing, in which he argued all blind children

⁸ Throughout this chapter I use the term 'blind'. This is because although it overlooks the considerable differences between those who were congenitally visually impaired and those who developed an impairment later in life, and ignores variation in visual acuity even among those legally categorized as blind, it highlights the political implications of the homogenization of a diverse group of people as 'the blind'. Using this term also highlights its pervasive usage throughout the twentieth century as both a physical and metaphorical impairment, where each implied the other. For contemporary medical and legal definitions of blindness see Mark Paterson, *Seeing with the Hands: Blindness, Vision, and Touch after Descartes*, (Edinburgh, 2016), pp.12-15.

⁹ On the intrinsic 'plurality' of relations opened up by a photograph, see Azoulay, *Civil Contract of Photography*, c.2.

should become ‘expert’.¹⁰ Indeed, Hirst introduced Braille to Australia during his visit in 1881, and produced his own pamphlet outlining *Types for the Blind* in 1894.¹¹

Examining the degree to which touch was believed to substitute for vision in blindness therefore also reveals changing assumptions about sensation as a basis of citizenship. From the 1890s, when the education of blind children for the first time came under the purview of the state, touch in blindness became a means through which to enact and contest the boundaries of a citizenship that was increasingly understood in bodily terms. As the understanding of citizenship became increasingly bound up with a growing culture of bodily improvement and, after the Great War, the rehabilitation of disabled soldiers, the question of tactile substitution in blindness became increasingly linked to determining those who did and did not count as citizens.¹² Through the increasing legal and medical definition of blindness and its reification as a domain of expertise, the perceived relation between the senses came to express and shape the perceived relation between the individual and social body and hence the shifting boundaries of citizenship.¹³ As *My Dark World* already made clear, touch in blindness increasingly became a

¹⁰ Hirst, *My Dark World*, p.6, p.14.

¹¹ H. J. Wagg, *A Chronological Survey of Work for the Blind: From the Earliest Records up to the Year 1930*, (London, 1932), p.58; Alfred Hirst, *Types for the Blind*, (London, 1894).

¹² On the emerging culture of bodily improvement, see Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain, 1880-1939*, (Oxford, 2010). On rehabilitation, see Julie Anderson, *War, Disability, and Rehabilitation in Britain: “Soul of a Nation”*, (Manchester: New York, 2011); Seth Koven, ‘Remembering and Dismemberment: Crippled Children, Wounded Soldiers, and the Great War in Britain’, *American Historical Review*, 99/4, (October 1994), pp.1167-1202; Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939*, (Berkeley: London, 2001).

¹³ The same was true for representations of the body in understandings of pornography and homosexuality in post-war France: Carolyn Dean, *The Frail Social Body: Pornography, Homosexuality, and Other Fantasies in Interwar France*, (Berkeley: London, 2000), p.4.

formulation for who was and was not ‘perceptible’ as citizens, and it was through this formulation that blind people themselves staked a claim to equal citizenship.¹⁴

Central to this was what it meant for touch to stand in the place of vision. While Hirst was convinced that his remaining senses improved to compensate for blindness he was vague about how this happened. Was compensation, for example, a physiological or a psychological adjustment? As we saw in the previous chapter, this question was itself dependent on a shifting production of a division between mind and body. In the 1910s Henry Head argued that the increasing refinement of touch over the course of evolution resulted from the diversification and multiplication of cutaneous touch end-organs. By 1942 this argument had been discounted in favour of one attributing improvements in the sense of touch to the increasing ‘differentiation and integration of function’ in the brain.¹⁵ If the relation ‘between’ mind and body remained unresolved, we can detect an echo of this shift in the developing belief over the 1920s and 1930s that tactile compensation in blindness was a psychological rather than a physical matter.

Besides debating how tactile compensation happened, teachers, journalists, and blind commentators disputed even what it was. By increasing in acuity to compensate for the absence of vision, did touch merely add to those senses which remained? Or did it stand in the place of vision, displacing its absence? And if touch stood in for vision, did it erase or, precisely through taking its place, mark even more sharply the difference between the two? These questions especially underpinned interwar discussions about methods for teaching blind children, but they also had a wider political importance.

¹⁴ Here and throughout I make this argument with reference to Jacques Rancière’s understanding of the ‘distribution of the sensible’: Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. and ed. Gabriel Rockhill, (London, 2004), pp.7-8, p.89; Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation*, (Durham, NC, 2009), pp.2-3, pp.6-7.

¹⁵ F.M.R. Walshe, ‘The Anatomy and Physiology of Cutaneous Sensibility: A Critical Review’, *Brain*, 65/1, (1942), p.50.

Through debates about how blind peoples' touch 'supplemented' the absence of vision, both displacing and highlighting that absence even more, blind people themselves became supplements to a definition of (sighted) citizenship, included within it only to be excluded from it.¹⁶

This was the language in which *My Dark World* made its case for equal citizenship. Describing his journey to Australia in October 1881, Hirst noted how his sense of smell had become 'much more sensitive since I lost that of sight,' enabling him even to detect the presence of nearby gum trees as he passed them during a stop-off in Cape Colony.¹⁷ Yet by the 1960s an alternative discourse had emerged which, if not discarding the language of sensory compensation, understood blindness not as an impairment to overcome but as a disability constituted by societal attitudes *towards* impairment. In the following decades, this belief became the founding tenet of the first wave of disability activism.¹⁸ No longer, as had been true in the language of compensation, was the role of touch to enable blind and sighted people to become 'blind' to visual impairment. In this new discourse, evident in several BBC programmes broadcast in 1967 and 1968, the disability of blindness was blindness *to* the societal

¹⁶ My understanding of 'supplementary' draws on Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore, 1976), pp.144-145, p.154, p.314.

¹⁷ Hirst, *My Dark World*, p.10.

¹⁸ The new understanding of disability became known as the 'social' model, and defined itself against what it saw as an earlier 'medical' model. For overviews, see Rod Michalko, *The Difference that Disability Makes*, (Philadelphia, 2002), pp.50-60; Colin Barnes, 'Understanding the Social Model of Disability', in Nick Watson, Alan Roulstone, and Carol Thomas (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*, (London: New York, 2012), pp.12-29; Paul K. Longmore, *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability*, (Philadelphia, 2003), pp.1-11. For calls for a more historical attitude to disability, and the value of disability as a critical tool, see Beth Linker, 'On the Borderland of Medical and Disability History: A Survey of the Fields', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 87/4, (Winter 2013), pp.499-535; Koven, 'Remembering and Dismemberment'; Catherine J. Kudlick, 'Disability History: Why We Need Another "Other"', *American Historical Review*, (June 2003), pp.763-793. I am grateful to Hilary Buxton and Kate Imy for their expertise in this area.

construction of impairment *as* disability. Impairment in blindness; blindness to impairment, or to its social constitution as disability: over the first half of the twentieth century, the understanding of touch in blindness interacted with the perceptibility of blind people as citizens, or to themselves as political subjects. By the 1960s, disability activists reconceived citizenship from a question of sensory equality to one of the political constitution of sensory difference. In turn, touch itself was reconceived from a personal compensation to a political effect.

Blind Masseurs and Tactile Acuity

In its 1901 prospectus, the London Institute for Massage by the Blind confidently justified its existence through calling attention to a common assumption. ‘It has been proved that the Blind can become expert in the practice of massage, and that when properly trained they attain a high standard of skill. In Japan, massage is commonly the work of the Blind.’¹⁹ Institute promotional literature and medical journals repeated the claim over the next decade, often assuming it self-evident enough to not require elaborating, besides passing reference to the long history of blind massage in Japan.²⁰ When explanation was given, periodicals and medical professionals commonly resorted to another apparent truth: that a blind person’s sense of touch was ‘more finely developed than that of normal persons.’²¹ Praising the excellent work done by blind masseurs during the Great War, the

¹⁹ London Institute for Massage by the Blind prospectus, 1901, RNIB, P/2/2/C, Box 3, p.1.

²⁰ London Institute for Massage by the Blind minute book, RNIB, RS/10/7/B, 27 January 1902; ‘Massage by the Blind’, *The British Journal of Nursing*, 29, (1902), p.526; ‘Teaching the Blind and Deaf in Japan’, *Quiver*, January 1901, pp.701-704; ‘An Ancient Profession’, *The Review of Reviews*, 49/292, (April 1914), p.311; ‘Massage by Blind Soldiers’, *The Times*, 2 November 1920, p.117.

²¹ ‘New Profession for the Sightless’, *London Journal*, 12/296, (23 December 1911), p.203.

superintendent of Alder Hey Military Orthopaedic Hospital claimed it ‘a well-known fact that when one of the senses is diminished in usefulness, by the law of compensation the remaining senses develop greater acuity. [...] It is remarkable how quickly the blinded masseur exhibits the value of his improved sense of touch, and I have personally seen many outstanding examples of this particular capacity.’²²

The assumption that blindness resulted in a compensatory increase in the acuity of touch was the Institute’s key tenet, and its minute books offer glimpses into attempts to justify the claim over its history. Founded at 64 Lancaster Gate, Bayswater, in 1900, the Institute was the first institution dedicated solely to training blind students in massage, although the more established London School of Massage also opened its doors to blind students in the same year.²³ The course was a broad one covering massage, Nauheim and Swedish Remedial Exercises, and the electrical therapy popularized by American neurologist Silas Weir Mitchell. Students were given several months training to enable them to secure a hospital post or set up their own practice, and the Institute solicited employment for those working on a free-lance basis.²⁴ By 1910, the Institute (since 1908 National Institute: NIMB) had fifty-five masseuses and twenty-seven masseurs on its books, the lucky ones having gained appointments at St Thomas’s Hospital, the London Hospital or a Military Academy.²⁵ So high was the demand for treatment at the Woolwich Military Academy that one masseur treated over two hundred patients over eleven months

²² W.H. Broad, ‘The Blinded Soldier as a Masseur’, *The Beacon*, 4/37, (January 1920), p.11.

²³ Henshaw’s Blind Asylum in Manchester began training blind masseurs in 1895 but this was only one element of its vocational training. J. Barclay, *In Good Hands: The History of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, 1894-1994*, (Oxford, 1994), pp.44-45; Wagg, *Chronological Survey*, p.83.

²⁴ National Institute of Massage by the Blind minute book, RNIB, RS/10/7/B, 31 March 1914.

²⁵ London Institute of Massage by the Blind minute book, RNIB, RS/10/7/B, loose insert: Balance Sheet and Report (1910), p.1.

and decided to resign his position at St Thomas's.²⁶ Both an institutional record and a catalogue of evidence for promotional material, the NIMB's minutes recorded instances where patients agreed that their blind practitioners were expert at massage. Writing to the Institute in 1912, General Bainbridge found the 'manipulation & touch' of his masseur 'as near perfection as possibly could be.'²⁷

But if the NIMB assumed a blind person's acuter sense of touch, and their proficiency at massage, self-evident, this did not go uncontested. Opposition to blind massage over the 1910s suggests that truth-claims about the potential for touch to compensate for blindness were themselves a product of institutional conflict within the emerging field of physiotherapy. As physiotherapy sought to distance itself from earlier scandals, disagreements over the gendered constituency of its professionals and patients translated into conflicts over the compensatory power of touch in blindness; over the degree to which a blind person could be considered 'disabled'.

The causes of these disagreements emerged before the existence of the NIMB. In July 1894, the *British Medical Journal* revealed that masseuses across London were using private massage practices as fronts for offering sexual services to clients and a week later Home Secretary Herbert Asquith and Scotland Yard launched an investigation into the claims, their inconclusive reports further galling the *BMJ* into publishing another series of exposés in November. In response, four masseuses ventured to improve the professional standing of massage through the establishment of the Society of Trained Masseuses (later the ISTM) in December 1894.²⁸ At the preliminary meeting, held at the Midwives' Institute, a set of rules for good practice were listed in the temporary minute

²⁶ National Institute of Massage by the Blind minute book, RNIB, RS/10/7/B, 30 July 1912.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 26 November 1912.

²⁸ Barclay, *In Good Hands*, pp.20-22.

book, rules that all trainees of the Society had to abide by if they were to become certificated. Massage was only to be given under ‘medical direction’, advertised in ‘strictly professional papers’, and refused to men unless specially prescribed by a doctor.²⁹

The professional standing of massage gradually improved from the late 1890s. In part this was due to the Society’s careful regulation of members’ professional conduct but it was also a result of the instrumental role massage played in the treatment of amputees and shell-shock sufferers during the Great War.³⁰ No longer was massage primarily a treatment for female victims of neurasthenia, as it had been in the 1880s, but an integral part of rehabilitating the broken bodies of Britain’s soldiers.³¹ Society membership more than tripled to 3,641 in the war years alone.³² Despite these advances, though, the Press continued to publish allegations of improper conduct at private massage practices throughout first three decades of the Society’s existence. A year after the Society’s founding, an undercover officer monitoring No. 4 Rupert Street, Soho, reported seeing masseuses dubiously ‘dressed in long tea gowns with the front open displaying lace underlinen and old gold stockings.’³³ In April 1897, the Social Purity Department of the National British Women’s Temperance Association again drew police attention to apparent improper conduct in London’s massage trade, noting a *Figaro* article that described masseuses at one establishment wearing ‘uniform[s]’ of a ‘chemise-like loose-fitting dress of the most diaphanous silk’; a sure sign, it seemed, that their primary role

²⁹ Incorporated Society of Trained Masseuses Council minutes, WL, SA/CSP/B.1/1/1, p.1.

³⁰ See for example the minor infringement by one member who advertised in a railway timetable and was subsequently struck off the roll of members and blacklisted by the Society in five medical journals in March 1899. Barclay, *In Good Hands*, p.30.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.14-16.

³² *Ibid.*, p.50.

³³ Metropolitan Police Report, TNA, MEPO 2/460, 18 October 1895, pp.1-2.

was not therapeutic massage.³⁴ Undercover police filed reports of a similar nature over the succeeding years and suspicions were raised once again by a front cover *John Bull* exposé on 24 April 1920.³⁵

Embattled into the 1920s, the ISTM was consequently reluctant to accept any claims for the special proficiency of blind people at massage, especially if this gave the latter a competitive edge. In part this reluctance was because the NIMB enabled the entry of men into a profession that the ISTM had attempted to restrict to women; although the Society began training masseurs of the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1905 it only welcomed male members from 1918.³⁶ But it was also likely due to the ISTM's desire to maintain control over the system of massage certification, especially for masseuses, that was crucial to establishing the credibility of professional physiotherapy.³⁷ W. H. Illingworth, Superintendent of Henshaw's Blind Asylum in Manchester, was aware of the threat unregulated massage posed to physiotherapy in general, as well as perhaps that posed by a parallel system of certification to the ISTM in particular. His *History of the Education of the Blind* (1910), part-history, part-encyclopaedia on all matters relating to the education of blind people, noted that there was 'no better or lucrative form of employment' than massage to blind people 'of good tact'—in both senses of the word. He warned, though, that '[g]reat care should be taken [...] that a certificate of efficiency

³⁴ Letter from the Social Purity Department of the National British Women's Temperance Association, 30 April 1897, and enclosed article of *The London Figaro*, 22 April 1897, TNA, MEPO 2/460, both p.1.

³⁵ 'Massage Houses Unmasked', *John Bull*, 24 April 1920, TNA, HO 45/17371, p.6. The London County Council responded with by-laws in 1915 and 1920 attempting to tighten regulation of massage establishments.

³⁶ Barclay, *In Good Hands*, pp.44-45, p.52.

³⁷ See for example the strict expectations for the 'costume' of masseuses outlined in the ISTM's training manual: M. Pireau, *Massage Manual: Intended for the Use of Students for the I.S.T.M. Examination*, (London, 1912), pp.2-3.

in this art is never granted without a most searching examination as to qualifications and character.’³⁸

Anxiety over the propriety of some blind masseuses, or over the rigour of the NIMB’s examination standards, came to a head in May 1912 when several blind masseuses staged a ‘Sale of Work’ at an Albert Hall exhibition of women’s work organised by the Society for Promoting Female Welfare. This was despite the best efforts of the ISTM, which had called at the Society’s offices the week before in order, the NIMB minutes resentfully record, ‘to poison their minds against us’. Although the ISTM failed to prevent the demonstration going ahead it managed to intimidate one masseuse into declining attendance by using the same ‘falsehoods’, provoking the NIMB to write to the ISTM to protest that ‘such slanders must not be propagated against us’.³⁹ Precisely what these ‘falsehoods’ were remains uncertain, as there is no record of the incident in the minutes of the ISTM; we do not know what accusations were levelled against the blind masseuses, but it is intriguing enough that they were kept off the books.⁴⁰ Perhaps wishing to avoid a repeated confrontation the following year, the Society for Promoting Female Welfare suggested to the NIMB, under the pretext of lack of space, that it only exhibit a stall this time rather than provide demonstrations.⁴¹

Relations between the two institutes remained sensitive throughout the 1910s. The ISTM had in fact received an invitation in 1910 from the British and Foreign Blind Association, forerunner of the National Institute for the Blind, to train blind candidates but despite asserting that it was ‘most interested’ nothing was done, the Albert Hall

³⁸ W. H. Illingworth, *History of the Education of the Blind*, (London, 1910), p.53.

³⁹ National Institute for Massage by the Blind minute book, RNIB, RS/10/7/B, 28 May 1912.

⁴⁰ Incorporated Society of Trained Masseuses Council minutes, WL, SA/CSP/B.1/1/1/8-15.

⁴¹ National Institute for Massage by the Blind minute book, RNIB, RS/10/7/B, 28 January 1913.

contretemps suggesting that the ISTM was less than interested.⁴² Only in 1915, when the National Institute for the Blind absorbed the NIMB, did the ISTM begin training and examining blind candidates and then principally because it was unable to refuse the rehabilitation of war casualties, or so the director of the NIB's massage institute thought.⁴³ This mounting public concern for those disabled in the War was especially clear in the case of the blind, St Dunstan's Hostel for Blind Soldiers and Sailors growing rapidly with the aid of public subscriptions since opening in 1915.⁴⁴ As the War progressed, the question of whether touch increased in acuity to compensate for blindness became less an effect of institutional conflict – the ISTM's position becoming increasingly assured over the War – and more one of the changing politics of care for the blind. As it became increasingly politically imperative to provide for, or at least show provision for, blinded ex-servicemen, it equally became impossible to deny the potential substitutional powers of touch of those trained in massage.⁴⁵ This was especially the case after the establishment in 1919 of the Association of Certificated Blind Masseurs under the auspices of the NIB and St Dunstan's and presidency of Arthur Pearson, founder of the *Daily Express*.⁴⁶

Yet even with this change the ISTM resisted claims about the self-evidence of blind people's tactile abilities. It remained sceptical about the ability of blind candidates in its programme to perform tasks as well as their sighted counterparts, notably in Swedish Remedial Exercises, a series of stretching and flexing exercises designed to test a patient's movement. Two blind candidates acted as test cases for suitability in these exercises and

⁴² Incorporated Society of Trained Masseuses Council minutes, WL, SA/CSP/B.1/1/8, 8 July 1910.

⁴³ [Percy Way], 'Physiotherapy by the Blind: A Short Account of the Early History of the Movement', RNIB 4/10/47, pp.2-3; Wagg, *Chronological Survey*, p.125.

⁴⁴ Cohen, *The War Come Home*, p.32.

⁴⁵ On the changing politics of care of disabled ex-servicemen, see Koven, 'Remembering and Dismemberment', pp.1182-1184; Cohen, *The War Come Home*, pp.29-37.

⁴⁶ Wagg, *Chronological Survey*, p.138.

despite passing the examination in 1917, ‘all Drs present considered that there must be limitations to the work that the blind undertake’ and the suitability of Swedish Exercises remained under question.⁴⁷ Shortly after obtaining his certificate one of the candidates, Percy Way, gave a demonstration at King’s College Hospital but this elicited further criticism from the doctors present, which was forwarded to the Advisory Committee of the ISTM.⁴⁸ Again in 1919 doubts were raised over the ability of blind candidates to perform Swedish Exercises effectively as it was argued they were unable to see whether they were moving a patient’s limbs correctly.⁴⁹ Only in 1919, when the ISTM had to win support from the NIB in its bid for a royal charter, was it compelled by the latter to adopt a more generous attitude towards its blind candidates through forming an advisory standing committee composed partly of blind masseurs.⁵⁰ Even as it became increasingly impossible to contest the abilities of blind masseurs, institutional development within physiotherapy continued to shape the terms under which touch was believed to compensate for blindness.

Just as Henry Head’s belief in the superiority of his tactile discrimination over that of his London Hospital patients reproduced his class distinction, so understandings of tactile substitution in blindness were a language through which the wider growth-pains in physiotherapy were enacted. The ISTM’s questioning of the degree to which touch compensated for blindness reflected concerns both over the entrance of men into the profession and over its authority to certify candidates. Yet at the same time, it likely reflected anxiety over the effect a public discourse about tactile compensation for

⁴⁷ Incorporated Society of Trained Masseuses Council minutes, WL, SA/CSP/B.1/1/12, 27 July 1917.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 23 November 1917.

⁴⁹ Incorporated Society of Trained Masseuses Council minutes, WL, SA/CSP/B.1/1/14, 11 July 1919.

⁵⁰ ‘Physiotherapy by the Blind’, pp.3-4.

blindness had on the Society's competitiveness. In June 1926, *The Spectator* drew attention to the case of Percy Way, director of the NIB's massage institute, who – apparently despite the ISTM's concerns – topped the examination results of all blind and sighted candidates for 1916.⁵¹ When the NIB opened a new physiotherapy clinic in 1934, *The Times* again highlighted the unique proficiency of blind physiotherapists, claiming that '[b]lindness has developed their sense of touch to an abnormal degree'; blind people massaged 'not only as efficiently as the sighted but with a special skill born of their very affliction.'⁵² Claims such as these were common since the opening of the NIMB in 1900 and challenged the position the ISTM had established for itself in the face of ongoing scandals surrounding massage. In consequence, the question of the physical compensation of one sense for another in blindness became entangled with the wider question of the place that newcomers were to be allowed within the expanding constituency of physiotherapy – as well as the place that blinded ex-servicemen were to take within a reconstructed nation. The question of touch in blindness became the language through which to articulate these wider concerns; the hypothetical question of tactile substitution 'stood in' for wider concerns about the integrity of physiotherapy – in both senses of the word – and of the national body it was tasked with healing.⁵³

Active Touch and the School Desk

For all their promotion in the Press, however, claims about the 'natural' physical compensation of touch for blindness were not the only ones circulating. Alongside these

⁵¹ 'The National Institute for the Blind: Some Aspects of its Work', *The Spectator*, 26 June 1926, p.1101.

⁵² 'Massage by the Blind', *The Times*, 23 June 1934, p.9.

⁵³ Paterson, *Seeing with the Hands*, p.9.

claims existed a parallel and increasingly influential discourse about tactile substitution as a psychological compensation and, as a matter of mental application as much as physical functioning, therefore something that could be cultivated. In part this discourse derived from the growing emphasis in mainstream education on the health of schoolchildren, shaped by their meals, physical education, and built environment, as the basis for ‘national efficiency’.⁵⁴ But it was also a product of a growing legal, medical, and institutional reification of blindness that made blind children supplementary to citizenship – both included within and excluded from it – precisely through the way their touch was characterised as supplementary to vision.

The first schools for blind children opened long before the twentieth century; Liverpool (1791) Edinburgh (1793) and Southwark (1799) all provided specialist training for blind children before the NIMB was established. But only after the 1870 Education Act, which allowed school boards to include blind children in mainstream elementary schools, did blind children come within the purview of the state. In 1879 the London School Board opened a day school offering classes for blind children but the trend by 1890s was typically towards the expansion of voluntary specialist schools which, with grants from the newly established Gardener’s Trust for the blind, were able to offer better provision for students seeking post-schooling employment.⁵⁵ The vitality of specialist schools and the voluntary nature of board-funded provision resulted in an ambiguous situation where school boards remained uncertain over their responsibility to provide elementary education for blind children, an uncertainty targeted by the 1886 Royal

⁵⁴ Tom Hulme, “‘A Nation Depends on Its Children’: School Buildings and Citizenship in England and Wales, 1900-1939’, *Journal of British Studies*, 54, (April 2015), pp.406-432; James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History*, (Cambridge, MA: London, 2007), pp.161-164.

⁵⁵ The College of Teachers of the Blind, *The Education of the Blind: A Survey*, (London, 1936), pp.1-3; G. Phillips, *The Blind in British Society: Charity, State and Community, c.1780-1930*, (Aldershot, 2004), pp.200-208, p.214.

Commission on blind welfare. The Commission recommended that school be made compulsory for blind children between the ages of five and sixteen and that it be half funded by school boards, half by parents, with boards making up the deficit for parents unable to pay. The Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act carried these recommendations into law in 1890 in Scotland and 1893 in England and Wales and although the Commission had advised mainstream schooling for at least part of the blind child's education, most boards preferred to fund existing specialist schools.⁵⁶

These educational reforms had a two-fold effect. As was also the case for 'defective children' covered by a similar Act in 1899, an emerging system of mandatory elementary education increased the need to determine the ways in which the different educational requirements of children could be categorized and provided for.⁵⁷ Thomas Armitage's *The Education and Employment of the Blind*, released a year after the 1870 Education Act and re-issued in the same year as the 1886 Royal Commission, especially sought to shape this conversation.⁵⁸ At the same time as incorporating blind children within the state education system, though, these reforms paradoxically sharpened their differentiation from sighted children through assuming their *a priori* difference. As Koven has noted for later legislation covering 'defective' children, the 1893 Education Act always already assumed the difference and necessary segregation of blind children by defining them as those 'too blind to read the ordinary school books used by children'; as those unable to benefit from the education given sighted children.⁵⁹ This paradoxical exclusion through inclusion within a state education system both underpinned and was

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.244-251.

⁵⁷ Koven, 'Remembering and Dismemberment', p.1173.

⁵⁸ Thomas Armitage, *The Education and Employment of the Blind: What it Has Been, Is, and Ought to Be*, (London, 1871).

⁵⁹ Koven, 'Remembering and Dismemberment', p.1176; Phillips, *The Blind in British Society*, pp.392-393; Wagg, *Chronological Survey*, p.71.

informed by the understanding of tactile substitution in blindness that would develop into the interwar.

Once they began receiving state grants in 1890, schools for the blind were required to provide the same minimum standard of education as all elementary schools, monitored by the Board of Education's inspectorate.⁶⁰ Although the beginning of state inspections of schools for the blind was intended to standardize the provision of elementary education, increasingly its effect was to demarcate the education of blind children as a distinct object of knowledge. In part this was a result of the terms of the 1890 and 1893 Education Acts, which inscribed the different education required by the blind within their provisions by granting special capitation grants for the technical training of children in craft skills. Schools for the blind received £3 3s. per year for each child meeting requirements in elementary subjects and an additional £2 2s. per child showing 'efficiency in manual work', likely the traditional handicrafts taught blind children like basket-weaving and chair-caning.⁶¹ In part, though, this differentiation of education for blind children emerged from within voluntary organisations themselves, which increasingly emphasized their specialist expertise in educational provision. In July 1907, the British and Foreign Blind Association established the College of Teachers of the Blind in order to train and certify teachers in schools for the blind. Through lectures, a library, examinations, and its own journal, *Teacher of the Blind*, the College aimed at establishing the position of teachers in schools for the blind as, its foundation charter stated, 'specialists in the work of education'.⁶² From the opening of the College, both the knowledge obtainable by blind

⁶⁰ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Education of the Blind*, pp.4-5.

⁶¹ Illingworth, *History of the Education of the Blind*, pp.121-122. For an account of a large workshop employing up to one hundred blind workers in Tottenham Court Road, London, in around 1900, see R. Austin Freeman, 'Afflicted London', in George R. Sims (ed.), *Living London: Its Work and Its Play, Its Humour and Its Pathos, Its Sights and Its Scenes*, (3 vols, London, 1901-1903), III, pp.28-31.

⁶² Illingworth, *History of the Education of the Blind*, pp.149-150.

children and the knowledge of *teaching* them were to be regarded as special domains requiring institutional segregation.

Most significant to this process of differentiation, though, was the requirement, under the 1907 Education (Administrative Provisions) Act, that every elementary schoolchild should be subject to periodic medical inspection.⁶³ As Zweiniger-Bargielowska notes, this marked a change from the general regulation of the school environment to the individuation of each schoolchild, with their own health record, as the object of medical knowledge.⁶⁴ School Medical Service inspectors examined children three times over their elementary schooling, and would often test for visual impairment during the first test, when children were aged five or six.⁶⁵ The Ministry of Health further sharpened the medical definition of blindness when in 1926 it informally adopted the Snellen test, the now familiar chart of different sized letters.⁶⁶ Although applied across the whole elementary system, medical inspections widened the distinction between blind and sighted children by turning blindness into a discrete condition to be diagnosed, especially as inspections in schools for the blind were placed almost entirely in the hands of one inspector, Alfred Eichholz.⁶⁷

The medicalization of blindness, and of supplementary touch within it, incorporated blind children within a wider discourse of preventative medicine gaining

⁶³ John Welshman, 'Physical Education and the School Medical Service in England and Wales, 1907-1939', *Social History of Medicine*, 9/1, (1996), pp.31-48.

⁶⁴ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body*, p.85.

⁶⁵ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Education of the Blind*, p.20.

⁶⁶ Phillips, *The Blind in British Society*, pp.395-396.

⁶⁷ See Ian Hacking, 'Making Up People', in Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology*, (Cambridge, MA: London, 2002), p.100, pp.105-106. Eichholz was appointed the Board of Education's first Chief Medical Inspector for schools for the blind in 1907. College of Teachers of the Blind, *The Education of the Blind*, pp.4-5. He was also a member of the NIB's council and the 1922 Departmental Committee on the causes and prevention of blindness. 'Alfred Eichholz, C.B.E., M.D.', *The British Medical Journal*, 18/1, (18 February 1933), p.295.

currency in the 1900s. Following the 1904 report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration, charged with investigating the reasons for the alarmingly high rejection rates at military recruiting stations during the Boer War, the Board of Education emphasized the importance of both a well-ventilated, hygienic school environment and of a varied course of physical education in schools.⁶⁸ Eichholz, appointed the first Chief Education Inspector of schools for the blind in 1901, testified before the Committee.⁶⁹ As a primary advocate of the argument that physical ‘deterioration’ resulted from environmental conditions rather than hereditary ‘degeneration’, he stressed the benefits that improvements in sanitation, food, and clothing had on both the physical and psychological state of inhabitants of the poorest urban areas.⁷⁰ This contrasted with the strongly hereditarian view presented to the Committee by James Cantlie, co-founder with Fletcher Little of the NIMB.⁷¹ It is difficult to determine how much Cantlie’s belief in the racial basis of physical ‘deterioration’ underpinned the discourse of tactile compensation maintained by the NIMB; his *Physical Efficiency* (1906) made no direct reference to blindness.⁷² For the Committee, however, it was Eichholz’s environmentalist argument that won out and governed both mainstream physical education and the understanding of touch in schools for the blind.

If, as the Committee concluded, physical deterioration was the product of a deleterious home and school environment, then schoolchildren could also be shaped to become active, healthy citizens.⁷³ Prior to its report, physical education in schools, besides

⁶⁸ Hulme, “‘A Nation Depends on Its Children’”, pp.412-413.

⁶⁹ Wagg, *Chronological Survey*, p.84.

⁷⁰ Bernard Harris, ‘Eichholz, Alfred (1869–1933)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/63806>, 21 March 2013).

⁷¹ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body*, p.72, p.68.

⁷² James Cantlie, *Physical Efficiency: A Review of the Deleterious Effects of Town Life Upon the Population of Britain, with Suggestions for their Arrest*, (London, 1906).

⁷³ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body*, p.72.

the competitive games played at public schools, consisted of military-style drill exercises standardized by the Board of Education, in consultation with the War Office, in its *Model Course in Physical Training* (1902). In the light of the findings of the Committee on Physical Deterioration, the Board of Education swiftly abandoned drill in favour of Swedish gymnastics in its 1905 *Syllabus of Physical Exercises* and subsequent 1909 *Syllabus*.⁷⁴ These syllabi outlined a holistic training which strengthened the ‘total unity’ of the mind and body in the belief that efficient physiological functioning ensured a healthy nervous system and attentive mind. Only through ‘the unity, balance, and equilibrium of the body as a whole,’ later reflected George Newman, Chief Medical Officer at the Board of Education between 1907 and 1935, could body and mind achieve ‘growth’.⁷⁵

Schools for the blind readily included elements of this new thinking into their teaching. In 1921 Colville Street School, Nottingham, combined exercises and games from the Board of Education’s *Syllabus* and *Handbook of Games* with four classes of Swedish gymnastics per week.⁷⁶ But, as was also the case for blind children’s legislative and medical distinction, the adoption by schools for the blind of recommended Board exercises reified blindness as a distinct ‘problem’ even as it incorporated blind children

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.87. George Newman, *The Building of a Nation’s Health* (London, 1939), pp.269-271.

⁷⁵ Newman, *The Building of a Nation’s Health*, pp.254-256.

⁷⁶ M. Davidson, ‘Physical Training for the Blind’, (letter to editor) *Teacher of the Blind*, 9/1, (May, 1921), pp.15-19. The adoption of new Board thinking is also evident in E. Evans, ‘Physical Activity Exercises for the Blind’, *Teacher of the Blind*, 8/4, (February, 1921), pp.81-83, which commented on the ‘lack of elasticity of movement’ of blind children and recommended daily exercises derived from the 1919 Syllabus of Physical Training. See also articles by G. M. Campbell in the October, November, and December 1914 issues of *Teacher of the Blind* as well as the photographs of model postures for the physical exercise of blind children in G. M. Campbell, ‘Physical Training of the Blind’, 3/1, (January, 1915), pp.20-21. Combined with this was an increasing emphasis on the recreational aspect of exercise, as Newman had stressed: A. Burke, ‘Games as a Regular Part of the Equipment of the Classroom’, *Teacher of the Blind*, 20/2, (November, 1931), pp.45-51.

within mainstream education. While teachers of blind children adopted Newman's understanding of the trained, mutual shaping of mind and body, they repurposed it to apply to the specific question of tactile substitution in blindness. Combined with current thinking in the psychology of blindness, physical education in schools for the blind became from the early 1920s a matter of shaping the mind through training the body, and tactile substitution increasingly a matter of psychological rather than physical compensation.

This changing understanding of touch in schools for the blind is evident in the growing popularity of 'eurhythmics', a dance-exercise devised by former Professor of Harmony at the Geneva Conservatoire, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze.⁷⁷ By 1920 E. Morley and E. Jones had released their version of the technique, adopted by the Queen Alexandra Kindergarten for the Blind in Birmingham and also translated into Braille.⁷⁸ The aim of eurhythmics was to foster a relationship between musical time and the listener's body; 'to translate rhythms of music into rhythms of movement.'⁷⁹ This translation enabled blind listeners to gain greater awareness of their limbs in relation to each other and of their bodies in relation to their physical surroundings. The difference from earlier drill training, recollected by Alfred Hollins, a former pupil at Wilberforce School for the Blind in Yorkshire in the 1870s, could not have been greater. For those who passed boot inspection before breakfast, 'we made a right turn, which brought us into single file. On the word "Forward" [...] each boy put his right hand on the shoulder of the one in front of him. The bigger boys marched in first, and as soon as they were well inside the dining-room,

⁷⁷ 'A New Development in Dalcroze Eurhythmics', *Teacher of the Blind*, 11/4, (February, 1924), p.65.

⁷⁸ 'The System of Training in Rhythm and Rhythmic Movement', *The Beacon*, 4/43, (July, 1920), p.4.

⁷⁹ M. Meredyll, 'Eurhythmics and the Blind!', *Teacher of the Blind*, 5/5, (September, 1917), p.55.

“Forward” was given to our line, and we followed.’⁸⁰ Whereas drill standardized body habitus, the child’s knowledge of space dependent on the body in front, the purpose of eurhythmics was to experiment with it. While the correspondence between musical and bodily rhythms required ‘rules of grammar’, this differed from drill as such rules were the condition for ‘free expression’ rather than the limit to it.⁸¹ Children were encouraged to formulate a bodily syntax which connected what they heard in a mutual but free relation to how they moved.

The unification of hearing with movement, though similar to Newman’s emphasis on the ‘total unity’ of mind and body, was uniquely important to blind children for several reasons. First, the quality and intensity of sound resonance was a way of determining the distance from and characteristics of objects, as well as perceptions of volume in enclosed spaces; aural correspondences with movement enabled a smoother negotiation of space.⁸² The mind educated the body in ‘obedience’ to the expression of an idea and the body educated the mind in improvised decision-making.⁸³ Second, unlike the sighted, blind children lacked the means of learning good posture and unconsciously self-correcting postural ‘defects’ and so they benefited from training in managing the body. Their understandable caution towards physical risk could also be overridden by a more confident interaction between mind and body.⁸⁴ Thirdly, and most importantly in terms of touch, although eurhythmics focused on the body as a medium of expression, its

⁸⁰ Alfred Hollins, *A Blind Musician Looks Back: An Autobiography*, (Edinburgh: London, 1936), p.38.

⁸¹ Meredyll, ‘Eurhythmics and the Blind!’, p.55.

⁸² Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, ‘Eurhythmics and the Education of the Blind’, trans. E. R. Hutchinson, *Teacher of the Blind*, 4/2, (March, 1918), pp.26-27; ‘Eurhythmics for the Blind’, *The Beacon*, 7/77, (May, 1923), pp.11-12.

⁸³ ‘Eurhythmics for the Blind’, p.11.

⁸⁴ Jaques-Dalcroze, ‘Eurhythmics and the Education of the Blind’, pp.28-29; K.C., ‘The Sense of Rhythm and the Blind Child’ (letter to the editor), *Teacher of the Blind*, 7/1, (February, 1919), pp.8-9.

encouragement of greater bodily awareness enlarged the body's capacity as a medium for sensation as well.⁸⁵ What eurhythmics enhanced was not touch as direct contact but consciousness of the physical conditions of possibility within which touch could occur: the potential to touch.

The interest in the mutual relation between blind children's mind and body, and the potential to train it, was not confined to eurhythmics. Between Autumn 1931 and Spring 1936, the College of Teachers of the Blind and NIB conducted a wide-ranging inquiry into the principles and methods of educating blind children. Chaired by Alfred Eichholz, and including representatives from the Board of Education and Ministry of Health, the inquiry initially aimed at establishing an empirical basis for the psychological differentiation of blind and sighted children. Continuing an earlier, abortive investigation by F. M. Earle in 1927, the aim was to determine whether blindness, if at all, affected children's 'native intelligence' or 'acquirement of knowledge'.⁸⁶ But after nine months' investigation the inquiry failed to find any generalizable distinction, concluding that 'no qualitative estimate of the mental life of a blind child was forthcoming'.⁸⁷ These findings both supported and subverted an assumed psychological difference that had already been institutionalized. On the one hand, they challenged an assumption that blindness necessarily deprived blind children of the same cognitive and emotional development as sighted children. On the other, they resonated with contemporary works on the psychology of blindness, like Pierre Villey's *The World of the Blind* (English translation 1922) and John Ritchie's *Concerning the Blind* (1930), that argued that the blind differed

⁸⁵ Meredyll, 'Eurhythmics and the Blind!', p.56.

⁸⁶ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Education of the Blind*, pp.viii-ix; F.M. Earle, 'Principles Underlying the Teaching of Blind Children', *Teacher of the Blind*, 15/4, (June, 1927), p.106, and 'Principles Underlying the Teaching of Blind Children', *Teacher of the Blind*, 16/1, (September, 1927), p.5; 'The Psychology Course', *Teacher of the Blind*, 16/4, (March, 1928), pp.82-83.

⁸⁷ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Education of the Blind*, p.x.

from the sighted only in the means of acquiring knowledge, not in their intellectual or emotional potential. Touch was, these authors concluded, fully able to compensate for blindness, not through itself increasing in acuity, but through psychological compensation enacted through an adjusted relation between mind and body.⁸⁸ In his contribution to the inquiry, Ritchie drew on the work of Charles Spearman, Chair of Psychology at University College London, to argue that the essence of intelligence, what Spearman termed the ‘g’ factor, was unaffected by blindness; only the conditions within which intelligence could operate differed.⁸⁹ Following this thinking, the inquiry as a whole emphasized the importance of developing an active, reciprocal relation between blind children’s bodies and minds.

The ability for touch to compensate blindness, the inquiry stressed, depended on encouraging a child’s early and active engagement with their environment.⁹⁰ Schools should be spacious, especially the infant school, where ‘corridors should be reasonably straight, with no jutting-out corners, and always kept free from casual obstacles.’⁹¹ They should also be ‘richly stocked with all that will appeal to the senses’; children required ‘the insistent call of external things’, from boxes and canvas to ‘constructional toys’, to incite them to mutually constituting mental and physical action.⁹² Children aged between nine and fourteen should for example develop concepts of ‘form and proportion’ through

⁸⁸ Pierre Villey, *The World of the Blind: (A Psychological Study)*, trans. A. H. Ward, (London, 1922), p.16, p.24, p.98; John M. Ritchie, *Concerning the Blind: Being a Historical Sketch of Organised Effort on Behalf of the Blind of Great Britain, and Some Thoughts Concerning the Mental Life of a Person Born Blind*, (Edinburgh: London, 1930), pp.195-197.

⁸⁹ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Education of the Blind*, pp.57-58.

⁹⁰ Phillips, *Blind in British Society*, p.256.

⁹¹ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Education of the Blind*, p.101.

⁹² *Ibid.* pp.69-71. The Royal Normal College even had an old bus standing in its grounds to provide its students with the opportunity to become tactilely familiar with public transport. M. Ward, ‘At School with the Blind’, *The Beacon*, 1/5, (May, 1917), p.8.

plasticine modelling, an alternative to the tedious routinized movement of chair caning that had formerly been the mainstay of ‘handwork’ in schools for the blind.⁹³

This method of cultivating blind children’s mind-body relation through play was embraced by the new NIB Sunshine Homes for blind pre-school children. These residential nurseries, of which there were three by 1924, provided accommodation for up to 96 children from families that might struggle to care for them at home.⁹⁴ When the first of these opened at Chorleywood in 1918, NIB director Arthur Pearson capitalized on his press contacts to garner journalists’ comments on the experiment, the resulting praise published as a book. In contrast with later guidance offered by the College of Teachers of the Blind, several visitors commented positively that few environmental changes were made to the home to cater for the needs of blind children.⁹⁵ This was likely a practical reason acquiring conceptual legitimation as Sunshine Homes tended to be converted private residences which resisted adaptation. It was nonetheless considered a strength as children were sensorially educated in a ‘normal’ domestic environment more similar to life outside the home; one visitor noted how the children had learned to describe the ‘gay little figures’ painted on their cots.⁹⁶ However, the keynote remained cultivating children’s mind-body schema through concrete non-visual experiences, often of specially adapted materials.⁹⁷ This sat well with broader contemporary enthusiasm for the sensory

⁹³ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Education of the Blind*, pp.133-134.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.6-7.

⁹⁵ For example, E.F. Benson, ‘The House-Party’ (*Pall Mall Gazette*), W.L. George, ‘If I Were Blind’, (*Evening Standard*), E. Le Breton Martin, ‘Sing a Song of Sunshine’, in Anon. ed., *A Little Book of Sunshine: a collection of articles, stories and poems on Sunshine House, the Blind Babies’ Home at Chorley Wood, Herts.*, (unknown location, n.d., c.1918), p.13, p.17, p.41.

⁹⁶ Anon., ‘For Sightless Children’, in Anon. ed., *A Little Book of Sunshine*, pp.92-93.

⁹⁷ This remained true of Sunshine Homes into the 1950s. M.S. Colborne Brown, ‘The Care, Training and Education of Blind Young Children in the Royal National Institute for the Blind’s Sunshine Home Residential Nursery Schools’, n.d., c.1953, RNIB, RS/7/3/E/Box 1, pp.7-8.

autodidacticism promoted in Britain by educationalist Maria Montessori.⁹⁸ As it was described by the NIB's journal:

The scholars of the Montessori schools become sense specialists. The method is largely based on the use of specially designed "didactic material", [...] which trains the child through its senses, touch, hearing, sight, the power of appreciating form, colour, dimension and weight. [...] [S]eparate little tables and chairs, light enough to be moved about by the children themselves; jugs and basins, dusters and brooms, and other simple household effects, go to make up this valuable scheme of instruction.⁹⁹

This was not only a matter of training the blind child's senses but a complex interplay between different forms of 'sense'. The teacher 'acquires by practice the power of "sensing" the inner working of the child's development and realising his state, and she can give him exactly the help he needs'; by 'sensing' the way a child learned sensorially, teachers enmeshed their sensing, in both perceptual and physiological terms, with the child's.¹⁰⁰

Besides emphasizing the importance of a sensorially appealing school environment, the joint inquiry also reviewed methods of teaching physical education. The review, conducted by orthopaedic surgeon Dr Anna Broman and teacher Miss V. Vulliamy, responded to the concerns of the College of Teachers of the Blind that examination candidates showed widespread ignorance of blind children's physical needs. Already in 1933 the College charged Vulliamy with creating and reporting upon a summer

⁹⁸ When Montessori offered a training course and supplementary lectures on her teaching method in London in early 1920 there were over two thousand applications for two hundred and fifty places. S.B.P., 'Childhood's Royal Road to Learning: The Montessori Methods of Education', *The Beacon*, 4/38, (February, 1920), p.3; Colborne Brown, 'The Care, Training and Education of Blind Young Children', pp.3-4.

⁹⁹ S.B.P., 'Childhood's Royal Road to Learning', pp.3-4. The method was subsequently recommended by C.W. Kimmins, former Chief Inspector of the London County Council Education Department, at a speech to a joint meeting of the College of Teachers of the Blind and Association of Teachers of the Blind in March 1923. C.W. Kimmins, 'Special Features in the Training of the Blind', *The Beacon*, 7/76, (April, 1923), pp.13-14.

¹⁰⁰ A. Maccheroni, 'The Montessori Method', *The Beacon*, 4/43, (July, 1920), p.8.

course on the subject for teachers of the blind.¹⁰¹ While influenced by physical education of sighted children, like eurhythmics this course targeted the specific needs of blind children. Physical training, John Ritchie prefaced the report, should aim at removing the visual stigma of bad posture characteristic of blind children: ‘the well known droop at the shoulders, the drag and shuffle of the feet, the stolid springless slouch’.¹⁰² In line with the introduction of medical inspections, Vulliamy recommended that gymnastics instructors conduct annual orthopaedic examinations to grade children from A to C.¹⁰³ She stressed that during training instructors should avoid ‘stereotyping movement’, as with drill, and instead encourage creative expression of the body.¹⁰⁴ The emphasis was on expanding the ease, energy, and scope of movement as a precondition of touch. In this manner, the mind worked in conjunction with the body as active touch fostered a more attentive mind and vice versa; the body schema integrated through a ‘habit of responsiveness’.¹⁰⁵ The report illustrated the ideal-typical posture to be aimed for through photographs of statues at Dunfermline, diagrams of ‘good standing’ produced by the early nineteenth-century formulator of Swedish Massage Pehr Ling, and demonstrations by a schoolboy.¹⁰⁶

Vulliamy continued her focus on poor posture in her contribution to the joint inquiry in 1936. Of 644 children that she and Broman examined, 79 percent showed ‘postural and slight structural defects’ and 10 percent ‘marked postural defects’ or ‘crippling deformities’, including kyphosis (backward curvature of the spine), knock-

¹⁰¹ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Physical Education of the Blind: Being the Report of the Summer Course, July, 1933, at the School for the Blind, Swiss Cottage, Under the Auspices of The College of Teachers of the Blind*, (London, n.d. [1933]), Education Library, University of Birmingham, (uncatalogued), pp.7-8.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.8.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.13.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.26-27.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* pp.60-61.

knees, and raised shoulders.¹⁰⁷ The culprit, it seemed, was the school desk. The report included an appendix illustrating the postural defects caused by particular desk types (Fig.6), also offering guidelines for their replacements and recommending that children should be regularly ‘fitted for their desks’.¹⁰⁸ In her summer course report Vulliamy stressed the importance of developing good posture for the creation of ‘strong, lithe bodies’ which were ‘efficient instruments of the will’.¹⁰⁹ Good posture consolidated a physically active body in close connection with an attentive mind. This was especially important for blind children, both for developing their sense of touch and for guarding against bad habits they were ostensibly prone to. As the joint inquiry report surmised in earlier chapters, the lack of incidental sensory stimulation and the inability to see ‘physical contingencies’ reduced incentives for activity and could make blind children ‘cautious’ and ‘sedentary’.¹¹⁰ The ‘relative scarcity of distracting stimuli’ meant that ‘[t]he emotional states of blind people tend perhaps to last longer than those of seeing people’ and that the blind were ‘more prone to become introspective and moody and to yield to the attractions of a dream life, which in extreme cases may unfit them for grappling effectively with realities.’¹¹¹ Encouraging good posture therefore helped develop both blind children’s active, tactile engagement with their environment and their attention to the world beyond them.

The caution against a ‘dream life’ creating a simulacrum of reality reveals an ethical basis to the development of blind children’s active touch. In its discussion of blind

¹⁰⁷ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Education of the Blind*, pp.190-191.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, Appendix. A contemporary report by the Board of Education suggested that schools for partially sighted children deal with similar problems in posture through specially adapted Bishop Harman desks. Board of Education, *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Problems Relating to Partially Sighted Children*, (London, 1934), pp.107-109.

¹⁰⁹ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Physical Education of the Blind*, pp.62-63.

¹¹⁰ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Education of the Blind*, pp.69-70.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.49-50.

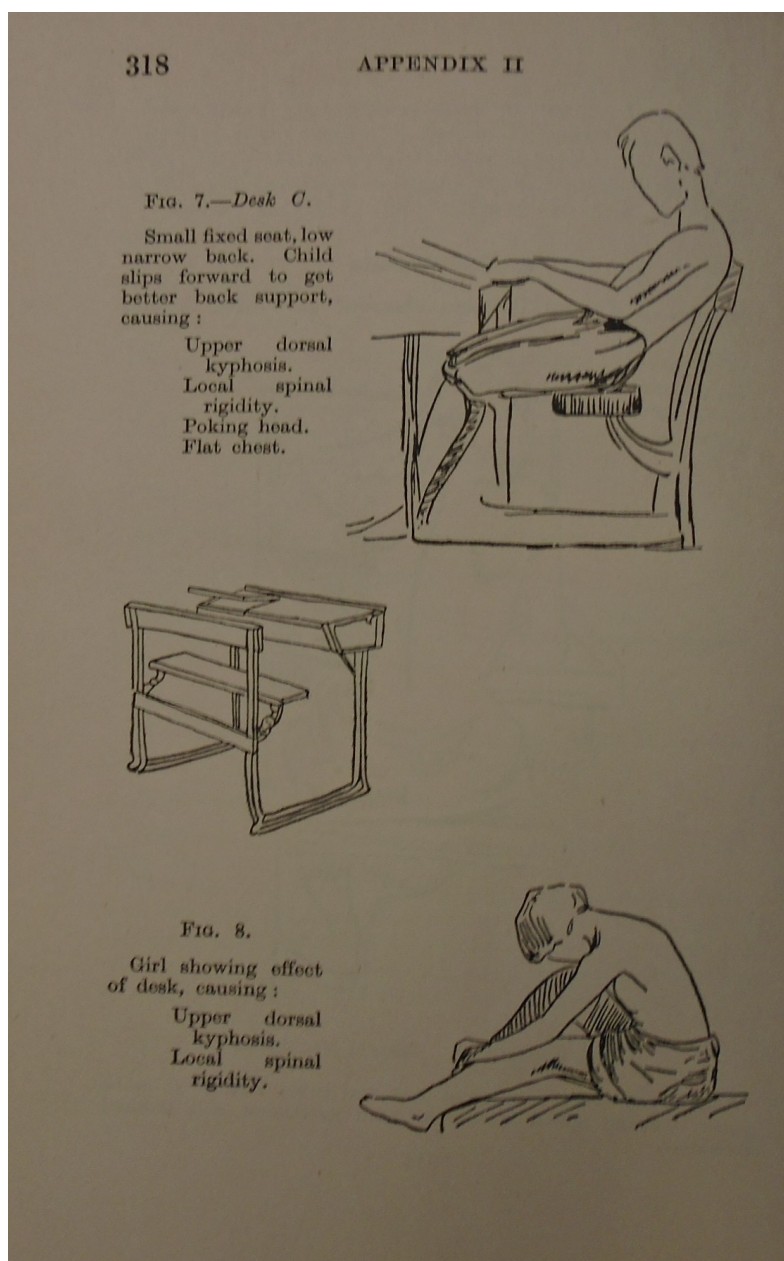


Fig.6 Postural defects caused by desk types, in Anon., *The Education of the Blind: A Survey*, (Frome: London, 1936), Appendix II, p.318.

children's 'emotional world', the joint inquiry noted that 'in many respects a blind person's conceptions of the external world must be only partial and may be erroneous, in consequence of which the exercise of his intelligence upon the relationships between the various parts of his knowledge or experience may lead him astray'.¹¹² To be led 'astray' here meant perceptually, but it had a subtext of moral straying. As the inquiry explained in the chapter on sex education, blind children relied principally on touch to understand sexual difference. Lacking 'variety' in sensory stimulation, though, they could also fall into potentially harmful 'self-exploration' and, by implication, masturbation.¹¹³ The necessarily intimate means of gaining knowledge combined with the potential lack of alternative distraction repeated a similar link made between raised-print reading and masturbation in the late nineteenth century, as well as playing on broader contemporary fears concerning the dangers of escapist fantasy.¹¹⁴ In the circumspect words of the inquiry, '[w]here the mind is insufficiently occupied with agreeable matters, it will tend to seek relief in such outlets as present themselves. These are more restricted for the blind than for the seeing, and the danger that they may lead to undesirable forms of relief proportionately greater.'¹¹⁵ Encouraging blind children to develop an active tactile engagement with the world beyond themselves, the inquiry suggested, maintained a boundary between children's inner life and outer reality otherwise blurred by masturbation. As a principal means of improving posture and active touch, school desks

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp.57-58.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.183-188.

¹¹⁴ Vanessa Warne, 'Between the Sheets: Contagion, Touch, and Text', 19: *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 19, (2014), p.4; Matt Houlbrook, "'A Pin to See the Peepshow": Culture, Fiction, and Selfhood in Edith Thompson's Letters, 1921-1922', *Past and Present*, 207/1, (May 2010), pp.215-249. On the broader contemporary anxiety over masturbation see Thomas Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*, (New York, 2003).

¹¹⁵ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Education of the Blind*, pp.187-188.

therefore became central to mediating this relation between children's inner worlds and their external relation to people and things by keeping their attention directed outwards.

Prospectus photographs of school desks in subsequent decades show the inquiry's recommendations remained the ideal rather than the reality for some schools.¹¹⁶ But the recommendations importantly highlight an ethical dimension to the cultivation of blind children's active touch. Not only was cultivating touch essential to preventing harmful solipsism, it also ensured that blind children acquired the knowledge of the world necessary to form right judgements and constructive relations with others; to become responsible citizens. Without blind children acquiring 'direct contact with the world', the inquiry warned, 'all subsequent formalizations of knowledge may be riddled with errors and misunderstandings, and all evaluations of what is good and worthy in life may be shattered by encounter with reality.'¹¹⁷ Likewise, training active touch was crucial for developing the communicative skills necessary for an integrated society of equal citizens: 'the child must learn by experience how to control his bodily movements, and to acquire the innumerable forms of muscular skill that [...] enter most of his daily acts; he must learn the art of expressing his feelings and thoughts, and of interpreting those of others'.¹¹⁸ Only then could blind children become 'mutually dependent members of an ordered society'.¹¹⁹ If cultivating active touch was important for blind children's own moral and intellectual development, it was also, the inquiry implied, vital for their acquisition of the knowledge, values, and interpersonal skills necessary for their attainment of full, responsible citizenship.

¹¹⁶ See prospectuses of Chorleywood School under headmistresses Phyllis Monk and D.A. McHugh, both p.3. Freestanding chairs were however used in both instances. Chorleywood prospectuses, NCW, NCW 2/1.

¹¹⁷ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Education of the Blind*, pp.45-46.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.42-43.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.39-41.

Visual Representation and ‘Tactual Images’

By the 1930s teachers of the blind broadly accepted the importance of cultivating the reciprocal relation between blind children’s bodies and minds. Yet for some, questions remained about the *way* information obtained from touch was converted into and itself modulated by thought. The joint inquiry by the College of Teachers of the Blind and NIB boldly stated that the ‘thought processes’ of blind and sighted people were the same; both employed ‘[t]he same concepts’ which, although potentially ‘fuller in meaning to the seeing because of the visual experiences with which they are associated’, nevertheless ‘stand for the same things’.¹²⁰ Yet the inquiry left unexplained whether there was a necessary connection between certain kinds of knowledge and the sensory means of acquiring it, or whether this connection disappeared once a concept was fully formed. The unexplored relation between sensation and perception consequently threw into question the presumed equivalence between the concepts blind children derived from touch and those sighted children derived from vision, an equivalence that teachers especially struggled to establish when it came to teaching Geography through maps.

In 1930, Headmaster of Swiss Cottage School for the Blind, John Ritchie, examined this vexed relation between sensation and perception in his account of the psychology of the congenitally blind. Ritchie argued, as Villey also had, that through frequently handling objects blind people were able to create ‘an instantaneous mental image’ which apparently divorced a concept from the sensory means of constructing it; the recollected ‘image’ of a chair, for example, retained no traces of the touch which

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.62-63.

formulated it.¹²¹ But while Ritchie claimed that blind people constructed mental ‘images’, he regarded these as subtly different from those of the sighted. Grounding his argument in Lockean empiricism, Ritchie argued that, since every concept had its basis in sensation, there were some which, being entirely visually-based, were inaccessible to the blind.¹²² But most concepts, he claimed, derived from multiple sensations, meaning that the absence of vision did not prevent blind people forming their own, ‘tactual images’.¹²³ The difference between tactual images and visual ones was a result of the degree to which the sensations forming each were mediated by thought. Touch, Ritchie argued, was ‘close to reality’; concepts derived from touch were ‘unambiguous’ and required little intervening judgement. By contrast, sight was the subtlest of the senses and therefore visually-based concepts required the most ‘mental correction’.¹²⁴ While ‘a blind man’s images of objects are always tri-dimensional’, ‘the ordinary man’s are seen and remembered upon a plane background and must be over-ridden and corrected by his knowledge of the third dimension.’ This meant, Ritchie continued, that it was equally impossible for a blind person to develop mental images of plane surfaces – like maps – without some mental correction. A picture of a fox, for example, could not be made perceptible to a blind person simply by embossing its outline, for this ignored how a sighted person’s conception of the picture as a whole depended on their ability to conceive of objects on the plane, which blind people lacked.¹²⁵ Although Ritchie did not develop the point, this distinction

¹²¹ Ritchie, *Concerning the Blind*, p.204.

¹²² John M. Ritchie, ‘The Mental Life of a Person Born Blind’, *Teacher of the Blind*, 19/3, (January, 1931), pp.61-62; Ritchie, *Concerning the Blind*, p.175. This referred specifically congenitally blind people; those who lost their sight some years after their birth, Ritchie argued, could develop mental ‘images’ from their memory of the world when sighted. On John Locke’s understanding of blindness see Paterson, *Seeing with the Hands*, c.2.

¹²³ Ritchie, *Concerning the Blind*, pp.176-177.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.178-179.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.177-178.

between mental images presented problems when teaching blind children map work because their mental images, remaining stubbornly ‘tactual’, could not replicate the two-dimensionality of maps. As the blind Pierre Villey noted, his mental images of relief maps were always ‘impregnated with tactile and muscular impressions,’ as the maps were covered with ‘too many intermingled lines, and too many different dots [...] for all this complex medley to be represented, as a whole, in my imagination.’¹²⁶

This thinking guided the recommendation by the joint inquiry on the education of the blind that teachers take a pragmatic attitude to what could be accomplished with maps.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, between 1932 and 1937 Leonard Hardcastle, a partially-sighted geography teacher at Leeds School for the Blind and a witness for the inquiry, crafted his own experimental relief maps with the aim of determining just how much a two-dimensional representation might be converted into a ‘tactual image’. At root was a semiotic dilemma: how to keep the same relation between a map and the world it represented when the touch of that map had a potentially different relation to the mind than its sight. How could the direct relation between the places marked on a map and those places in the world, a relation grasped instantaneously by a sighted person, be maintained in an object where that relation depended on the laborious successive movements of fingers across paper? Writing in May 1932 the NIB secretary-general proposed that Hardcastle develop relief maps of England similar to those already used at major train stations like Paddington.¹²⁸ But Hardcastle replied that such maps, which converted all visible features into relief, were of little use for blind children as their detail was imperceptible to touch. Children easily overlooked coastline not bordered by cliffs while mistaking river valleys for train lines because their relief was so faint. Instead,

¹²⁶ Villey, *World of the Blind*, p.188.

¹²⁷ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Education of the Blind*, p.124

¹²⁸ W. Eager to Leonard Hardcastle, RNIB, RNIB/4/17/223, 8 May 1932.

Hardcastle argued, it was necessary to simplify and exaggerate relief representations, for example marking coastline with a definite ‘step’, removing ‘unimportant bends’ in rivers, and indicating towns with round or square pegs according to population size.¹²⁹ The map Hardcastle suggested would approximate, but bear only indirect relation, to what it represented.

When Hardcastle sent his prototypes for evaluation at schools for the blind it became clear that determining how much maps should differ from their referents, and as a corollary how much tactual images differed from visual ones, was a fraught exercise. While Swiss Cottage welcomed the prototype headmaster Ritchie wrote that it was likely blind people would gain ‘an equally vivid and more accurate impression’ with a less exaggerated relief: ‘[t]he impression which one might get from the Isle of Man, for instance, might be that anyone standing on it would be in grave danger of slipping off into the sea.’¹³⁰ The report from Linden Lodge agreed that the elevation of relief was excessive, adding that ‘[t]he perception gained from the map of the contour of the land can never be really translated into visual perception (the only adequate presentation of the real thing) so why trouble with so much detail.’¹³¹

The belief that only vision adequately represented ‘the real thing’ was telling. Linden Lodge’s report assumed that only if maps maintained a direct relation with the world did they adequately represent ‘reality’ – reality independent of the one observing it – and since touch was unable to perceive such detail this reality remained inaccessible to the blind, and their tactual images insurmountably poorer than visual ones. Even if blind children were trained, then, to substitute touch for vision, the resulting representation remained only a supplement to what sighted children could achieve. ‘After all,’

¹²⁹ Leonard Hardcastle to W. Eager, RNIB, RNIB/4/17/223, 20 May 1932.

¹³⁰ J. M. Ritchie to W. Eager, RNIB, RNIB/4/17/223, 6 March 1936.

¹³¹ Report by Linden Lodge on the use of relief maps, 1936, RNIB, RNIB/4/17/223, p.1.

Hardcastle agreed, ‘a map is not a scale model’; a relief map did not, like a visual one, *reproduce* reality to scale, remaining directly proportional to it, but *stood in* for that reality in a relation that, like tactual images standing in for visual ones, retained their difference.¹³² Just as relief maps maintained only a ‘functional’ rather than ‘absolute’ equivalence to reality, performing the same role but, unlike visual maps, unable to reproduce it, so was also the case for tactual images in relation to visual ones, which stood in for the same concepts, but were unable to replicate them.¹³³

Over the subsequent decade the NIB continued research into the psychology of blindness but this focused on developing intelligence tests for blind children rather than their ability to translate visual representations into tactile ones.¹³⁴ Between 1942 and 1956 teacher Myfanwy Williams variously worked for the National Foundation for Educational Research and the NIB adapting intelligence tests for use in schools for the blind.¹³⁵ But following the 1944 Education Act, a wider interest in the specific pedagogical needs of blind children returned. The Act promised to de-segregate blind from sighted children by allowing the education of disabled children in mainstream schools. But regulations from the Minister of Education in 1945 mandated that blind children remain in residential schools, further hardening the distinction by also categorizing them separately from partially-sighted children. No longer was it possible for the blind and partially-sighted to be educated together and hence the education of blind children became an even more specialist domain.¹³⁶ In 1951, the College of Teachers for the Blind created a research

¹³² Leonard Hardcastle’s response to reports from Swiss Cottage and Linden Lodge, n.d., RNIB, RNIB/4/17/223, p.2.

¹³³ The distinction between ‘functional’ and ‘absolute’ equivalence is Paterson’s: Paterson, *Seeing with the Hands*, p.56.

¹³⁴ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Handbook for School Teachers of the Blind*, (Bristol, 1956), p.243.

¹³⁵ Reports by Myfanwy Williams, RNIB, RS/7/4/D Box 6.

¹³⁶ D.G. Pritchard, *Education and the Handicapped, 1760-1960*, (London, 1963), pp.209-212.

council for investigating ‘matters affecting the education and welfare of the blind’ and from 1950 published pamphlets under that theme, collated as a handbook for schoolteachers of the blind in 1956.¹³⁷ The handbook covered the now-conventional themes of physical education and concrete learning, reiterating the rejection of the idea that blind people developed heightened sensory acuity, instead arguing for a theory of psychological compensation.¹³⁸ Yet, as had also been the case for the College’s inquiry in the 1930s, the handbook omitted to explain *how* concepts derived normally from sight could be translated into ones derived from touch.

In the teaching of science at schools for the blind this remained a knotty question. Teachers had always struggled to teach blind pupils a broad science curriculum not just because of the expense of adapted apparatus and scarcity of Braille scientific and mathematical books but also because of the difficulty of transcribing ‘non-literal’ scientific symbols into a form comprehensible to the blind.¹³⁹ Writing around 1960, William Bickley, partially-sighted Professor of Mathematics at Imperial College London, claimed that ‘[s]cience for the blind has resembled the mediaeval maps of the dark continent – empty, or decorated with fabulous or unreal objects.’¹⁴⁰ The public schools had long taught theoretical and sometimes practical science, but emphasized humanities teaching in line with the belief that blind children were better-suited to non-technical jobs.¹⁴¹ Yet following the success of Adrian Magill, a partially-sighted pupil from

¹³⁷ College of Teachers of the Blind, *Handbook*, pp.8-9.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.232.

¹³⁹ Report by William Bickley, n.d., c.1960, RNIB, RS/7/2/E Box 1, pp.1-3.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.7; Hannah Gay, *The History of Imperial College London, 1907-2007: Higher Education and Research in Science, Technology, and Medicine*, (London, 2007), n.101, p.375.

¹⁴¹ R.C. Fletcher, ‘Introduction’, Nuffield Report (proposed), RNIB, RS/7/4/E Box 7, pp.4-5.; See also Careers of ex-pupils of Chorleywood College, September 1947, RNIB, RNIB/4/5/9, p.1 and D. Bell, *An Experiment in Education: The History of Worcester College for the Blind, 1866-1966*, (London, 1967), p.43.

Worcester College for the Blind, at GCE Advanced Level Physics in the early 1940s, teachers of the blind increasingly focused their attention on developing new methods and apparatus for teaching science.¹⁴² In 1959, the Royal National Institute for the Blind invited Abraham Wexler, teacher at the Royal Victoria Institute for the Blind, Melbourne, to visit Worcester College in order to reformulate existing methods of science teaching at schools for the blind.¹⁴³ The resulting manual, published in 1961, stressed that practical science teaching was not a matter of translating visual *experience* into tactile experience but of translating the *concepts* derived from the former into ones derived from the latter. Visual experiences remained inaccessible to the blind, but concepts derived from them did not.¹⁴⁴

Soon after Wexler's visit, another major investigation into the uses of touch in science teaching at schools for the blind was launched. In 1965, Adrian Magill's brother Brendan wrote to a manufacturer of school scientific apparatus asking whether it would make adaptations for blind students.¹⁴⁵ The manufacturer forwarded the letter to the Nuffield Foundation, a charity which had already initiated a large-scale project aimed at reformulating the methods and materials used for science teaching in mainstream secondary schools.¹⁴⁶ In August 1965, the Foundation provided a three-year grant for research into the same area in schools for the blind, including investigations by Worcester College's craft instructor, W. Pickles, and Physics teacher, W. VanClute.¹⁴⁷ The purpose

¹⁴² Fletcher, 'Introduction', RNIB, RS/7/4/E Box 7, pp.6-7.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.5. The National Institute for the Blind became the Royal National Institute for the Blind in 1953.

¹⁴⁴ Abraham Wexler, *Experimental Science for the Blind: An Instruction Manual*, (Oxford, 1961), pp.5-7.

¹⁴⁵ Fletcher, 'Introduction', RNIB, RS/7/4/E Box 7, p.7.

¹⁴⁶ Mary Waring, *Social Pressures and Curriculum Innovation: A Study of the Nuffield Foundation Science Teaching Project*, (London, 1979).

¹⁴⁷ Report justifying funding application to the Nuffield Foundation, April 1965, RNIB, RS/7/2/E Box 1, p.3; Fletcher, 'Introduction', RNIB, RS/7/4/E Box 7, p.7.

of teaching blind children through practical science lessons was ‘to provide their minds with a schema by which objects of their world are comprehended in an ordered system of spatial relationships’.¹⁴⁸ Surprisingly, the report recommended few adaptations of apparatus in subjects like chemistry and biology as, Headmaster of Worcester College Richard Fletcher argued, blind children should learn, where possible, to use apparatus for the sighted both to enable them to work in a sighted environment and because commercial apparatus was cheaper.¹⁴⁹

By contrast, the report emphasized the importance of training blind children to interpret what they felt within the same terms as the sighted, particularly for tactile versions of images. Discussing ‘the meaning of a line’, Pickles argued that images were ‘completely artificial to the congenitally blind’ and dismissed ‘nonsense about “giving sight to the blind”’; visual experience would always remain inaccessible to them. Yet it was possible, he claimed, to teach the congenitally blind ‘sighted technique’; to teach them the same ‘convention[s]’ by which the sighted interpreted the relationship between representation and reality.¹⁵⁰ Crucially for Pickles, the act of translating visual representations into tactile ones came not at the level of experience, which was always incommensurate, but in the *way* blind children turned experience into concepts. If blind children learned to interpret embossed lines using the same ‘techniques’ by which the sighted interpreted pictures, then they could develop the same concepts without requiring vision. For this reason, while Pickles experimented with lines of different texture, he also suggested methods by which blind children could learn to read images. Blind children struggled, he claimed, to gain the ‘overall’ impression of an image that the sighted

¹⁴⁸ Report justifying funding application. RNIB, RS/7/2/E Box 1, p.7.

¹⁴⁹ Fletcher, ‘Introduction’, RNIB, RS/7/4/E Box 7, p.8.

¹⁵⁰ W.J. Pickles, ‘Surface Representation’, Nuffield Report (proposed), RNIB, RS/7/4/E Box 7, p.72.

achieved with a ‘glance’ because the blind built it through sequential touches. But they could be taught to gain this overall impression, either through resting the heel of their hand at the bottom of an image and allowing their fingers to spread outwards, or by placing ‘all the fingers of both hands side by side flat on the diagram and giving them a rotatory rubbing action altogether’.¹⁵¹ These techniques allowed children both to build synoptic understandings of images, and to develop a bank of images with which they could make comparisons in the future.¹⁵²

Pickles was tentatively optimistic about blind children’s potential to learn such techniques, though he found some reliefs more conducive to ‘sighted’ reading than others. The distinctions of bas-relief ‘(flattish relief with a rounded edge)’ were too fine to be perceptible by blind readers whereas flat relief ‘(obtained by pasting cut-out card on a background)’ was more effective in teaching what a line meant.¹⁵³ Overall, Pickles concluded that most blind children could learn sighted techniques, though there was an ‘intelligence level’ below which this was impossible.¹⁵⁴ Yet even where Pickles felt interpretation was possible he stressed the limits to this. Texture was a ‘good substitute for colour’ but it was ‘not sufficient to copy out all the convolutions of say a sighted map of coal and iron fields.’ ‘The blind reader,’ Pickles continued, ‘just has not got the interpretative mechanism to deal with it. In this case a simple shaded oval would have made the point.’¹⁵⁵ While blind children were able to achieve some level of ‘sighted’ reading, then, the irreducible difference between touch and sight meant they would never equal the concepts sighted children formed of visual representations.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.74.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p.77.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.78-80.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.87.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.80.

For this reason, Pickles encouraged teaching blind children to produce their own tactile versions of visual representations in order to learn sighted techniques by doing, and so maximize what potential for ‘seeing’ they had.¹⁵⁶ As part of this study, in summer 1967 teacher Audrey Slater asked her students at Dorton House School to make several tactile drawings. Armed with ball pens and Melinex sheets backed with rubber, her class of eight- and nine-year-olds created a range of drawings, including self-portraits. Some of these students Slater judged successful at producing work which was ‘realistic and had meaning’. Others, however, seemed incapable of converting their sense of self into visual terms. Paul I., for example, ‘could trace round shapes, but did not succeed in creating any outlines with any obvious connection between them and what they were reputed to represent. His drawings without exception appeared to be random drawings wriggling across the page’.¹⁵⁷ For the production of self-portraits, as for the reading of maps, it seemed there was an element of untranslatability between what some blind children felt and thought and how this could be visually represented. For Slater and Pickles, this was not a case simply of alternative modes of perceiving, but of the degree to which blind children could access a ‘reality’ legislated in visual terms. In a comparison of two self-portraits, the report labelled the one best approximating a visual representation of a face as produced by an ‘intelligent child’, the other by one ‘less intelligent’. The ‘intelligent’ child had captioned the portrait ‘THIS IS ME’ in embossed Roman and Braille lettering, an additional mark that, like a signature, bound the representation to its author both through the caption’s self-designating function and its existence as a tangible trace of the author.¹⁵⁸ Yet paradoxically, Slater and Pickles judged that trace ‘intelligent’ precisely because it, like the self-portrait, was a *visual* representation standing in for its author’s

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.103.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.117-119.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.116.

absence, so demonstrating the child's ability to convert their tactile sense of self into a representation linked to 'reality'. For Slater and Pickles, blind children's conception of reality was best judged in visual terms. Some blind children apparently approximated this conception whereas others did not, but in all cases the very terms of the inquiry – that a 'realistic' self-conception depended on its visual representation – necessitated the difference between blind and sighted children the inquiry was ostensibly meant to test.

These working assumptions, as with those of earlier investigations into map reading, raised a deeper question underpinning that of tactile substitution. In the same way that the extension of medical examination to blind children reified their physical distinction from the sighted, efforts to develop methods through which blind children could substitute touch for vision also revealed – or established – their apparently irresolvable difference. By examining the degree to which touch 'stood in' for vision, these investigations called attention to its apparently necessary difference *as* a substitute, or place-holder, to normative sensation. In the case of blind self-portraiture, this called into question the very ability of blind children to establish a coherent sense of self assumed to be grounded in visual terms – the old fear of a 'dream life'. At the same time, if examining the substitution of touch for vision only revealed their necessary difference, then it questioned the ability for blind children to acquire the knowledge and value-judgements apparently required for full citizenship. In the same way that touch apparently played a merely supplementary role in blindness, so these investigations inadvertently made blind children *themselves* supplements to sighted subjectivity, both as private selves and as citizens.

Contesting Supplementary Touch

One year after Audrey Slater's students drew their self-portraits, in 1968, the RNIB celebrated its centenary. It was a year in which to take stock of what it meant to be blind in Britain, a theme the BBC pursued through two programmes released in the autumns of 1967 and 1968. On 27 and 28 September 1967 BBC1 broadcast a two-part television programme produced by Philip Donnellan and given a sound montage by Charles Parker called *BD8*. On 9 October 1968 BBC Midlands Radio 4 followed this with *The Blind Set*, a radio programme produced by Parker in his trademark 'radio ballad' style, which intercut folk songs with interview recordings made at schools, homes, and training centres for the blind across Britain between 1965 and 1967. Both programmes aimed to counter what their producers perceived as a culture of pity towards the blind which assumed their unfortunate but inevitable dependence upon the sighted. Instead, the programmes stressed blind people's ability to 'overcome' their impairment, particularly through new advances in mobility training enabled by the development of the long cane in the USA. But while *BD8* received an overwhelmingly positive reception from both blind and sighted viewers, *The Blind Set* was, in Parker's assessment, 'an unparalleled disaster', many blind listeners interpreting the programme as a plea for pity that alienated them even more from mainstream society.¹⁵⁹ Through the hostility it received, *The Blind Set* inadvertently revealed a shift in the way that many of its blind listeners conceived of blindness, and touch in blindness, that contrasted with its own emphasis on tactile substitution.

In 1961, the British Pathé short *No Longer Alone* illustrated the training given to blind children at Condover Hall. Through ten graded exercises, children travelling in pairs

¹⁵⁹ Audience Research Report for *BD8*, 2 November 1967, BBC, M 34/2, p.1.; Typescript of telephone calls reacting to *BD8* Part 1, BBC, M 34/2, p.1.; Charles Parker to Lee Farmer, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, 14 February 1969.

advanced through a ‘privilege scheme’ until deemed capable of travelling independently by bus to nearby Shrewsbury.¹⁶⁰ For *BD8* and *The Blind Set*, though, such training fell far short of what the blind were capable of by encouraging independence only insofar as their impairment allowed. *BD8* cited an example of such thinking in the case of Henry Taylor, teacher at the Scottish Blind School, who explained the purpose of the school’s privilege scheme as producing ‘independent, mobile citizens within the limits of their handicap’.¹⁶¹ By contrast, *BD8* urged what the psychologist J.A. Leonard explained as a ‘standard’ in which a blind person could ‘move about with the same degree of freedom [...] as a sighted person’.¹⁶²

This standard could be achieved, *BD8* argued, by making long cane training central to courses teaching blind students navigation techniques. Although long cane training was developed in the USA in 1946, *BD8* reported that the RNIB resisted its introduction for decades; it was taught in Britain only from 1966, when funding from the Nuffield Foundation enabled the establishment of the Midlands Mobility Centre and the RNIB introduced trials at its training centre in Torquay.¹⁶³ *BD8* and *The Blind Set* presented long cane use as a matter of tactile substitution: of training the mind to direct movement according to tactile information derived from the cane tip. For Lee Farmer, the RNIB instructor, the cane was an ‘environmental sensor’ continually providing information to its user. The blind person had to decide in a ‘split second’ whether he or she needed to react immediately to that information, discard it, or store it as ‘money in the bank’ for the future.¹⁶⁴ In the words of trainee Victor Horsley, ‘[b]eing able to use the long cane it’s like having an extra long index finger, and it ferrets out for us the things,

¹⁶⁰ *No Longer Alone*, (1961), British Pathé, 2717.04.

¹⁶¹ Script of *BD8 Part Two: Independence of the Blind*, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124A, p.14.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁶³ *BD8: 2: The Independence of the Blind*, (Dir. P. Donnellan, 1967).

¹⁶⁴ Interview of Lee Farmer, 25-25 January 1967, WCAR, MS 4000/6/1/54/87/C-88/C.

the information that we really need to know.’ Early in this interview Donnellan asked Horsley what independence meant to him. The reply, reproduced at the beginning of *The Blind Set*, was that ‘[i]ndependence, of course being very much allied with mobility, is one of the most important things in life.’¹⁶⁵ Taking up this message, *BD8* and *The Blind Set* foregrounded long cane training, and the tactile substitution on which it depended, as the path to blind people’s independence.

While countering the assumption, held even by sighted sympathizers, that blind people were inevitably dependent, this claim also challenged what Donnellan and Parker saw as blind people’s own pessimism about their abilities.¹⁶⁶ ‘The blind have been conditioned,’ Donnellan wrote, ‘[...] to accept a state of non-information and prejudice, which has been alarmingly fostered by all sorts of reputable organisations’.¹⁶⁷ Parker especially singled out the RNIB, whose resistance to long cane training had, he believed, conditioned blind people to accept lower levels of mobility. In this way, the RNIB perpetuated the dependence of those it was meant to help, reproducing what Parker understood as the class inequality at the heart of blind welfare. Underpinning blind people’s self-conceived disability, Parker asserted, was ‘the reality of CLASS WAR and property [and] the utter refusal of the bourgeois to concede human parity to his class inferior.’¹⁶⁸ Parker formulated this belief in part through an article by Anne Lapping reporting on the condition of blind people in Britain published in the left-leaning journal *New Society* in March 1968. Lapping asked whether the strength of welfare organisations

¹⁶⁵ Interview of Victor Horsley, 25 January 1967, WCAR, MS 4000/6/1/54/89/C.

¹⁶⁶ Charles Parker, ‘The Blind Set: Declaration of Intent’, 14 April 1968, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, p.1.

¹⁶⁷ Philip Donnellan to Walter Thornton, BBC, M 34/2, 11 October 1967. For earlier uses of canes to aid navigation see memo from B.O.B. to Colborne Brown, 9 October 1956, and unsigned memo, probably by Colborne Brown, 12 October 1956, RNIB, ‘Worcester College’, RS/7/2/C Box 1, both p.1; F.R. Marriott, ‘How the Blind Travel’, *The Beacon*, 4/38, (February, 1920), pp.7-8.

¹⁶⁸ Parker, ‘The Blind Set’, pp.1-2.

for blind people in Britain had paradoxically slowed the advance of welfare initiatives by allowing the state to evade its responsibilities towards the disabled.¹⁶⁹ She particularly drew attention to the apparent subordination of blind people, especially working class blind people, to a predominantly sighted and middle-class RNIB. In a section Parker heavily underlined, Lapping reported the split occasioned in 1961 when the RNIB claimed the right to negotiate on behalf of kiosk workers represented by the National League for the Blind, a trade union whose members mainly worked in sheltered workshops.¹⁷⁰ For Parker, the assumption of blind people's inevitable sensory inequality from the sighted reproduced and was reproduced by an equally pernicious class inequality.

The Blind Set therefore faced a difficult task: while exposing what Parker believed to be many blind people's false consciousness regarding their abilities, it also needed to demonstrate what might be achieved once they thought of themselves in new terms. Constrained by the BBC's rules on political commentary, Parker believed the best way of achieving this critique was through careful attention to the form of radio documentary. Through intercutting contrasting material, for example, Parker highlighted the legitimacy of one viewpoint over another without the need for direct comment. In one section, an actor read an extract from Thomas Carroll's *Blindness* (1961) describing blindness as the 'death' of one life and 'birth' of another. This was succeeded by a clip of Tom Drake, manager of the RNIB centre at Torquay, concurring with Carroll that blindness was a kind of 'dying' in which the blind person was 'born' as someone 'functioning, competent, but different'. Parker then critiqued this belief in blind people's inevitable difference through

¹⁶⁹ This echoes Cohen's argument that strong philanthropic support for disabled ex-servicemen both responded to and enabled the withdrawal of state support after the Great War: Cohen, *The War Come Home*, pp.4-5.

¹⁷⁰ Anne Lapping, 'How do we Treat the Blind as People?', *New Society*, 14 March 1968, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, p.374.

juxtaposition with a clip from Lee Farmer: ‘People haven’t asked “what can we do?”; the desire to get by, to make a token adjustment to a problem seems to be the predominant way of handling the situation here’.¹⁷¹ Parker also conveyed his message through interweaving commissioned folk songs between interview extracts, a technique known as ‘radio ballad’. Fortuitously for Parker, one blind interviewee compared overcoming blindness with the ‘life/death struggle’ of humans over their environment, a struggle she believed folk myths particularly drew inspiration from: ‘St George killed the dragon but you – in essence this is the same thing as you’ve got to do’. She speculated that ‘I think if you are searching for why the anxiety to blindness you have to go to folk-lore and primitive beliefs’.¹⁷² Parker followed this claim with a song recounting a hero ‘battling with a dragon’ and, apt for blindness, the ‘king of darkness’. Interspersed between verses were snatches of blind people describing moments when they overcame barriers presented by blindness, so conquering their own ‘dragons’.¹⁷³

‘[I]t will make your hair stand on end!’ Parker wrote a week before the broadcast.¹⁷⁴ He was right, but not in the way expected. Far from showing blind people’s sensory equality with the sighted, to many listeners *The Blind Set* seemed to accentuate their difference even more. In the weeks following the broadcast, Parker received a torrent of critical letters, especially from blind listeners. Listeners variously described the music as ‘drooling’, ‘dreary’, ‘a sop to the contemporary folk-fad’, and as ‘doggerel ditties’ that distracted from programme content and ‘presented the blind as half-witted’.¹⁷⁵ In

¹⁷¹ *The Blind Set: An Encounter with Prejudice*, recording of first half, 9 October 1968, WACR, MS 4000/6/1/54/179/C.

¹⁷² *The Blind Set* production script, ‘As Broadcast’, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, pp.3-4.

¹⁷³ WCAR, MS 4000/6/1/54/179/C.

¹⁷⁴ Charles Parker to J. A. Leonard, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, 1 October 1968.

¹⁷⁵ Audience Research on ‘Blind Set’, n.d., pp.1-3; L.A. Brown to Charles Parker, 11 October 1968; Clarence Gilbert to Charles Parker, 11 October 1968; Keith Brace, *Birmingham Post* radio review, 12 October 1968, p.1, all WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B.

addition, the audience report based on responses from a survey of 317 listeners noted that ‘[n]othing was said of the many who had triumphed over their disability with courage and good humour, nor had sufficient attention been paid to the fact that most sighted people did their best to treat them with “courtesy, kindness, and respect”.’¹⁷⁶ Listeners especially rejected the impression given by the programme that blind people were pitiable dependents. An exasperated H. Dudley, herself blind, wrote ‘I don’t quite know who you at the B.B.C. think you are, but will our point of view never sink in,’ suggesting that the BBC produce a programme depicting blind people as ‘the same as everyone else’.¹⁷⁷ An injured Parker replied that ‘You say that you fight every day against the public? [‘who think we are either stupid or wonderful’, wrote Dudley] I feel that perhaps you should first fight against you[r] own organisations who perpetuate the charity image.’¹⁷⁸ A mollified Dudley agreed that the RNIB was responsible for cultivating a culture of dependency, but that *The Blind Set* did little to combat this; ‘did you know that there are people looning round the streets of everywhere who actually think the blind don’t and can’t work!!!!’¹⁷⁹ D. Lineham wrote that her blind daughters knew some of the programme contributors but ‘could not understand [...] why such knowledgeable people consented to have their voices drowned by raucous cries of “PITY THE BLIND”’.¹⁸⁰ Some correspondents rejected the programme’s apparent condescension through the act

¹⁷⁶ Audience Report for *The Blind Set*, n.d., WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, p.1. See also F. Brace, a retired secretary, who was ‘disgusted’ at the presentation of the insensitivity of the sighted and the apparent dependence of the blind. Audience Research on ‘Blind Set’, n.d., WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, p.2.

¹⁷⁷ H. Dudley to Charles Parker, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, 10 October 1968.

¹⁷⁸ Charles Parker to H. Dudley, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, 23 October 1968.

¹⁷⁹ H. Dudley to Charles Parker, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, 28 October 1968.

¹⁸⁰ D. Lineham to Charles Parker, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, n.d.

of writing itself, Joy Gilbey pointing out that she was ‘a blind shorthand typist’ who had typed her letter ‘on my office machine.’¹⁸¹

For Parker, though, the most unsettling letters came not from critical listeners, but from those who conscientiously interpreted the programme as a plea for help. S. Wilson’s letter, Parker wrote, was ‘the most disturbing I have ever received, and I am very nearly at a loss at how best to reply [...] in the face of such an extraordinary failure on my part to communicate. [...] What is most horrifying about your letter is its reasonableness and genuine and informed concern about the condition of the blind.’¹⁸² Wilson’s letter, heavily underlined by Parker, read ‘I listened to your programme “Blind Set”, but I am not really sure what you were trying to do. Was it an appeal for funds on behalf of the R.N.I.B. – in one part reference was made to sending donations to them.’¹⁸³ One listener did in fact donate 2s. 6d. in sympathy for the blind, hoping that Parker received ‘lots & lots of Half Crowns & other big moneys’ on their behalf.¹⁸⁴ If angry letters written to Parker revealed his failure to communicate, they at least showed blind listeners’ rejection of the condescending attitude he was attempting to expose. By contrast, sympathetic letters, whether from blind or sighted listeners, devastatingly evidenced the persistent assumption that blind people were, indeed, necessarily deserving of pity.

The widespread misconstrual of *The Blind Set*, Parker believed, resulted from the failure of the radio ballad form. For Parker, radio ballad was not simply a way of overcoming the BBC prohibition on political commentary but also the only way in which the experiences related by blind interviewees might be related without being subsumed within a controlling narrative. After the magnitude of hostility towards the programme

¹⁸¹ J. Gilbey to BBC and RNIB, enclosed in letter to Charles Parker, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, 10 October 1968.

¹⁸² Charles Parker to S. Wilson, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, 25 October 1968.

¹⁸³ S. Wilson to Charles Parker, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, 14 October 1968.

¹⁸⁴ Anonymous note attached to 2s. 6d., WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, 6 [16?] October 1968.

became apparent, the Controller of Radio 4 ('CR4') and Head of Programming Midlands ('HPM') sent Parker sharply critical memos; enraged, Parker scribbled a vigorous rebuttal, which was never sent, explaining the importance of radio ballad and why it had failed. For CR4, complex intercutting of speech and music rendered the programme unintelligible. Parker argued instead that intercutting placed blind people's experience, directly related, 'in a context deliberately provocative (as for instance immediately following a description, or direct quote, from a TV commercial on make-up)' therefore juxtaposing 'social matters' with the reality of a blind person's 'deprivations'.¹⁸⁵ Countering CR4's exasperation that the technique made 'the thread of the programme [...] impossible to follow', Parker contended that radio ballad was 'dialectical', deliberately 'leav[ing] space in the "thread of the programme"' for the listener 'to enter and join up – so himself participating.'¹⁸⁶ The point was to offer multiple possible interpretations which were only realized through their reception by each listener. At the same time, intercutting presented blind people's experience in a way that did not reduce it to 'evidence' in an inquiry that always already turned those people into objects. The word rankled Parker:

The real give away is "evidential": what an adjective, with all its legalistic/journalistic overtones, for such devastatingly human and social sources. Really that one work [word] damns C.R4 as having no concern for or understanding of the nature of Actuality, and its overwhelming potency as the oral expression of experience and so charged that at its high point, the experience seems to burst out of the loudspeaker as [at] first-hand, re-forged on the anvil of the speaker[']s passion to communicate every time that piece of tape is played.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Charles Parker, 'Analysis of HPM memo, 30/10/68, referring to C.R4, strictures on "The Blind Set", 30/11/68, "Strictly Confidential"', WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, pp.2-3.

¹⁸⁶ Charles Parker, 'Analysis HPM memo 30/10/68 contd' 3[0?]/11/68, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, pp.6-7.

¹⁸⁷ Parker, 'Analysis of HPM memo, 30/10/68, referring to C.R4, strictures on "The Blind Set"', p.8.

Adding force to the ‘actuality’ was the role folk music played not, in Parker’s interpretation of CR4’s criticism, as ‘BACKGROUND’ aimed at ‘souping it up emotionally’, but as an ‘unequivocal statement’ which activated the spoken material interweaving it.¹⁸⁸ For Parker, ‘the Common speech (“actuality”) and the true Popular Song (“folk song”) are galvanically related’, each animating the other and so conveying the immediacy of an experience otherwise attenuated by narrative.¹⁸⁹ Only in this way was it possible to convey his subjects’ experiences without turning them into objects of pity.

More than this, Parker believed that radio ballad was particularly appropriate for blind listeners, whose assumed heightened hearing enabled them to discern his message beneath complex editing. The dispute with CR4, wrote Parker, revolved around the meaning of ‘impact’. CR4’s understanding of the word was only of ‘impact as a machine gun hail of leaden information pellets, consistently clanging on the armoured hide of the [?] “ordinary listener”, (a hide ever thickening by exposure to just such “impact”!)’. He, by contrast, aimed for ‘impact as that sense of excitement which irresistibly draws a listener to personal involvement’.¹⁹⁰ For Parker, blind people were uniquely suited to this kind of impact because their acuter hearing made them especially sensitive to hidden messages.¹⁹¹ The failure of *The Blind Set*, however, suggested that the reverse was true:

one of the most terrible revelations for me, was the extent of the cultural deprivation of the blind. I had fallen [...] into the trap of assuming that the blind would be much more perceptive and sensitive where sound was concerned. In fact, [...] the absence of correctives available through the eyes meant that fed on the standard sound fare of broadcasting and middle-class utterance, they are, in fact, much more deprived than the sighted. This I believe is why the allusive method I was forced to use in “The Blind Set” [...] were [*sic.*] just taken straight and interpreted by the blind as wounding and offensive.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.2.

¹⁹⁰ Parker, ‘Analysis HPM memo 30/10/68 contd’, p.1.

¹⁹¹ Charles Parker to A. R. Hay, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, 28 October 1968.

¹⁹² Charles Parker to Lee Farmer, WCAR, MS 4000/2/124B, 14 February 1969.

Blind listeners' misconstrual of Parker's message proved to him that they lacked not only the usual critical 'correctives' of vision but also any compensatory ones from hearing. Blind listeners were not, after all, more perceptive but in fact exemplars of the unreflexive 'ordinary listener'.¹⁹³ In his very effort to counter the assumed difference of blind people by highlighting their tactile powers, Parker ultimately recentred that difference in his 'discovery' that their hearing did not make them particularly attentive to his message. If blind people were now like 'ordinary' listeners, this did not make them equal to those listeners, only woefully unable to grasp a message that might lead to their full independence.

Parker had presented radio ballad as a way of directly re-presenting blind people's experiences without reducing those experiences to 'evidence' in a story over which they had no control. It was meant especially to impact upon blind listeners, whose acuter hearing would enable them to discern a message intended specifically for them, and in so doing raise them to a higher consciousness about their ability to become, through touch, wholly independent. In this way, blind people might challenge the assumption that blindness always already meant disability, an assumption that reified their difference as members of a subordinate 'class', and so take their place as equal citizens with the sighted. For Parker, *The Blind Set's* failure therefore represented not only the failure of hearing to compensate for blindness but also the depth of blind people's 'blindness' to their own subordination. The failure of hearing to substitute vision also entailed the failure of blind listeners to become perceptible to *themselves* as subordinated subjects and unequal citizens: impairment, Parker concluded, did apparently necessitate disability. While Parker did not relate this conclusion to his earlier claims regarding touch, the potential for

¹⁹³ Parker, 'Analysis of HPM memo, 30/10/68, referring to C.R4, strictures on "The Blind Set"', p.6.

touch to enact the political – and perceptual – transformation he believed necessary seemed increasingly uncertain.

Yet another story is possible. While Parker believed the hostility *The Blind Set* provoked pointed to an intransigent sensory and political inequality between blind and sighted, it instead, the programme's listeners might have contended, meant the opposite. Parker's case for the independence attainable by his blind listeners depended on the potential for touch and hearing to compensate blindness: civil equality was contingent on sensory substitution. But the angry letters sent to the BBC suggest that by 1968 the question of tactile substitution was no longer the right one to ask. Instead, and in accord with a groundswell of other contemporary civil rights movements, blind listeners' rejection of what they perceived to be a call for pity challenged the very terms under which impairment was constituted *as* disability. While missing Parker's point, their letters paradoxically converged with his intention to reframe blindness from an impairment which always already meant disability to a state which was *constituted by* the attitudes of blind and sighted people themselves.¹⁹⁴ In this way, *The Blind Set*'s listeners anticipated an understanding of blindness, and particularly of touch in blindness, as itself a product of – and therefore a battleground for – wider understandings of who counted as citizens.¹⁹⁵ What 'sense' was possible in blindness was both cause and effect of who 'made sense' as citizens.

¹⁹⁴ Blind American writer Hector Chevigny made a similar point: Hector Chevigny, *My Eyes Have a Cold Nose*, (London, 1947), pp.83-85.

¹⁹⁵ Michalko, *The Difference that Disability Makes*, pp.14-16.

Conclusion

On 27 June 1901, a fund-raising meeting was held in the Egyptian Hall at Mansion House on behalf of the Royal Normal College and Academy of Music for the Blind, Norwood.¹⁹⁶ In an attempt to rouse support, the Reverend H.J.R. Marston called for subscriptions to the College ‘on grounds of public economy, no less than on grounds of Christian charity’. Referring to the College Principal’s claim that 89 percent of his students became ‘self-supporting’, Marston argued that it was economic good sense to educate blind children rather than allow them to ‘remain a dead loss to society’. For only £2,600 a year eighty-nine blind children could be made economically independent for their adult lifetimes; by contrast, merely supporting the thirty thousand blind people in Britain at the same level of 10s. per person per week would cost approximately £780,000 a year. For this reason, Marston contended, funding the College would make blind people ‘an asset’ rather than ‘a bad debt’ and was not only ‘sound Christianity’ but also ‘sound political economy’.¹⁹⁷

An extract from this speech was reprinted in *The Law of Compensation: Blind but Self-Reliant* (1904), a pamphlet outlining the activities and successes of students at the Royal Normal College and repeating the call for public subscriptions. The pamphlet argued that the College, which specialised in musical training, amply demonstrated the ‘law of compensation’. Although this ‘law’ was apparently too self-evident to require explanation, the pamphlet pointed to the successful careers of former students as organists, pianists, professors of music and pianoforte tuners as proof enough that a blind person’s hearing ‘compensated’ for blindness.¹⁹⁸ Understood in the light of Marston’s speech, then, compensation assumed a double meaning. Not only did teaching blind

¹⁹⁶ ‘Royal Normal College for the Blind’, *The Times*, 29 June 1901, p.19.

¹⁹⁷ J. F., *The Law of Compensation: Blind, but Self-Reliant*, (London, 1904), pp.8-11.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

children musical vocations enable their hearing to compensate for blindness, it also compensated society for its initial investment by preventing those children from becoming a future burden on welfare organisations and the Poor Law. *The Law of Compensation* made explicit a link between the substitutional potential of a blind person's senses and their economic and political relation to sighted society that defined the education of blind children well into the twentieth century. The reason for encouraging tactile substitution changed between the 1900s and 1930s, from economic thrift and physical deterioration to national rehabilitation and efficiency. Changing attitudes towards provision for disabled people after the Great War and new medical and legislative understandings of blindness transformed the concept of tactile substitution from one of natural bodily compensation to one of trained attentiveness. Yet through until at least the 1930s, the understanding of touch in blindness remained within a political economy of disability that linked the relation between the senses to the relation between the individual and social body, a relation that, in both cases, appeared to displace an absence even while defining it further.

With the furore over *The Blind Set* in 1968, though, a new story emerged. Both Charles Parker's expressed intention for the programme and the hostile reception it received from blind listeners revealed attempts to contest the very grounds on which touch in blindness was understood, and how sensation was linked to citizenship. In this understanding, citizenship was to be based not on sensory equality, and hence on the compensatory powers of touch, but on societal attitudes towards sensory difference. Paradoxically, this rethinking reproduced an essentialist understanding of blindness, developed by the medicalization of blindness and growing emphasis on training the body's compensatory powers, by reifying a distinction between the 'natural' body and 'social' attitudes towards it. If the functional relationship between touch and vision was

itself only a product of social attitudes, then this depended still on an understanding of the body as a given ‘fact’ on which society, also assumed *a priori*, might do its work.¹⁹⁹ Yet despite this, the furious reception of *The Blind Set* nonetheless represented the beginning of a new thinking where blindness might be considered not a condition to overcome, but a new tool for exposing patterns of social exclusion, patterns maintained and contested through touch.

¹⁹⁹ For critiques of the social model see Simo Vehmas, ‘What Can Philosophy Tell Us About Disability’, in Nick Watson, Alan Roulstone, and Carol Thomas (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*, (London: New York, 2012), pp.298-309; Christopher A. Riddle, ‘The Ontology of Impairment: Rethinking How We Define Disability’, in Matthew Wappett and Katrina Arndt (eds), *Emerging Perspectives on Disability Studies*, (Basingstoke, 2013), pp.23-39.

Chapter Three

How We Came to Mind the Gap:

Time, Tactility, and the Tube

Teresa Lubienska was not without enemies. As a countess who had been in the Polish Resistance, interned in Ravensbrück, and since migrating to Britain in 1946 chaired the association providing relief to Polish ex-political prisoners, she had ample reason and means to settle old grievances and, the police inferred, make new ones.¹ But despite this, it was still shocking news that on the night of Friday 24 May 1957 the seventy-three-year-old had been stabbed on a platform of Gloucester Road tube station, West London. Ticket collector Emanuel Akinyemi was stood in lift No. 3, listening for passengers. When the cry ‘Bandits!’ reached him, he glanced down the passageway, catching sight of Lubienska staggering by the stairs. Akinyemi brought her up to the booking hall, from which she was rushed to St Mary Abbot’s Hospital. She died at 11pm.²

We know that Lubienska attended a party that evening, left with a Polish priest who accompanied her on the tube as far as Earl’s Court, and had only one station to go after the priest alighted.³ But the murder was never solved. More revealing than her puzzling death are the 575 statements collated by the police enquiry, a snapshot of the

¹ *The Times*, 27 May 1957, p.6; *The Times*, 20 August 1957, p.4.

² Emanuel Akinyemi and Vivian Devan in Unsolved Murder of Countess Teresa Lubienska at Gloucester Road Underground Station, Kensington, on 24 May 1957, Statements Material to Report, TNA, MEPO/2/11018, 24 May and 27 May 1957; 30 May 1957 respectively.

³ Kazimerz Krzyzanowski, TNA, MEPO/2/11018, 25 May and 29 May 1957.

eighteen thousand interviews allegedly conducted between late-May and late-August 1957 and most from tube passengers volunteering information about their journeys that they thought pertinent to the case.⁴ As textured accounts of 1950s tube travel, these provide openings into thinking more broadly about the relation between touch, personal space, and time in a proximate space exemplary of, and peculiar to, modernity. Often recounting when normative passenger relations were transgressed, these statements reveal ordinary conditions of travel through extraordinary occurrences: an archive of the incidental.

Given that the incidental appears so normal it seems controversial to suggest that it has a history. But the statements show that what we take for granted as personal space is actually historically specific. We can tease this out through Cyril Power's 1934 linocut *The Tube Train* (Fig.7) which also serves as the cover image of James Vernon's account of 'how Britain became modern'.⁵ A decade earlier Power argued that the 'satanic strength' of modern industry called for an equivalent artistic 'sternness of treatment'.⁶ His image bore this out, the oversized bodies of passengers conforming to the car's curvature, angular limbs mirroring the angularity of newspapers that preserved each passenger's isolation in the midst of their proximity. Touch was prevented at all costs. For Vernon, this marked the end-point of a century-long process by which an increase in population size, density, and mobility made Britain a 'society of strangers': although these changes also entailed reanimation of personal relationships, tube cars heightened worry over the loss of personal space as an increasingly diverse mix of

⁴ *The Times*, 20 August 1957, p.4.

⁵ James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern* (Berkeley: London, 2014).

⁶ Philip Vann, *Cyril Power Linocuts: A Complete Catalogue* (Farnham, 2008), pp.22-23.



Fig.7 Cyril Power, *The Tube Train*, c.1934, Estate of Cyril Power and Osborne Samuel Ltd., Redfern Gallery, London/Bridgeman Images.

passengers were thrown together and forced to develop new strategies of indifference.⁷ But far from being *a priori*, personal space crystallized only in and through the transformation of bodily transactions that informed and were informed by physical transformations of the tube. Power's linocut represents not the 'loss' of pre-existing personal space, but the *production* of that space in interaction with seemingly minor changes in tube travel including electrification, de-compartmentalization, and straphanging.

Personal space was specific to the evolving material conditions of the tube. When, for example, Arthur Tribe informed a 'young foreign looking man' rushing down the stairs of South Kensington station that 'We keep to the right in England', he expressed a tacit etiquette of space that only emerged with the introduction of escalators in the Underground in 1911.⁸ But the statements call for more than a history of tube architecture and technology or even a history 'of' personal space, as if the concept pre-existed the practice.⁹ They instead show that, like an embodied speech act, personal space was realized only in the particularity of every passenger action, its conceptual

⁷ Vernon, *Distant Strangers*, p.xi, p.8, pp.35-37. For a comparable reading of a contemporaneous painting of the New York Subway, see Christoph Lindner on James W. Kerr's *7th Avenue Subway*, 1931, in Christoph Lindner, *Imagining New York City: Literature, Urbanism, and the Visual Arts, 1890-1940*, (Oxford, 2015), pp.163-165. The similarity of Lindner's reading to Vernon's suggests a greater equivalence between American and British modernity than the latter's emphasis on British peculiarity allows. It does, however, support Vernon's critique of the pluralization, and weakening, of modernity as an analytic category. James Vernon and Simon Gunn, 'What Was Liberal Modernity and Why Was It Peculiar in Imperial Britain?', in James Vernon and Simon Gunn (eds.), *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain* (Berkeley: London, 2011), pp.5-6, p.12.

⁸ Arthur Tribe, in Unsolved Murder of Countess Teresa Lubenska at Gloucester Road Underground Station, Kensington, on 24 May 1957, Statements Non-material to Report, TNA, MEPO/2/11019, 25 July 1957.

⁹ For key histories of the tube taking these various approaches, see Christian Wolmar, *The Subterranean Railway: How the London Underground Was Built and How it Changed the City Forever*, (revised, London, 2012); Stephen Halliday, *Underground to Everywhere: London's Underground Railway in the Life of the Capital*, (Stroud, 2004); Richard Dennis, 'Making the Underground Underground', *The London Journal*, 38/3, (November 2013), p.223.

existence contingent upon each interaction between changing tube space and the bodies occupying it. Tribe did not merely ‘articulate’ an existing etiquette of space but brought it into being anew, investing it with his own, national connotations. Personal space was *improvised*, concept and bodily practice mutually shaping one another, rather than either pre-existing or being passively ‘determined’ by physical changes in the tube.

If personal space was improvised, then it was also increasingly improvisational. The opening up of tube cars since the early 1900s – for example through introducing central doors in cars – meant that by the 1950s passengers faced a physically indeterminate space within which they had to improvise relations with one another. June Kitchin recounted how, one night in May 1957, three standing ‘youths’ spent the journey ‘trying to kick each other in the pants and standing on each other[’]s toes’ until they were told to stop.¹⁰ As rising passenger numbers and innovations like grab straps made it more necessary and possible to stand, passengers had to improvise between tacitly agreeing and explicitly enforcing personal space. Underpinning this improvisation were two major transformations: the transferral of private tube lines to public ownership and rising passenger anxiety over the need to rush. I argue that the switch from competition to coordination between lines and the paradox that efficiency improvements only encouraged more rush together drove the restructuring of the tube and the improvisational personal space that resulted. It was these changes that, ultimately, meant passengers came to mind the gap between each other as much as that between train and platform.

Tracing this change matters because it helps us rethink key explanatory frameworks for twentieth-century Britain: subjectivity, governmentality, and modernity. A contained space where the routinization of touch and movement appear paramount, at

¹⁰ June Kitchin, TNA, MEPO/2/11018, 27 May 1957.

first glance the tube seems the perfect example of liberal governmentality: a site where, to adapt Patrick Joyce's phrasing, passengers were ruled to rule themselves. It might appear a site where, through sustained intervention in the material environment, the state paradoxically evacuated itself from direct intervention in the lives of its subjects, creating a space in which those subjects were ostensibly free to act. This would be a space where the careful planning of entrances and exits, lines of movement and points of stasis would, through habituating tube passengers to particular ways of moving, thinking, and interacting, enable them to self-regulate as 'liberal' subjects and, ultimately, ostensibly monitor the state that at the same time guaranteed their freedom.¹¹

We can find echoes of this in J.B. Priestley's account, published in 1932, of how rush hours on the tube turned passengers into 'parcels' to be ordered and made self-ordering: 'Labels are pushed into their hands; trains are promptly loaded with them to full capacity; doors are opened and shut to admit them; they are hustled out, shot up in lifts, and only then, when the sweet cold rush of real air comes to meet them, are they allowed to turn back into ordinary men and women.'¹²

But the evidence of everyday encounters on the tube suggests a different story. Even for a critic such as Priestley, for whom the tube presented a strange 'nightmare of machinery', it would have been a mistake 'to deduce the inner from the outer facts of

¹¹ Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City*, (London, 2003), p.4; Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800*, (Cambridge, 2013), pp.5-6. For examples of such an approach, though not from an explicitly governmentality perspective, see Richard Hornsey, "'He Who Thinks, in Modern Traffic, is Lost": Automation and the Pedestrian Rhythms of Interwar London', in Tim Edensor (ed.), *Geographies of Rhythm: Nature, Place, Mobilities and Bodies* (Aldershot, 2010), p.101, and Richard Dennis, 'The Architecture of Hurry', in Katrina Gulliver and Heléna Tóth (eds), *Cityscapes in History: Creating the Urban Experience*, (Farnham: Burlington, 2014), pp.132-133.

¹² J.B. Priestley, 'Man Underground', in J.B. Priestley, *Self-Selected Essays*, (London, 1932), p.75.

life, to imagine that the mere mechanics give the key to everything'.¹³ Focusing on specific, incidental tube encounters helps us avoid reducing passenger interaction to an expression of material change itself manifesting the pervasiveness of the liberal state. Instead, it allows us to think of a more interactive, variable, and localized relation 'between' bodies and their environment than that allowed by the paradigm of governmentality as often applied. Although recent work on liberal subjectivity counters these problems by highlighting how the use and failure of technology shape its power effects – pipes burst, concepts of privacy and secrecy conflict with attempts to make the city visible and legible – this nonetheless remains within a paradigm in which action is overdetermined by 'the rules of the liberal game'.¹⁴ This chapter instead shows how touch on the tube was not shaped only within these rules, but rather involved what Michel Foucault in his last public lectures conceived as 'practices of the self' standing *independent* of and in relation to techniques of government.¹⁵ In brief, personal space as it emerged on the tube by the 1950s followed its own improvised and improvisational logic.

This argument has two important implications. If personal space was not the defence of subjective boundaries that always existed but itself a contingent category that *constituted* those boundaries, then historicizing it calls into question the predicate of an

¹³ Priestley, 'Man Underground', p.78.

¹⁴ Joyce, *State of Freedom*, p.54; Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910*, (Chicago: London, 2008); Tom Crook, 'Secrecy and Liberal Modernity in Victorian and Edwardian England', in Simon Gunn and James Vernon (eds.), *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain*, (Berkeley: London, 2011), pp.72-90. Citation from Joyce, *State of Freedom*, pp.29-30.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, '1 February 1984: First Hour', in Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-1984*, Frédéric Gros (ed.), Graham Burchell (trans.), (Basingstoke, 2012), p.7. For a discussion of these lectures see Stuart Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade*, (Cambridge: Malden, 2016), pp.201-204.

autonomous self underpinning some histories of modernity and governmentality.¹⁶ When Douglas Wood claimed that, being a ‘regular passenger’, he took no notice of fellow passengers and could not even recall whether he had been sitting or standing on the night of the murder, he hinted at how the habitual practice of personal space shaped its conceptualisation, in turn shaping the very perception of himself *as* a body in relation to others.¹⁷ And if personal space constituted subjective boundaries that were only ever contingent, then it could never mark the point at which Britain ‘became modern’. It could never mark the point at which Britons ‘finally’ became indifferent strangers but instead calls into question the concept of modernity as a description of a singular, successive condition of being itself.¹⁸ That is the critical challenge of historicizing touch on the tube.

Minding the Gap: Automatic Doors and the Negotiation of Space in Tube Cars

The problem of minding the gap emerged at a point of crisis for the tube. Over the Great War tube traffic increased by two thirds and came to constitute half of London’s total

¹⁶ Despite its important critique of notions of the state as an ontological object and of distinctions between the natural and the social, recent governmentality theory still assumes, to differing degrees, an autonomous existence and implied coherence for the human subject in its relation ‘with’ the non-human world—a dualism readily admitted as problematic. See Patrick Joyce and Tony Bennett, ‘Material Powers: Introduction’, in Patrick Joyce and Tony Bennett (eds), *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History, and the Material Turn*, (London: New York, 2010), p.11. For a critique of this problem through an historicization of ‘habit’ see Tony Bennett, ‘Habit, Instinct, Survivals: Repetition, History, Biopower’, in Simon Gunn and James Vernon (eds), *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain*, (Berkeley: London, 2011), pp.102-118.

¹⁷ Douglas Wood, TNA, MEPO/2/11019, 4 June 1957; Shigehisa Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine*, (New York, 1999), p.13.

¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (trans.), Rolf Tiedemann (ed.), (Cambridge, MA: London, 2002), p.116, Da,4.

public transport journeys.¹⁹ Partly this was an effect of wartime conditions as over a third of buses were commandeered for front-line service, resulting in a shift of passengers from overground to underground.²⁰ But it reflected a longer-term trend caused by the mushrooming of London's population by over 4.2 million between 1861 and 1911 and the development of the West End as a leisure district and Whitehall as a nexus for commuting bureaucrats.²¹ Traffic increase reached a critical point during the War as labour and materials shortages made the repair or addition of new rolling stock impossible. On the District Line alone, only 504 of 544 cars owned were serviceable because there were no means to repair the remaining forty.²² This, combined with rising passenger numbers, resulted in worsening overcrowding, with a 36 percent increase in the average number of passengers carried per Metropolitan Railway car over the War.²³ By 1919, the particular economic exigencies of the tube forced a new economy of bodies within it.

The problem was not just insufficient cars but uncooperative passengers. At the 1919 London Traffic Enquiry one company manager stated that the maximum service of forty trains per hour required stops of no more than twenty-five seconds, an increase to an average of fifty-five seconds reducing the number of trains by ten per hour, and carrying capacity by a quarter.²⁴ Delays caused by congestion and dawdling passengers meant that in practice the timetable rarely converged with reality.²⁵ Various measures were attempted to align passengers with the tube's accelerated rhythm. At exceptionally

¹⁹ Wolmar, *Subterranean Railway*, p.219.

²⁰ London Traffic, 1919, LMA, ACC/1297/MET/10/381, p.5; T.C. Barker and Michael Robbins, *A History of London Transport: Passenger Travel and the Development of the Metropolis*, (2 vols, London, 1974), II, pp.193-194.

²¹ Wolmar, *Subterranean Railway*, pp.119-120.

²² London Traffic, 1919, LMA, ACC/1297/MET/10/381, p.8.

²³ London Traffic Enquiry, 1919, LMA, ACC/1297/MET/10/381, p.4.

²⁴ London Traffic Enquiry, 1919, LMA, ACC/1297/MET/10/381, p.9.

²⁵ London Traffic, 1919, LMA, ACC/1297/MET/10/381, p.10.

busy stations like Oxford Circus barriers were erected on platforms to delay the crush until passengers had alighted, at which point a sliding bar was opened and boarding allowed. But this proved self-defeating as, given a free exit, alighting passengers were ‘perhaps a little more leisurely in their movements’, so extending the layover the measure was supposed to reduce. Knightsbridge station experimented with ‘organized queuing’; while effective at quiet stations, the scheme proved unworkable at congested stations servicing multiple destinations.²⁶ The difficulty was finding solutions with sufficient flexibility to accommodate variations in traffic between stations and at different times of day.

The layout of end-gate stock was especially troublesome. With the exception of Metropolitan and District stock, which had doors to every car compartment, the non-compartmentalized cars of every other line were only accessible from gated platforms at their ends before central doors were experimentally introduced in 1915.²⁷ Passengers were slow in moving between train and platform because the procedure happened at only two points of a car, or for the City and South London line at only one point, and was regulated by gatemen assigned to each car. Limited accessibility increased average layover as it took longer to board and alight and meant that full car capacity was often not reached because passengers alighting at the next station refused to inconvenience their exit by moving to the car centre. Longer stopping times meant fewer trains, less carrying capacity and, combined with unequal distribution of passengers in cars, longer waiting times for would-be passengers (Fig.8). Although a perennial problem, immediately after the Great War these structural complaints converged with the explosion and ostensible naiveté of passenger traffic and the rolling stock shortage to

²⁶ W.E. Blake, ‘The Traffic Problem of the “Underground”’, 15 January 1918, LMA, ACC/1297/UER/4/73, p.8.

²⁷ Graeme J. Bruce, *The London Underground Tube Stock* (Surrey, 1988), p.45.

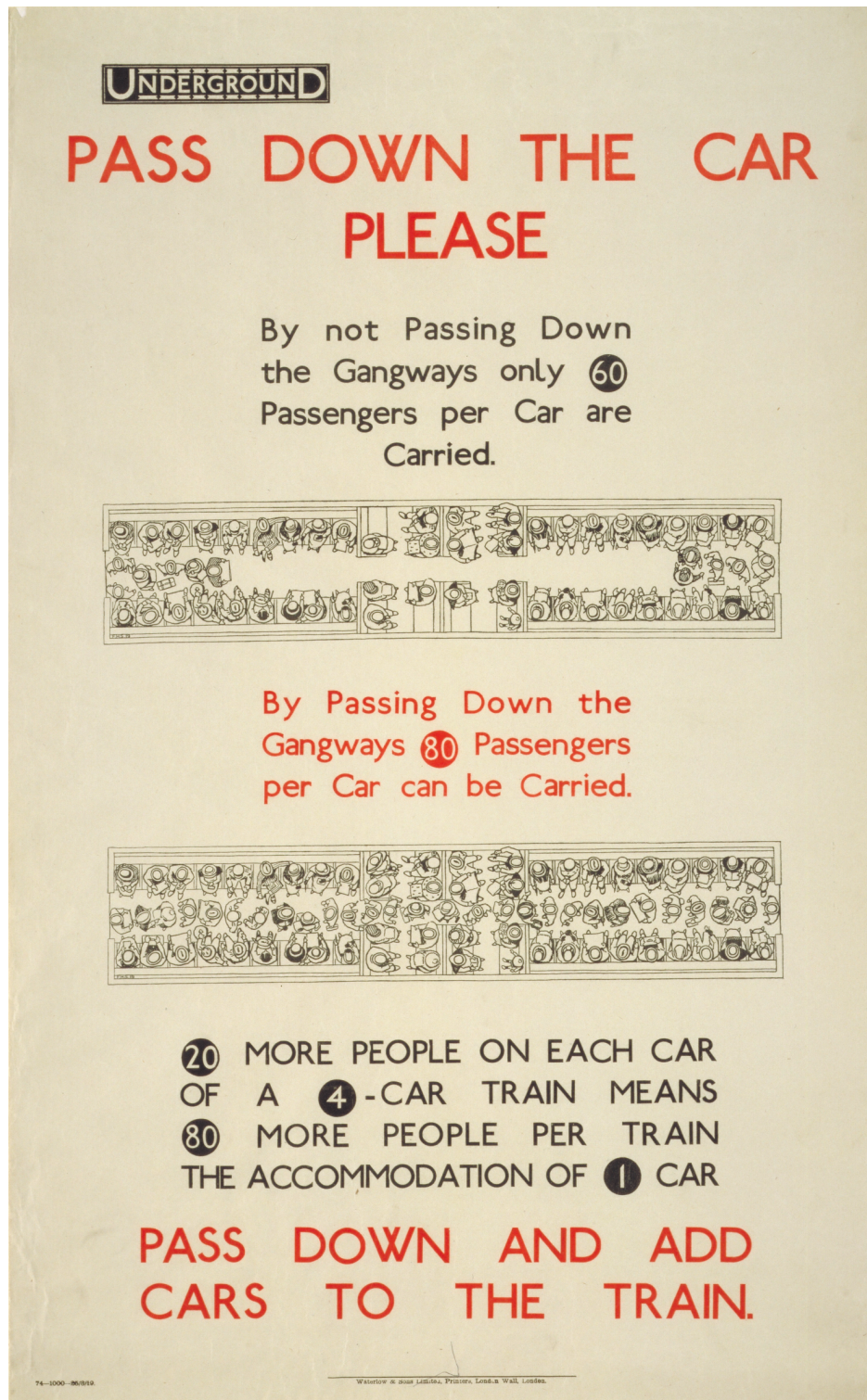


Fig.8 F.H. Stingemore, *Pass Down the Car Please*, 1919, LTM, 1983/4/808.

demand radical changes to the tube. Underlying those changes was a transformation in the tube's source of capital.

Tube lines were expensive. In the mid-1920s a line cost £850,000 per mile to construct and equip. It could be operated at a cost of two-thirds of its traffic receipts at the scale of fares for 1926, meaning it had to carry fifteen million passengers a year if every passenger travelled an average of three miles.²⁸ That was a lot of traffic for a line to generate by itself without buses depositing additional passengers at stations.²⁹ Because demand responded negatively to even small fare increases, raising fares to boost revenue was not a serious option. In 1913 the upper fare limit for the average commuter journey was estimated at 4d., any increase above this severely deterring passengers. The viability of tube lines primarily depended on traffic quantity. Given post-war overcrowding this might not seem problematic, but at the same time as being expensive to operate, tube lines were also unprofitable even when paying their way. In 1913 the Combine, that is, all tube railways excluding the Metropolitan, produced only enough profit for a meagre 2 percent dividend.³⁰ Low profits made private investment unattractive as well as making it expensive to borrow capital. The tube therefore depended on heavy traffic to cover costs, but even then remained a low-profit enterprise.

This presented a paradoxical situation in 1919. Though overcrowding was severe, this was due to the rolling stock shortage rather than because lines were running at maximum capacity. Because the tube's economic viability depended on traffic volume it had further to increase its traffic, yet could only do this with the addition of rolling stock to alleviate existing congestion and expand long-term capacity. At £3.65

²⁸ Frank Pick, 'Growth and Form in the Modern City', 3 January 1926, LTM, PA16, p.21.

²⁹ Lord Ashfield, 'London's Traffic Problem Reconsidered', *The Nineteenth Century and After*, XCVI/570 (August 1924), LTM, E11, p.171.

³⁰ Albert Stanley [Lord Ashfield], 'London Traffic in 1913', September 1915, LTM, PE1, p.38.

million the changes required could not be met by even optimistic projections of the amount the Combine could raise through profits or borrowing. The estimated shortfall was £2.75 million.³¹ Prospects worsened when the economy slumped in 1920, reducing annual passenger journeys per capita from 410 to 380 the following year.³² The tube simply could not fund itself.

Relief arrived with the 1921 Trade Facilities Act, which enabled tube companies to borrow at below-market interest rates guaranteed by the Treasury and so raise the capital necessary to expand service capacity. Though a palliative measure, its significance was far greater as the first public financial intervention, common to all companies, in the tube's history. It increased the size and unity of the tube's capital base, accentuating a trend towards financial integration between tube companies and with buses. It presaged a move from private to independent administrative control, from competition to coordination across all London transport, underlain by a shift from private to public ownership of capital. Most of these changes were only fully realized a decade later but what is significant here is how the changing economy of the tube already intersected with a changing economy of touch on the network.

Work soon began refitting the City and South London Railway (CSLR). When it opened in 1890 the line carried three-car trains pulled by the first underground electric locomotives. Excluding end-platforms, each car was a stunted twenty-six feet long, accommodating thirty-six passengers seated on facing longitudinal seats; no provision was made for standing passengers. High-backed upholstery and slit windows soon earned the cars the wry nickname of 'padded cells'. Their cattle-truck exterior, sparse lighting, and absent seat or class divisions did nothing to dispel the impression (Fig.9). Under the renovation programme the line's tunnels were widened to comply with the

³¹ London Traffic, 1919, LMA, ACC/1297/MET/10/381, p.12.

³² Frank Pick, 'Passenger Movement in London', n.d. (c.1923), LTM, PA12, p.3.

standard diameter of 11ft 8.25in and its platforms were lengthened to accommodate more and longer cars. The new 'standard' stock, introduced first on the CSLR from 1923 and subsequently rolled out on other lines, increased seating capacity to up to forty-eight passengers per car. This potentially increased overall seating capacity from 160, or at a push 180, passengers per five-car CSLR train (1890 stock) to what in 1920 had been considered the ideal of 336 seated passengers per seven-car train (1923 stock).³³ This transformed the conditions of passenger relations on the CSLR. More spacious cars meant more flexible space for passengers to choose when they sat next to others and who those others were. A mixture of transverse and longitudinal seating divided by armrests reduced the possibility for passengers cramming in next to each other, eyeballing their opposites, though this remained possible for facing longitudinal seats (Fig.10).

While such changes were important, they continued developments in tube car space started when four new lines opened between 1900 and 1907. More significant was the inclusion of automated central doors on new rolling stock. Central doors were automated on forty new cars in 1919 but only became a widespread occurrence when introduced on the CSLR in 1923. Between 1923 and 1927, 736 cars with automated central doors were ordered to entirely replace the manually-operated gate-stock on all Combine lines.³⁴ Seemingly a minor change, automated central doors fundamentally reordered touch on the tube for decades to come. By changing how passengers moved between train and platform they eased movement within cars and shifted the way passenger conduct was regulated.

³³ Bruce, *Tube Stock*, pp.53-57; Lord Ashfield, 'London's Traffic Problem', May 1920, LTM, PE10, p.10.

³⁴ Bruce, *Tube Stock*, p.49, pp.53-59.



Fig.9 Interior view of a CSLR 'padded cell' carriage, 1890 stock, n.d. (1890-1900), LTM, 1998/75396.



Fig.10 Interior view of 1923 'standard stock' car, no.820, c.1920-1925, LTM, 1998/81322.

Albert Francis's journey one evening in May 1957 is an example. A man sat opposite Francis eating a bar of chocolate, and another sat to his right. Two women sat to his left. The man sat to his right asked the man eating chocolate, whom he did not seem to know, for a piece, which he was given. A minute later he asked for more chocolate but was told it was 'all gone'. He then spat on the other man, drew a knife, and leaned over him just as the train pulled into Gloucester Road station. The threatened man alighted but the knife-wielding man remained.³⁵ This kind of occurrence owed much to the removal of gatemen effected by 1920s tube stock. In contrast to trains requiring up to six gatemen to operate the car gates, by 1927 automated doors required only one guard and removed the need for gatemen.³⁶ At the same time, 'minding the gap' entered London Underground discourse as new central doors created gaps at curved platforms (Fig.11). No longer a regulating presence of conduct on trains, tube staff came to manage the gap between train and platform while passengers were left to manage the gap between each other. While at Gloucester Road Francis leaned out of the car to report the incident to a porter, who only replied 'O.K. And mind the doors' and took no further action. The new tube stock opened up a gap between train and platform but also a charged gap between passengers freed from direct regulation and the constraint on movement imposed by end-gates.

When the train pulled away the man with the knife sat next to the two women who got up and sought reassuring seats next to Francis.³⁷ Left to themselves, passengers developed mutual understandings of personal space through which it was at once reified *and* transformed in every iteration.³⁸ Being a 'stranger' on the tube, as Cyril Power's

³⁵ Albert Francis, TNA, MEPO/2/11019, 25 May 1957.

³⁶ Bruce, *Tube Stock*, p.57.

³⁷ Albert Francis, TNA, MEPO/2/11019, 25 May 1957.

³⁸ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p.119, D10a,5.



Fig.11 Topical Press, Waterloo Underground Station, Bakerloo Line, 17 January 1936, LTM, 1998/88454.

linocut depicted it, necessitated a co-operation that *deferred* the inviolate boundaries which that co-operation was meant to fix. If tube travel exemplified modernity, then this was a modernity in which spatial relations between passengers became increasingly contingent, uncertain, and necessarily negotiated. Through the introduction of automated doors in the 1920s, the tube's modernity developed as a condition of spatial un-decidability requiring tacit agreement between passengers rather than the fixed anomie depicted by Power.

The novelty of this tacit knowledge of the tactile was shown by its advent in 1920s film. Opening in a crowded tube car, the melodramatic romance *Underground* (1928) depicted the ways passengers could, literally, put a foot out of place.³⁹ At the entrance of an attractive young woman a soldier and sailor jointly defer their seats, only to have them filled by other male passengers. One of these seat-grabbers, an electrician called Bert, then reads the newspaper over the shoulder of his neighbour, who glowers back. At the next stop insult is redressed with injury as the departing sailor gleefully treads on Bert's foot, while the latter's exasperated neighbour flings the newspaper onto his lap. By introducing its protagonist through his tube car misdemeanors, *Underground* reveals how tacit norms of personal space were gaining currency and becoming central to understandings of British character over the 1920s. Yet at the same time, spectacularizing those infringements showed they were still new enough to pass comment. The novelty of tacit tactile norms meant they still, ironically, depended on satirical, visual explication of their transgression.

³⁹ *Underground* (Dir. Anthony Asquith, 1928).

Economies of Coal and Bodies: Electrification and the De-segregation of Space

Underground concludes with a vertiginous fight between Bert and Bill, Bert's competitor in love for a woman named Nell, on the rooftops of Lots Road power station. As the tube's principal power source in 1928, Lots Road is the ultimate stage for enacting the sexual jealousy that drives the plot and which originates in a tube car. The film's return to its primal scene highlights a crucial factor governing tactile relations on the tube: its power source. Two decades before automated doors, the possible forms of passenger interaction were already being reshaped by the restructuring of car space attendant on the transition from steam to electric power.

In part, worsening travel conditions necessitated this transition. In 1897 a Board of Trade enquiry estimated that the nineteen trains run each way per hour on the Metropolitan Railway emitted approximately 825 gallons of water as steam. With 528 passenger trains and fourteen goods trains running on this line per day, and with few ventilation shafts, the atmosphere in the tunnels was becoming insufferable. In response, the enquiry approved additional shafts on the condition that the Metropolitan electrified its trains within three years of an Act sanctioning this.⁴⁰ Competition from other railways provided an even more important inducement for electrification. Charging a flat fare of 2d. and offering smoke-free tunnels, the new electric Central London Railway, opened in 1900, poached a healthy portion of Metropolitan traffic, which fell from ninety-six million in 1899 to eighty-eight million in 1901.⁴¹ Made possible by the creation of the giant Underground Electric Railways Company of London (UERL), more electric lines quickly followed. The Bakerloo, Charing Cross, and Piccadilly lines

⁴⁰ Report, Enquiry into Ventilation, 1897, LMA, ACC/1297/MET/10/250/002, p.vi, pp.ix-x, pp.1-6.

⁴¹ Barker and Robbins, *History of London Transport*, II, p.115.

all opened between March 1906 and June 1907. Anticipating the inevitable, the Metropolitan began a partial electric service in January 1905 while the District, now absorbed into UERL, followed suite.⁴²

UERL opened a coal power station at Lots Road in 1902 while the Metropolitan operated its own at Neasden from 1904. The tube's power source was relocated from locomotives to colossal Thames-side power stations, in turn shifting the possible ordering of bodies within tube cars themselves. In an analogy made on a poster at the time, 'The turbines sleep/Like tops, and out/Of their sleep/Comes the strength/To move London'.⁴³ That movement occurred not just across the space tubes traversed but also *within* the restructured space of their cars as electrification ushered in the de-compartmentalization of rolling stock and subsequent mixing of classes and genders.

Prior to the CSLR opening in 1890, all tube stock was one of three classes and divided into compartments. In the 1860s the Metropolitan's first-class cars were divided into six compartments, with total seating for up to sixty, and its second- and third-class cars into eight compartments.⁴⁴ While it still reserved cars for women and smokers, the CSLR was the first line to provide classless, non-compartmentalized cars, but in practice a car half-partitioned into two sets of sixteen seats was not much different from a compartment on the Metropolitan, even if all classes now sat together. The major change to tube stock arrived with the Central Line and the UERL lines and Metropolitan Line competing with it. At 13ft longer and 1ft 8in wider than CSLR cars and with seating for an additional sixteen passengers plus straphangers, the classless, non-compartmentalized Central cars provided far more potential for social and spatial

⁴² Barker and Robbins, *History of London Transport*, II, p.106.

⁴³ Thomas Way, *Turbines, Lots Road, Chelsea*, (1911), LTM, 1983/4/8124.

⁴⁴ Henry Mayhew, 'Metropolitan Railway', in Henry Mayhew (ed.), *The Shops and Companies of London and the Trades and Manufactories of Great Britain* (2 vols, London, 1865), I, p.150.

mixing.⁴⁵ The same was true of the three new UERL lines which ran motor cars with seating capacity of around forty-two passengers and trailers with seating capacity of around fifty-two passengers in trains up to six cars long. All cars were classless, non-compartmentalized, and entered by end-gates.

Electric trains with longer and more cars were made possible by the development in 1897 of multiple-unit control cars, or motor cars jointly controllable from a single point on a train. Long trains could now be powered without the necessity for heavy electric locomotives. Single UERL multiple-unit cars far exceeded whole CSLR trains in terms of power (480 h.p. compared to 100 h.p.) while still carrying over forty seated passengers.⁴⁶ Greater power meant quicker acceleration which, combined with an electric system of automatic signalling and the introduction in 1930 of electro-pneumatic braking, enabled shorter intervals between trains and a more frequent service.⁴⁷ Trains could also travel faster. Whereas the average underground steam train travelled ten to eleven miles per hour in the 1860s, electrification increased this to fourteen miles per hour by 1900 and eighteen to nineteen miles per hour by 1929.⁴⁸

It was not only distance that increasing speeds eliminated but the spatial differentiation of class. Shorter journey times reduced the necessity for class and gender divisions by cutting the duration of potentially awkward social interaction. Where class divisions remained, as with some Circle Line trains in 1906, the more luxurious accommodation of new classless rolling stock made them redundant as passengers waited for the latter rather than shelling out for second class on the former.⁴⁹ Electrification was the final blow to a spatial layout that had only infrequently worked

⁴⁵ Bruce, *Tube Stock*, p.13, p.26.

⁴⁶ Barker and Robbins, *History of London Transport*, II, p.111.

⁴⁷ LMA, ACC/1297/UER/4/73, p.6.

⁴⁸ Operating Manager's Personal Letter No.8, 29 November 1929, LMA, ACC/1297/UER/4/077, p.6.

⁴⁹ Report, A.C. Ellis, 22 February 1906, LMA, ACC/1297/MET/10/163, p.1.

as intended. One first-class passenger in 1883 recalled his horror when, '[o]n arriving at the South Kensington platform, a seething, distracted, and vociferous crowd' poured onto the station from the Fisheries Exhibition. A 'forlorn hope' of people 'tumbled and hustled' into every compartment, regardless of class, until each became 'a miniature "Black Hole of Calcutta"'.⁵⁰ While overcrowding in first-class cars here resulted from the tube's limited additional capacity in the face of traffic fluctuations, by 1919 the rise in average passenger density made straphanging in first-class cars more norm than exception. Even if this did not entail class mixing, one MP at the London Traffic Enquiry still regarded it as a breach of contract to not provide seats for all first-class passengers and suggested that segregated cars be abolished.⁵¹ In practice, changes in passenger traffic had already overtaken the suggestion. In 1913, nearly all lines were classless and first-class traffic accounted for only 4 percent of all traffic, excluding workmen's and season tickets.⁵² For nearly all lines, electrification made class segregation no longer socially necessary or, increasingly, practically possible.

The discontinuation of class segregation and women-only compartments converged with the increasing presence of white-collar female passengers to dissolve the former ordering of tactile relations on the tube.⁵³ After the removal of gatemen, women in vulnerable situations in non-compartmentalized cars were more compelled to manage their surrounding space, especially relying on the tacit cooperation of other passengers. When Mabel Petley caught the tube from Wimbledon one evening in May 1957 she chose an empty car. But a young man soon joined her and stood at the doors nearest her seat clutching a knife and staring. After an older man entered and sat at the

⁵⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, 31 October, 1883, LMA, ACC/1297/MET/10/38/2.

⁵¹ Minutes of a Meeting of London MPs, 12 May 1919, LMA, ACC/1297/MET/10/381, p.17.

⁵² LTM, PE1, p.30.

⁵³ Valerie Thompson, Dorothy Baker, Patricia Rowan, TNA, MEPO/2/11019, 27 May 1957, 4 June 1957, 12 June 1957 respectively.

end of the car Petley joined him, pretending she needed a light. Besides the obvious wish to distance herself from the knife, this was also a case of readjusting a postural economy by substituting oppositional with adjacent proximity, so interrupting eye contact, and disparate height with the equal height of two seated passengers. The gesture also enacted a response to the subcultural challenge posed by some 1950s adolescents, the forty-nine-year-old secretary reclaiming a bodily-forfeited social status by moving from the standing man ‘of Teddy boy appearance’ to her seated peer, though in so doing calling that status further into question.⁵⁴

This economy of bodies was particular to higher numbers of independent female travellers and anxiety surrounding Teddy Boy culture in the 1950s. But it also owed to earlier changes in the speed and shape of tube cars caused by the relocation of coal as a power source from within tube tunnels to outside of them. The bodily technology of personal space on the tube was informed by and responded to transformations in the technology of the electric engine.

The History of Impatience: Temporal Perception and Escalator Etiquette

At 5.26pm on 13 February 1928 Mr J. Broom was in a hurry. As a compartment stock train drew away from Baker Street station Broom dashed down the platform steps and, disregarding shouts from dispatch staff, leapt towards a compartment. Somehow his foot slipped, though, causing him to fall between the car and platform and be wrenched onto the permanent way. He did not survive the incident.⁵⁵ Though Broom no doubt had reason to rush, the next train would not have been a long wait. When the Circle Line

⁵⁴ Mabel Petley, TNA, MEPO/2/11019, 27 May 1957.

⁵⁵ Register of Accidents and Special Occurrences No.7, 1921-1928, LMA, ACC/1297/MET/4/003, 13 February 1928.

opened in 1884 the average interval between peak-time trains was ten minutes; by 1897 this had been cut to three. Electric trains were even more regular, with peak-time trains arriving every two minutes when the Piccadilly and Charing Cross Lines opened in 1906 and 1907.⁵⁶

Yet rather than resulting in nonchalant acceptance that a missed train meant briefly waiting for another, efficiency improvements failed to alleviate passenger frustration. Interwar Metropolitan Railway accident books show that Broom was not the only one to suffer injury when rushing for a train despite the decreasing reason to do so.⁵⁷ It was almost as if passengers hurried *because* tube travel was more efficient.⁵⁸ One of the causes of this paradox was the increased regularity of electric tube trains: as intervals between trains dropped, their perceived duration increasingly diverged upwards from their actual duration, generating continued frustration at the perceived inefficiency of the journey overall. That is, because we tend to overestimate short time periods and underestimate long ones, a reduction in the duration of a short interval – that of waiting for a train – paradoxically led to increasing *overestimation* of that interval.⁵⁹ In short, as tube passengers had to wait less time for trains, they became more keenly aware of the time they *did* have to wait. Although not exclusive to electric tube travel, this sense of time assumed a particular coherence on the tube in a way it did not

⁵⁶ Wolmar, *Subterranean Railway*, pp.86-88, p.98; Desmond F. Croome, *The Circle Line, Including the Hammersmith and City Line* (Harrow Weald, 2003), p.24; Barker and Robbins, *History of London Transport*, II, p.116.

⁵⁷ LMA, ACC/1297/MET/4/003; Register of Accidents and Special Occurrences No.9, 1932-1933, LMA, ACC/1297/MET/4/005,

⁵⁸ For the new pace of tube travel after electrification see Edwin Pugh, *The City of the World: A Book About London and the Londoner*, (London, n.d. [c.1912]), pp.116-118.

⁵⁹ Physician Karl von Vierordt first formulated this inverse relation between the perception of time intervals and their duration in his *Der Zeitsinn nach Versuchen* (1868). On 'Vierordt's Law' see John Wearden, *The Psychology of Time Perception*, (London, 2016), pp.12-13, and Helga Lejeune and J. H. Wearden, 'Vierordt's *The Experimental Study of the Time Sense* (1868) and its Legacy', *European Journal of Cognitive Psychology*, 21/6, (August 2009), pp.941-960.

on buses until after the mid-1920s.⁶⁰ Whereas tube trains stopped at every station in short, uniform intervals, before the 1920s motorbuses had neither a timetabled service nor fixed stops. They instead collected and deposited passengers as and when required. Fixed stops were experimentally introduced in 1920, with an average of four compulsory stops per mile and an additional two optional ones, but it was only after the 1924 London Traffic Act that buses were required to provide a regular service on set approved routes.⁶¹ Waiting for the bus was therefore different from waiting for the tube. The length of the wait and duration of the journey depended on the quantity of bus traffic and number of stops a bus made before and after collecting a passenger. Even though the time between trains might be shorter than that between buses it was precisely its predictable brevity that generated impatience.

This might seem even less reasonable given that in 1920 the average tube train speed was eighteen miles per hour compared with ten miles per hour, including three to four stops per mile, for buses.⁶² But in their early years motorbuses appeared more convenient than tube trains, as they surely were for short-distances. Buses compared favourably against the tube because they were accessible at street level and because tickets could be purchased on board; bus routes and the quantity of buses could also respond to geographical and temporal variations in demand.⁶³ While these features already applied to horse omnibuses, they combined with the increased acceleration of motorbuses to place them beyond tramways in terms of speed (averaging nine miles per

⁶⁰ For the increasing attention given to short time intervals from the late-nineteenth century see Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918*, (Cambridge, MA: London, 1983, reissued 2003), pp.110-111.

⁶¹ Frank Pick, 'The Place of the Motor Bus in Urban Passenger Transport', October 1920, LTM, PA5, p.4; LTM, E11, p.176.

⁶² LTM, PA5, p.4; LTM, PE10, pp.7-8.

⁶³ LTM, PA5, pp.7-8.

hour) and in competition with the tube in terms of convenience.⁶⁴ ‘On the comparatively short journeys with which we deal,’ worried the tube’s superintendent of the line in 1918, ‘any time spent in waiting [...] bears a large proportion to the total time occupied on the journey, and, if unduly lengthy, will be sufficient to deter passengers from using the Railways’. Inefficiencies could reduce the speed of a tube journey to only four miles per hour, and the actual time spent travelling to less than a third of the total journey time, making it much quicker to travel short distances by bus.⁶⁵

One way for tube companies to reorganize passenger flow was to change how passengers moved between platform and booking hall.⁶⁶ Electrification made more powerful lifts possible but early models attracted negative comment from passengers who resented crushing together.⁶⁷ The alternative, developed soon after, was the escalator. The first made its remarkable debut in 1906 at Holloway Road Station as a rotating double helix that conveyed passengers through a vertical shaft. It was declared irredeemably unsafe after a day of service. The next to enter operation, a linear design, opened at Earl’s Court station in October 1911.

Escalators rationalized movement between booking hall and platform by changing the relationship between the distribution of passengers and the speed at which they moved. What escalators lost in speed compared to lifts they gained through evenly spacing passengers and dividing them from those in a hurry. At a rate of one hundred feet per minute the first was, albeit optimistically, projected to carry 10,800 passengers

⁶⁴ LTM, PA5, p.5.

⁶⁵ LMA, ACC/1297/UER/4/73, pp.1-2.

⁶⁶ See also the introduction of automatic ticketing: Operating Manager’s Personal Letter No.14, LMA, ACC/1297/UER/4/077, 16 November 1932; Report on Automatic Ticket Machines by Messrs. Holt, Ballingall and Fiske, 14 July 1919, LMA, ACC/1297/MET/10/355.

⁶⁷ Wolmar, *Subterranean Railway*, p.154.

each direction per hour.⁶⁸ By contrast, the three high-speed lifts at Hampstead station, which operated at 360 feet per minute, or a thirty-second service over 180 feet, were conservatively estimated to carry only 2,400 passengers in only one direction per hour.⁶⁹ Through the regular arrangement of space occupied across time, escalators conveyed a greater number of passengers per hour. Though lifts travelled faster, their discontinuous service condensed space into a smaller number of discrete blocks occupied across time; passengers crossed the distance quicker, but only through collecting at lift entrances and jostling in when it arrived. This increased overcrowding, frustrated passengers, and caused further delays. In an incident at Lancaster Gate station one passenger left behind by an ascending lift rang the call bell continuously until it reached the top landing and returned. When he arrived at the booking hall he expressed annoyance at the lift attendant by jamming his walking stick between the lift doors to prevent them from closing.⁷⁰ In contrast with lifts, escalators achieved a continuous sequentialization of space and time between booking hall and platform, reordering tactile relations between passengers through regular spacing and reducing impatience by leaving room for sprinters. If, that is, passengers stood on the right.

The etiquette of standing on the right of escalators coincided with, and in part resulted from, the apparent convenience of motorbus travel. Curbside access to faster buses necessitated rationalizing access to tube trains, part of which involved enabling passengers to overtake. Barriers and signs prompted the new conduct. On the first escalators the handrail cut diagonally rightward across the point where the steps evened out, allowing those standing on the right to step off without being cut up by those

⁶⁸ *The Illustrated London News*, 14 October 1911, p.593; Operating Manager's Personal Letter No.8, LMA, ACC/1297/UER/4/077, 29 November 1929, p.9.

⁶⁹ Letter from W.Y. Lewis to Mr Agnew and Mr Baker, 28 February 1930, TfLA, (NEW) LT/150/014.

⁷⁰ Statement by London Transport employee (anon.), n.d. (c. June 1963), TfLA, (NEW) LT1455/1276.

walking on the left (Fig.12). Early signs seem to have directed passengers to step off with the left foot first but at some point this changed to the right foot.⁷¹ The latter instruction was sufficiently well established by 1928 to be satirized by *Underground*, which showed a puzzled soldier struggling not to step off left foot first, the convention for military step.⁷²

Although these instructions standardized the space between passengers they did not, however, prevent unwanted touch and in some instances encouraged it. One afternoon in May 1957 Susan Haynes arrived at the Lyons Corner House on Coventry Street for her shift. Before she began work she discovered a vertical cut running nearly five inches down the back of her skirt, slightly to the left. A little earlier, when stepping onto the Piccadilly Circus station escalator, she had noticed a young man standing at the bottom walk smartly behind her onto the lower step and, thinking this suspicious, clung onto her handbag. It only later transpired that it was not her handbag she had to watch, the position of the slit being consistent with the area exposed as she stood on the right of the escalator.⁷³ Since escalators equalized the distance between passengers and separated the fast from the slow, the hustle of lifts gradually gave way to the apparent safety of open, regularized space – and the risk that assurance created.

By 1919, the severe bus shortage in London meant less competition with the tube and so less cause for impatience with its comparative inconvenience. The growing coordination between tube services and London General Omnibus Company (LGOC) buses since 1912 also meant passengers increasingly saw each as supplementing rather than substituting the other. But new grounds for impatience soon emerged which contributed to further rolling stock restructuring. One of these was the increasing

⁷¹ *The Illustrated London News*, 14 October 1911, p.595; *Underground* (1928).

⁷² I am grateful to Lynda Nead for this comment.

⁷³ Susan Haynes, TNA, MEPO/2/11019, 31 May 1957.



Fig.12 Upper landing of the escalator connecting the District and Bakerloo/Northern Line platforms at Charing Cross (now Embankment) station, c. March 1914, LTM, 1998/73649.

difference between running for the tube and running for the bus. After automated central doors were introduced to new rolling stock in 1919, hurrying was no longer dictated by gatemen closing car platforms but by air-compressed doors. Boarding buses, by contrast, was regulated by conductors, automated doors only appearing on public central London services in 1965.⁷⁴ Automated doors induced further hurry by presenting a 'beatable' target. Initially, the edges were sensitized with contact breakers, allowing passengers to cut the circuit of closing doors and force their way into cars but this feature was soon removed, apparently because by encouraging hurry the system was causing the delays it was intended to resolve.⁷⁵

The ferocious resurgence of competition between buses also caused impatience with the tube. Between late 1919 and mid 1924 total bus stock rocketed from 2,761, with a seating capacity of 93,000, to 4,790, with a seating capacity of 220,000, a 73- and 137 percent increase respectively. Over the same period annual bus traffic increased from 727 million to 1340 million, an 84 percent increase which near-negated the capacity gains.⁷⁶ Within this growth in bus numbers the new player, the first of which began running in August 1922, was the independent, or 'pirate', bus.⁷⁷ Although only a fraction of the total increase, independents offered alternative bus travel separate from the LGOC and in some cases altogether more frenetic.⁷⁸ Rather than carving out new routes some independents tried capturing existing traffic by racing competitors or even changing direction if there was a larger queue of passengers on the other side of the

⁷⁴ Bruce, *Tube Stock*, p.49; Colin Curtis, *Buses of London: An Illustrated Review*, (2nd edn, London, 1979), pp.145-148; Ken Blacker, *Routemaster*, (2nd edn, 2 vols, Harrow Weald, 1995), I, pp.84-86.

⁷⁵ Bruce, *Tube Stock*, p.50.

⁷⁶ LTM, E11, p.167.

⁷⁷ For horse-powered forerunners of the 'pirate' motor bus, operating in the 1890s, see Shaw Desmond, *London Nights of Long Ago*, (London, 1927), p.41.

⁷⁸ LGOC bus drivers occasionally responded in equal measure: see the traffic accident case before Lambeth Police Court: Lambeth Police Court minute book, LMA, PS/LAM/B/01/006, 20 April 1926.

road. Convenience and accessibility, not fares, were the competitive stakes; a contrast to the tube, it seemed, with its labyrinthine tunnels and synchronized denial of automated doors working on a timetabled service.⁷⁹ For Lord Ashfield, UERL general manager, the solution to passenger impatience was to provide express lines running parallel to regular stopping services. But their prohibitive cost meant the only viable alternative was not to increase speed, but to increase train capacity to reduce waiting on stations during rush hour.⁸⁰

‘Rush Hour’ and the Rise of the Straphanger: Improvised Intimacy

Although the tube had always experienced daily rush periods, the coalescence of ‘rush hour’ from 1919 shaped the particular form taken by tube car restructuring and contrasted it with the simultaneous restructuring of buses.⁸¹ Between 1919 and 1920, trade union efforts won an eight-hour day for seven million workers nationwide.⁸² This reduced the preferred window of time for commuting and raised pressure on the tail end of workmen’s tube trains in London offering reduced fares for early-morning travel. Although workmen’s traffic only constituted 16 percent of total traffic in 1913 it was

⁷⁹ Barker and Robbins, *History of London Transport*, II, pp.222-227.

⁸⁰ LTM, PE10, pp.7-10.

⁸¹ For the new experience of ‘rush hour’ see Robert Lynd, ‘The Morning and Evening Rush’, in St. John Adcock (ed.), *Wonderful London: The World’s Greatest City Described by its Best Writers and Pictured by its Finest Photographers*, (3 vols, London, 1926), II, pp.580-591, and Charles G. Harper, *More Queer Things About London*, (London, 1924), pp.15-16. For the reordering, albeit uneven, of social time see Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time, 1870-1950*, (Cambridge, MA: London, 2015), c.2, and Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller, (Princeton: Oxford, 2014), pp.71-75.

⁸² H. Cunningham, ‘Leisure and Culture’, in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950* (3 vols, Cambridge, 1990), II, pp.281-283.

responsible for the dominant morning peak.⁸³ The standardization of the eight-hour day meant that the peak in workmen's traffic increasingly converged with the smaller peak in later traffic, compressing a greater number of people into a smaller time, worsened by the overall postwar increase in traffic. Unlike the tube, buses in 1913 did not have workmen's fares. They consequently did not have comparable traffic peaks as the tube deprived them of a large share of traffic before 8am. By contrast, Lord Ashfield pointed out that motor bus traffic 'consists of traffic casually picked up all day long, so long as there is traffic in the streets. The motor buses are always reasonably full throughout the day.'⁸⁴ When the consolidation of the eight-hour day pushed workmen's traffic into 'ordinary' traffic the tube therefore suffered a greater intensification of peak traffic than buses did. This likely fed into existing impatience particular to the intervals between tube trains. Rush hour overcrowding reduced the probability of catching the first train, making the interval between the one missed and the one anticipated seem increasingly critical.

As with the tube, the postwar increase in traffic necessitated restructuring bus space to increase capacity, but the greater daily fluctuation on the tube, and the particular impatience it caused, meant this occurred differently on each. Since 1906 a standard double-decked motorbus carried only thirty-four seats, sixteen of which were longitudinal seats running along the lower deck. Because police regulations strictly limited bus dimensions any increase in capacity had to be achieved through changing their layout rather than their size. In 1919 the development of wheel arches made it possible to lower the floor of the bottom deck, reducing the distance between it and the road and so, when combined with a reduction in the height of the bus, lowering the bus's centre of gravity. This and improved suspension allowed buses to carry the weight

⁸³ LTM, PE1, p.23, p.30.

⁸⁴ LTM, PE1, pp.22-23.

of additional passengers. LGOC consequently replaced its longitudinal seats with transverse seats in sets of two facing the front of the bus, increasing lower deck capacity to twenty-two; it also increased upper deck seating, bringing total capacity to forty-six. This set the pattern for enduring differences between bus and tube travel as bus passengers no longer sat in rows facing each other but on segregated seats facing forward. A mixture of longitudinal and transverse seating, roughly two-thirds to one-third ratio, persisted on the tube. The removal of longitudinal seating on buses also reduced standing space; the new K-type bus accommodated at most ten standing passengers.⁸⁵ Partly this reflected the police prohibition on standing, relaxed during the Great War, when five standing passengers were allowed, but reimposed shortly after.⁸⁶ Writing in 1920, Frank Pick, assistant managing director of UERL, hoped this restriction would soon be lifted.⁸⁷ However, it arguably fitted the growing functional differentiation of buses from tube trains resulting from the consolidation of rush hour: buses were not to absorb the daily peaks in traffic but to service the constant flow of casual, mainly short-distance traffic.

Tunnel dimensions, not police regulations, limited tube car size but similarly meant that capacity could only be increased by changing car layout. Unlike buses, though, there were no restrictions on standing. Besides, it was easier for more passengers to cram in if they were standing, making increasing standing space the best way to meet the greater quantity and fluctuation of tube traffic. Ashfield calculated that an arterial road with a maximum of 150 forty-six-seater buses running each direction per hour could carry seven thousand passengers. A tube line already managed 13,500 seated passengers per hour but with the addition of only half of its estimated standing

⁸⁵ LTM, PA5, pp.9-10.

⁸⁶ Barker and Robbins, *History of London Transport*, II, note, p.218.

⁸⁷ LTM, PA5, pp.9-10.

capacity this increased to twenty thousand.⁸⁸ While buses maximized capacity by only increasing seating, the growing functional difference of the tube, occasioned by rush hour, meant capacity increases were expressed as much through standing space as seating. Although the Central Line introduced the first straps for standing passengers in 1900, straphanging became more of a phenomenon in the interwar because the increasingly distinct roles that buses and tube trains played was also increasingly materially expressed: seats on buses; standing space in tube cars. This is why the ban on standing in buses kept it as an option, and increasingly a necessity, on the tube.

If impatience with the tube depended on its contrast with buses, how were the tube's structural solutions to this impatience and the personal space that resulted also different? The experience of twenty-two-year-old Ann Pilcher is an example. Pilcher commuted daily from a boarding house in Gloucester Road to Westminster in Spring 1957.

About February of this year I first became aware of a man who later attracted my attention a number of times. [...] We were both standing. At first we were apart but later, as people moved about, he came close to me. He leered and half smiled at me but I took no notice. He didn't speak to me on that occasion or touch me but about three days later he was again on the same train as me and he then said, "Good morning to me". [*sic*] I didn't speak.

He made no further effort to engage me in conversation but continued to stare and smile at me. I saw this man three or four times more in the mornings but he made no further approach to me.⁸⁹

The option and, as here, increasing necessity to stand on the tube during rush hour configured passengers in a different way from buses. Not only could the man in this incident move to join Pilcher, he could also press closer than if they were seated, making it harder to avoid eye contact. The freer movement of standing passengers required them tacitly to formulate a concept of personal space in a way that bus seating did not.

⁸⁸ LTM, PE10, p.11.

⁸⁹ Ann Pilcher, TNA, MEPO/2/11019, 18 June 1957.

In part, the fact that all tube seats faced each other whereas all bus seats faced forwards supported this, but in a way different from straphanging. Late one evening in June 1957, twenty-year-old Patricia Miatt was travelling home from the West End. She sat ‘on the inside seat of the type that face each other’ and found herself opposite a young man ‘with very dark blue “staring” eyes.’ The man struck up conversation about the book Miatt was reading, but she gave terse, non-committal responses. She continued reading but was nervously aware of the man watching her in the window reflection.⁹⁰ Oppositional seating made avoiding eye contact just as hard as standing did and so similarly compelled passengers to tacitly agree on personal space. But though Miatt’s experience was similarly awkward to Pilcher’s, the latter’s was less determinate, less predictable, because the space she occupied was less demarcated. Regardless of its orientation, seating delimited physical and social boundaries for touch in ways absent from standing space, which is perhaps why Miatt, albeit reluctantly, responded to conversation whereas Pilcher did not.

This risk of space between standing passengers compelled them to develop a personal space that was at once more fixed and more improvisational. The tension was best expressed when passenger vigilance revealed the assumption of common rules for personal space but admitted the indeterminacy of those rules and the need to enforce them. At almost the same time that Lubienska was murdered, Frederick Ayres caught a Piccadilly Line train from Knightsbridge station. The train was crowded, and Ayres stood in the doorway. Just before the train departed a ‘very agitated’ man leapt in next to Ayres: he appeared ‘a nasty character in spite of the fact that he was very well dressed.’ Because of this, Ayres thought to himself ‘I will keep an eye on you in case you start something’. The man ‘kept looking round at everybody in the train as though

⁹⁰ Patricia Miatt, TNA, MEPO/2/11019, 1 June 1957.

he was looking for somebody or somebody was looking for him' and so Ayres 'was determined at all costs to be ready for him'.⁹¹ Aware of a set, collective understanding of personal space, Ayres was equally aware that open tube car space was unpredictable and might require an improvised response. Rather than defending an already-existing concept of personal space, Ayres brought that concept into being *through* a practice that was just as contingent; one that emerged as it became easier to move around tube cars and that reified and risked itself every time it was enacted.

Open space heightened the dialectic between tacit norms of personal space and explicit improvisations, such as reprimanding passengers, when these collapsed. It is not just that norms and improvisations were conditions for each other, but that the particular *indeterminacy* of open cars demanded determination of personal space but became, through that attempt, indeterminable. Passengers therefore had to improvise. 'With elbows wedged into your ribs, and strange hot breaths pouring down your neck,' wrote the author Thomas Burke in 1919, 'you need all the serenity you have stored against such contingencies; and the attitude of the other people about you can mitigate your distress or enhance it.'⁹² The tube's modernity was that of an ongoing making and remaking of subjective boundaries in conditions of intrinsic *in*-determinability, not the final establishment and defence of those boundaries.

Queer Spaces: The Disturbing Effects of Tube Platforms

While Mary Eastwood rode the tube one Friday evening in 1957 she noticed a man 'wearing a vivid yellow sweater with coloured stripes running diagonally across it'. 'He

⁹¹ Letter from Frederick Ayres to Superintendent of Kensington Police Station, TNA, MEPO/2/11019, 7 June 1957.

⁹² Thomas Burke, *Out and About: A Note-book of London in War-time*, (London, 1919), p.99.

was the type of person,' she confessed, 'I hoped would not get off the train at the same time as myself.'⁹³ Her concerns hint at the difference between cars and platforms as social spaces. As sites of interchange, platforms expressed a liminality different from cars. Passengers' presence on platforms was conditioned only by the interval between trains, whereas their presence in cars was indefinite, although potentially equally transitory. While it compelled improvisation, the intimacy of cars was as much a benefit as a threat to vulnerable passengers compared to the expanse of stations. Without the constant presence of other passengers, stations offered more possibilities and risks to the socially marginal to suspend the very conditions under which their marginality materialized: to 'queer'.

I do not mean queer as a category of identity, defined by same-sex desire. Or even as an identity defined by its opposition to the norm. I mean instead the refusal to be subsumed within a sexual or social identity, or to accept a distinction between the two.⁹⁴ Station space did not make it easier to 'be' queer, or meet others who were, but rather to take a stance relative to categories of social and sexual identities *themselves*.⁹⁵ The streamlining of stations, for example through escalators or the cavernous 'ambulatory' booking hall opened at Piccadilly Circus in 1928, accentuated their function as in-between spaces to traverse as quickly as possible.⁹⁶ This liminality offered possibilities for encounters between the socially marginal *in between* the times and spaces in which identity distinctions of normality and difference cohered.

⁹³ Mary Eastwood, TNA, MEPO/2/11019, 3 June 1957.

⁹⁴ Matt Houlbrook, 'Thinking Queer: The Social and the Sexual in Interwar Britain' in Brian Lewis (ed.), *British Queer History: New Approaches and Perspectives* (Manchester, 2013), pp.135-164; Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War* (Chicago: London, 2013).

⁹⁵ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (Durham: London, 2004), pp.3-6.

⁹⁶ Frank Pick, 'The Design of Modern Railway Stations in Europe and America', *Journal of the Royal Institute of Architects*, 37/10, (March 1930), LTM, PB21; *The Illustrated London News*, 15 December 1928, p.1145

Take Frederick Williams, a West African student, whose encounter with a flirtatious woman in Gloucester Road station one night in May 1957 offered queering possibilities and limitations. Williams was leaving a platform when a young white woman with a non-English accent approached him, asked for a light, and began playing with his jacket lapels. A brief chat-up later, she jotted down her number and said she would like to hear from him again. Contrary to Williams's usual sexual possibilities as one of the Windrush generation, the platform's liminality enabled a new social liminality, not *as* a black man but temporally and spatially *in between* the conditions under which his blackness cohered as difference. Williams's sexual desire intersected with station space to suspend an identity that marked him as different. Though this was a 'social' rather than 'sexual' identity its suspension elided these categories by disturbing the conditions on which they were based: that one have an identity ordered within a binary of norm and difference. In other words, it was just as queer.

But it was also *contingent on* the particular liminality of the station. Three times Williams sought the woman at various Lyons teashops, where she had said she worked, but to no avail. He tried her number from multiple exchanges. Yet he also claimed to have resisted her initial advances, trying only to escape.⁹⁷ Partly retrospective justification of contact with a woman he now suspected of murder, the contradiction also suggests that the platform's liminality perpetuated as much as collapsed identities of social difference when its encounters transcended themselves and entered police records. If Williams's sexual desire intersected with the liminal space of the station its queer effects could not escape categorization by the recording Detective Inspector.

The inconsistencies in Williams's account reveal what divided mid-century cars and platforms as social spaces. Whereas passengers traversed the fixed space of

⁹⁷ Frederick Williams, TNA, MEPO/2/11018, 7 June 1957.

platforms, they were fixed within the moving space of cars. The open-plan space of 1950s cars demanded the fixing of personal space but also, because of its indeterminacy, precluded it and necessitated improvisation. But because tube cars were *confined* and more consistently occupied, rather than traversed, passenger co-operation made it possible, if not certain, for improvisation to re-determine personal space. By contrast, the traversed space of stations – equally indeterminate – had fewer tacit rules of tactility and fewer consistently present passengers with which to improvise them. This was a space disturbed by constant movement and constitutive of social relations that disturbed.

Yet what ties together queerness in stations and personal space in tube cars is the contingency of these as explanatory categories themselves. To ‘act’ queer or ‘have’ personal space depended on the interaction of concept and practice with the material transformation of the tube: it depended on the particular *use* of tube space at particular times in its development. Examining this interaction therefore destabilizes our own narratives treating categories of queerness and personal space as historical or analytic givens.⁹⁸ Frederick Williams’s queerness was at once particular to the space of Gloucester Road station in 1957 *and* called into question the stability of ‘queer’ as a trans-historical analytic category. If tube stations disturbed social relations, they also disturb our own categories for explaining the passenger interactions occurring within them, and on the tube as a whole.

Conclusions: From Ealing Common to Gloucester Road, 24 May 1957

We do have one piece of evidence for Lubienska’s practice of personal space on the tube: the statement of her companion, the priest Kazimerz Krzyzanowski. When they entered Ealing Common station, Krzyzanowski recalled, they ‘walked twelve paces

⁹⁸ Quentin Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, in Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Regarding Method*, (3 vols, Cambridge, 2002), I, pp.84-86.

from the staircase on the East Bound side and entered a smoking carriage at that point. We sat on a seat which ran across the train, on the offside [...]. The Countess sat by the window and I was at her side.’ There were other passengers in the car but Krzyzanowski disregarded them as he was immersed in conversation with Lubienska. He did however recall that they were quiet. Upon arriving at Earl’s Court he alighted from the same side on which he had been sitting, and ‘had to walk about twelve yards towards the front of the train to a lift’.⁹⁹ Through this recollection Krzyzanowski re-enacted a whole commerce between his mind, postural disposition, and his relation to other bodies. He re-enacted a finely calibrated relation between the arrangement of his limbs and the arrangement between himself and others that it effected. This was a transaction contingent on the particular instance in which it was enacted, but more importantly on the *confined indeterminacy* of the 1950s tube car. Seemingly pre-given, this practice of personal space emerged as cause and effect of a series of transformations in the experience of tube travel, from automatic doors to the intensification of hurry.

This calls into question accounts of modernity as a dialectic of intimacy and anomie for individuated bodies ‘possessing’ personal space. Personal space was not owned but practiced, not constant but specific, in turn reshaping the delineation of the body itself in its relation to other bodies. This is not to say that the emergence of personal space on the tube enacted a new relation ‘between’ inner and outer self and between self and other, as if these were stable binaries. Instead, it *produced* these binaries and, because it was practiced in an indeterminate space, produced them *differently* on every occasion.¹⁰⁰ This compels a reassessment of governmentality

⁹⁹ Kazimerz Krzyzanowski, TNA, MEPO/2/11018, 25 May, 29 May, 1 July 1957.

¹⁰⁰ See Elaine Hadley, *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago: London, 2010), p.5, pp.8-9, pp.12-17, and Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (New York, 2015), esp. introduction.

narratives that assume the stabilization of these binaries by the 1920s.¹⁰¹ If the tube produced neither stably individuated subjects nor a stable relation between inner and outer that encouraged those subjects to self-regulate, then it was not a space through which citizens were governed to govern themselves. It did not manage, or even produce, the relation between a passenger's thought and embodied experience required to create the self-governing liberal subject. It could not, in short, reduce the biological life of its passengers to a political effect; the 'politicization of bare life' that Giorgio Agamben argues underlies modern liberal democracies as much as dictatorships.¹⁰² In narrating this ostensible history, historians of governmentality unwittingly reproduce it, denying the possibility for past or future forms of existence outside those circumscribed by the liberal state. Historicizing the conceptual and practical co-evolution of personal space and how it mediated the relation between subjectivity and the state points us away from this spiral, towards histories containing the possibility for their own, different futures.

¹⁰¹ Joyce, *State of Freedom*, pp.3-6, pp.27-28.

¹⁰² Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford, 1998), pp.1-5.

Chapter Four

Thinking with the Body:

Labour Relations and Intimacy in the Teashop

At midday in early August 1929 Thelma Rogers went for lunch. It was still a little early to eat and so on entering the first-floor dining room of 233 Oxford Street, an Aerated Bread Company (A.B.C.) teashop, she found herself alone in a sea of tables. Locating an inconspicuous seat near the entrance, she began reading the menu. A few minutes later a scruffy clergyman entered and, disregarding the other forty-nine empty tables, settled upon hers. Apparently oblivious to any *faux pas*, he could not resist offering an opinion on Rogers' order – stewed oxtail: 'Oh, I should not have that; you do not know what they put in it. I should have a cut off the joint.' After quarter of an hour the clergyman found a new target for his uninvited solicitude. He called the waitress Phyllis Holt away from the customer she was serving and asked whether she would meet him at Oxford Circus tube station after she finished her shift. Holt refused; this was not the first time he had invited her out. Shortly after she started working at No. 233, the clergyman had offered her two theatre tickets and asked, when she mentioned going with another waitress, whether he might accompany her instead. On that earlier occasion Holt laughed and did not reply; the second time, the clergyman put only one ticket under his plate when he left.¹

The attention the Reverend Harold Davidson gave to A.B.C. waitresses was nothing new. On 22 September 1888, A.B.C. waitress Alice Farrell charged 25-year-old

¹ Norwich Consistory Court minutes: Bishop of Norwich vs. Revd H.F. Davidson, NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 5 April 1932, pp.663-669; pp.628-640.

George Hawkes, a solicitor's clerk, with indecently assaulting her in a train carriage the previous evening. Hawkes had coaxed Farrell into his first-class compartment and as the train ran between Liverpool Street and Bishopsgate wrapped his arm around Farrell's waist and, allegedly, kissed her. At Worship Street police court, Farrell admitted knowing Hawkes for six months as a regular customer but denied having ever encouraged his attention by serving him before other customers. Magistrate Montagu Williams, who believed a guilty defendant with 'a decent coat on his back' deserved exemplary severity, sentenced Hawkes to a £5 fine or ten days' hard labour; Hawkes's wry suggestion that Farrell apply for a summons against him probably did not work in his favour, the would-be solicitor snubbed by suitor and the law.²

Hawkes's assault differed little from Davidson's theatre trip gambit forty years later. But while Hawkes's case was treated as perfunctorily as any other summons heard by London's clock-watching magistrates, in Spring 1932 Harold Davidson faced a highly-publicized, twenty-four-day consistory court trial in the Great Hall of Church House, Westminster. The Bishop of Norwich, to whose diocese Davidson belonged, charged him with five counts of 'immoral conduct' under the 1892 Clergy Discipline Act; even before the trial Davidson became a Press sensation.³ The final verdict came on 8 July 1932, when Chancellor of Norwich Frederick Keppel North found Davidson guilty of all charges: he was subsequently deprived of his living, deposed from holy orders, and spent the

² Montagu Stephen Williams, *Later Leaves: Being the Further Reminiscences of Montagu Williams Q.C.*, (London: New York, 1891), pp.212-213; 'Yesterday's Law, Police, etc.', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 23 September 1888; 'The Cost of a Kiss', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 30 September 1888.

³ 'Stiffkey's Rector Cheered by His Flock', *Daily Express*, 8 February 1932, p.11.

remaining five years of his life protesting his innocence through ever-more scandalous methods on Blackpool Beach.⁴

What might explain the difference in attention devoted to Davidson? Davidson's case was in some respects more serious: he was a married priest, and although four of his alleged offences involved nothing more tactile than a hug in a Chinese restaurant, one involved attempted, if only ever inferred, sex with the prostitute Rose Ellis. But more significant was the particularly ambiguous entanglement of desire and empathy apparently motivating Davidson. At the same lunch that Davidson angled for a soirée with waitress Holt, Thelma Rogers recalled, he also 'ran after' the teashop's assistant manageress, 'caught hold of her arm and started to speak to her.'⁵ According to Davidson, assistant manageress Williams had 'rather a "down" on some of the girls'; there were a few that 'she did not seem to understand, and I was giving her a little advice as to how to handle them.'⁶ That the prosecution did not call Williams to dispute this claim was telling. For lead prosecutor Roland Oliver, it was this confusion of intention that presented [t]he great issue' of the case: 'Was his association with these young women [...] an association in which he was seeking to rescue them from a life of sin [...], or was it an association for his own self-indulgence?'⁷ Why, Oliver asked, would rescue work be necessary for 'perfectly respectable women in perfectly respectable employment'?⁸

⁴ For accounts of Davidson's life and trial, see Jonathan Tucker, *The Troublesome Priest: Harold Davidson, Rector of Stiffkey*, (Norwich, 2007); Tom A. Cullen, *The Prostitutes' Padre: The Story of the Notorious Rector of Stiffkey*, (London, 1975); Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939*, (Manchester, 2006 [1940]); Rob Baker, *Beautiful Idiots and Brilliant Lunatics: A Sideways Look at Twentieth-Century London*, (Stroud, 2015), c.22.

⁵ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 5 April 1932, p.663.

⁶ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 23 May 1932, p.996.

⁷ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/3, 29 March 1932, p.7.

⁸ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/3, 29 March 1932, p.33. Compare this with the criticism the Reverend A. Pitt received in 1891 for defending A.B.C. shareholders who accepted 28 percent dividends while waitresses' wages languished at 10s. a week. 'A.B.C. Girls'

This chapter takes Oliver's question as a starting point for exploring the broader relation between capital, labour, and desire as it was tactilely enacted in the London teashop.⁹ The association between rescue work and desire, and contemporary anxiety over their entanglement, has been well elaborated for late-nineteenth century London, especially around the discourse of 'slumming'.¹⁰ As Roland Oliver's rhetoric implied, by the 1930s it was possible to suggest that rescue work, at least by middle-class men working independently, had been consigned to less compromised domains as charity institutionalized, the Metropolitan Police tasked an expanding contingent of women police with protecting women and children, and labourers in precarious professions unionized.¹¹ But Davidson's case hints at a different story. It suggests an accentuated relation between the increasingly alienated –and alienating – labour of teashop waitresses and a complex mix of empathetic desire on the part of the customer: an entwined history of labour and desire expressing wider shifts in capital in a new era of mass consumption – particularly mass public consumption of tea.¹²

Plotting key moments in Davidson's life helps us to better understand this shared history as it evolved between the 1890s and 1930s. Through an 'intimate history of capitalism' we can better discern the history of intimacy as it developed under changing

Wages', *The Star*, 10 November 1891, p.2, 12 November 1891, p.4; Letter from Sidney Thomson to the Editor, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 November 1891.

⁹ For a similar argument examining links made between the economic and 'sexual labour' of women hitchhikers, and the labour of lorry drivers accommodating them, see Julia Laite, 'Immoral Traffic: Mobility, Health, Labor, and the "Lorry Girl" in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 52, (2013), pp.693-721.

¹⁰ Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, (Princeton, 2006).

¹¹ See Louise A. Jackson, *Women Police: Gender, Welfare and Surveillance in the Twentieth Century*, (Manchester, 2006).

¹² See Jane Pettigrew, *A Social History of Tea*, (London, 2001); Rachel Rich, *Bourgeois Consumption: Food, Space, and Identity in London and Paris, 1850-1914*, (Manchester, 2011); Ian Miller, 'A Dangerous Revolutionary Force Amongst Us: Conceptualizing Working-Class Tea Drinking in the British Isles, c. 1860-1900', *Cultural and Social History*, 10/3, (2013), pp.419-438.

capitalist conditions.¹³ We can examine ‘up close’ how Davidson’s tactile interventions in waitresses’ working conditions, and the physical violence he suffered as a result, rework our narratives of labour relations during and after the advent of ‘New Unionism’. We can also examine how those labour relations, through regulating waitress behaviour, governed the content and form of customer desire, producing the customer that came to desire, as it were, after the fact.¹⁴ Davidson’s story, therefore, suggests something different from that of the predatory male constructing his object of desire. It shows how desire, and any capacity to ‘be touched’, depends first upon the touch of world beyond it. Only through the specific, alienated labour of early twentieth-century teashops, and the paradoxically abstract intimacy of teashop waitresses that was its effect, did Davidson’s desire take shape; only through the touch of the world, phenomenology might say, was it possible to feel.¹⁵ Yet through his own touch of waitresses, desiring or not, he revealed and rubbed against those capitalist conditions and our understanding of them. The intimate – Davidson’s physical touch of waitresses and affective experience of being ‘touched’ – is here both our subject and our *way of thinking* about the capitalism conditioning it.¹⁶ We think *with and through* the physical limits of Davidson’s body, whom he could touch and how, as it presses up against, resists, and reconfigures our narratives about the capitalist conditions of what he could feel.

¹³ The phrase ‘intimate history of capitalism’ is from Seth Koven, *The Match Girl and the Heiress*, (Princeton, 2014), c.2.

¹⁴ My thinking about the relation between labour and desire is inspired by Deleuze and Guattari. See Eugene W. Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis*, (London, 1999). See also Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love*, (New York, 2012), esp. pp.64-65, and ‘Thinking About Feeling Historical’, *Emotion, Space and Society*, 1, (2008), pp.4-9. For a critique of love and desire in relation to Marx’s critique of the commodity see Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation*, (2012).

¹⁵ Judith Butler, ‘Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche’, in Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject*, (New York, 2015), pp.36-62.

¹⁶ This takes inspiration from Stephen Brooke, ‘The Body and Socialism: Dora Russell in the 1920s’, *Past and Present*, 189/1, (November 2005), pp.147-177 and Koven, *The Match Girl and the Heiress*, c.4.

A fifty-seven-year-old rector, with a parish 130 miles north of central London, Davidson is not an obvious candidate for understanding patterns of intimacy in London teashops. But it is precisely the exceptional nature of his case, and of Davidson himself, that reveals more than itself. As Richard Levy, Davidson's defence counsel, put before Chancellor North, Davidson was 'not only unusual' but 'eccentric' and must therefore be judged 'by different standards from those which you would use in judging ordinary people'.¹⁷ The *Church Times* followed Levy's lead, claiming that although Davidson's conduct was 'eccentric' he had undoubtedly been 'moved by a high Christian impulse' and that many regarded him 'as a champion of the outcast and the wretched'. It was 'a thousand pities' that the prosecution had not been given 'into the hands of men with more mundane knowledge'.¹⁸ Davidson's eccentricity simultaneously placed him outside the common standards of teashop behaviour and, because of this, within them as integral to their foundation. His case is at once what Lauren Berlant calls 'a perturbation in the normative' and that which represents, after a judgement, its 'achieved transparency' – both to contemporaries and, hopefully, to us.¹⁹ Thinking about Davidson's touch offers a way into exploring how those common standards evolved in line with four decades of shifting labour relations in London teashops.

Thames Embankment, November 1894: The Precarious Possibilities of the Teashop Waitress

In November 1894 Davidson was walking along Thames Embankment one particularly foggy night. As he passed Charing Cross tube station he noticed a young girl attempting

¹⁷ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/2, 2 June 1932, p.1950.

¹⁸ *Church Times*, 3625/CVIII, 15 July 1932, p.68.

¹⁹ Lauren Berlant, 'On the Case', *Critical Inquiry*, 33, (Summer 2007), p.670.

to throw herself off the parapet into the river below. The girl, he related forty years later, was sixteen years old. She had run away from her home in a village near Cambridge ten days previously, chanced her luck in London, and having failed to find work decided to jump. Davidson clambered after her and once she was consoled sent her back to her mother with a letter; it was from this moment, he alleged, that he began taking an interest in helping vulnerable young women in dire straits.²⁰

The girl, if Davidson's story was true, was unlucky but not uncommon. She was one of many drawn to London in the 1890s seeking work in the expanding service and white-collar sectors.²¹ One of the places to which she might have applied for work was the A.B.C., which opened its first teashop in 1864 and by 1893 operated seventy across London. Capitalizing on custom provided by the growing army of West End shoppers and clerks, the A.B.C. offered cheap fare in an unfussy atmosphere. Prior to the A.B.C., women caught in central London at lunchtime had little option but to provide for themselves or venture into the dark backroom of a 'pastrycook's shop' or the overwhelmingly male preserve of London's coffee-shops.²² Whiteley's and Debenham and Freebody's department stores featured rooms 'where women could lunch', but with the focus on 'hot joints and poultry' these were beyond the means of lower middle-class workers; the high prices and social graces of tearooms like the Ladies' Tea Association

²⁰ Harold Davidson to Mr Sheppard, C/o Messrs. Glynn Barton & Co., 4 January 1934, LPL, MS 4873.

²¹ See Anna Davin, 'City Girls: Young Women, New Employment, and the City, London, 1880-1910', in Mary Jo Maynes, Birgitte Søland, and Christina Benninghaus (eds), *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills: Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960*, (Bloomington, 2005), pp.209-223.

²² Shaw Desmond, *London Nights of Long Ago*, (London, 1927), p.70, p.52; C.S. Peel, *A Hundred Wonderful Years: Social and Domestic Life of a Century, 1820-1920*, (London, 1926), p.19; George R. Sims, *Glances Back*, (London, 1927), p.194; citation from Talbot Coke, 'Tea-Rooms', *Hearth and Home*, 11 July 1895, p.313.

were similarly prohibitive.²³ Teashops, by contrast, offered both a new employment prospect and a welcome lunchtime escape for women workers – as well as refuge from London’s stifling fogs of the 1890s. ‘How crisp and fresh were the plates of tongue,’ wrote novelist Shaw Desmond, ‘when the incandescents went up in the winter evenings with the yellow fog clammy on the panes!’²⁴ Focusing on customer turnover rather than comfort, teashops were ‘a godsend for the impecunious,’ even if some found the whole experience rather harrying.²⁵ For *Hearth and Home* columnist Talbot Coke, the ‘rush and push of an ordinary tea-shop with its American cloth-covered tables, sawdusted floor, “ready made” tea, and overworked, “snappy” attendants’ was a world away from the ideal tearoom.²⁶

If teashop waitresses were snappy they had reason to be. In the 1890s, A.B.C. waitresses earned between 8s. and 10s. for a fifty- to sixty-hour week. The diligent became counter assistants or manageresses; most did not.²⁷ The A.B.C. justified low wages by pointing out that they were only intended to ‘supplement’ the support waitresses received from their families. It required its waitresses to live with relatives, a condition enforced by the company’s own ‘lady visitors’.²⁸ Backed up by the certificated approval of a clergyman, this condition was ostensibly in order to guarantee a waitress’s

²³ ‘Where to Lunch When Shopping’, *Hearth and Home*, 3 March 1892, p.502; Coke, ‘Tea-Rooms’, p.313; Frances H. Low, ‘Profitable Employments for Educated Women’, *The Woman at Home*, n.d., p.63. On the rise of tearooms and teashops as a resort for women shoppers see Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s West End*, (Princeton, 2000), pp.102-103.

²⁴ Desmond, *London Nights*, p.70.

²⁵ *Ibid.*; ‘The Café in London: An Appeal to Common Sense’, *Pick-Me-Up*, 24 November 1894, p.114.

²⁶ Coke, ‘Tea-Rooms’, p.313.

²⁷ Report by Eliza Orme on the Conditions of Work of Barmaids, Waitresses, and Book-Keepers, February 1893, Royal Commission on Labour, Cmd. 6894-XXIII, pp.200-204.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.209.

respectability – particularly important during anxiety over the ‘new girl’ of the 1890s.²⁹ As Assistant Commissioner Eliza Orme reasoned for the 1893 Royal Commission on Labour, there was ‘great risk’ for women serving a mixed clientele during the day and living alone in common lodging houses at night.³⁰ Yet over the 1890s this justification seemed increasingly hollow as the A.B.C.’s profits mushroomed while wages remained below subsistence level. The combined effects of expanding white-collar work and agricultural depression meant that by 1895 A.B.C. shareholders could vote themselves an enormous 28 percent dividend; wages remained static.³¹

This disparity between wages and dividends ignited small but persistent dissent among A.B.C. shareholders. At every annual shareholder’s meeting between 1891 and 1893, shareholder Sidney Thomson called for an increase in waitresses’ wages reflecting the A.B.C.’s growing profits, but each time he was silenced.³² At a particularly raucous meeting in November 1892, Thomson pointedly drew attention to ‘those members of the Christian Church’ sat before him who determinedly resisted waitress wage increases. ‘Don’t talk such rubbish,’ rejoined an excited Reverend A. Pitt. ‘I live among the poor and know their wants, and I do all I can to relieve them, and would assist these young women if I thought they were badly paid, but I don’t’.³³ These comments earned Pitt strong censure in the liberal Press; a stark contrast to the tabloid treatment of Harold Davidson forty years later, whose claim that he had been assisting underpaid waitresses

²⁹ ‘Waitress’s Wages’, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 19 November 1895. For the ‘New Girl’ see Sally Mitchell, *The New Girl: Girls’ Culture in England, 1880-1915*, (New York, 1995), and Sally Mitchell, ‘Retrospective: The New Girl’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 46/4, (Winter 2013), pp.554-561.

³⁰ Report by Eliza Orme, p.209.

³¹ ‘The A.B.C. Girls’, *Woman’s Herald*, 28 November 1891, p.921; *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 November 1897.

³² Letter from Sidney J. Thomson to the Editor, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 November 1891; ‘The Aerated Bread Company’, *The Standard*, 1 November 1892, p.7; *The Morning Post*, 1 November 1893, p.4.

³³ ‘The Aerated Bread Company’, *The Standard*, 1 November 1892, p.7.

was regarded with heavy scepticism. By November 1891 the *Woman's Herald* and *The Star* had taken up the waitresses' cause. Three years after championing the 1888 strike of match girls at Bryant & May's match factory in Bow, *The Star* opened its columns to readers voicing their dismay at the treatment of A.B.C. waitresses and calling for a boycott of all A.B.C. teashops until wages increased.³⁴ A flurry of letters provided updates of individual boycotts, suggestions for teashop co-operatives, and even more scandalous details of waitresses' working conditions.³⁵

The A.B.C. response failed to address the underlying problem, as *The Pall Mall Gazette* understood it, that it expected from its waitresses 'a maximum of respectability' with 'a minimum of remuneration'.³⁶ When shareholder Dr Furnivall suggested at the 1895 shareholder's meeting that the A.B.C. provide its waitresses with one free daily meal, deputy chairman B.W. Richardson replied that they were already able to buy hot meals for 'a small charge'.³⁷ This referred to a co-operative system of buying meals introduced shortly after the papers began expressing concern over waitresses' wages. Under this scheme, manageresses bought ingredients from a common fund contributed to by participants. Teashop cooks made a hot meal which waitresses ate together between 11am and 12pm. Much vaunted by Eliza Orme, the scheme likely caused resentment among waitresses wanting higher wages rather than added expenses. Each meal cost on average 3½d.; at 1s. 9d. per six-day week that was a significant deduction from a total

³⁴ 'The A.B.C. Girls', *Woman's Herald*, 21 November 1891, p.905, 28 November 1891, p.921, 5 December 1891, p.9, 12 December 1891, p.9; 'A.B.C. Girls' Wages', *The Star*, 10 November 1891, p.2. For *The Star's* campaign on behalf of the Bryant & May match girls see Koven, *Match Girl*, p.88, n.34.

³⁵ 'A.B.C. Girls' Wages', *The Star*, 12 November 1891, p.4; 'The A.B.C. Girls', 14 November 1891, p.2; 'A.B.C. Girls', 16 November 1891, p.4; 'The A.B.C. Girls', 19 November 1891, p.4; 'The A.B.C. Girls', 24 November 1891, p.4; 'The A.B.C. Girls', 8 December 1891, p.2; 'The A.B.C. Girls', 10 December 1891, p.4.

³⁶ 'The Aerated Bread Company', *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 21 November 1889.

³⁷ 'Aerated Bread Co. and Their Work Girls', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 3 November 1895.

weekly wage of 8s. to 10s.³⁸ Although the scheme seems to have been voluntary, the common mealtime may have placed uncomfortable pressure on waitresses for whom wages did not merely ‘supplement’ existing income.

The A.B.C. was not the only teashop chain that became a contested site for women’s labour relations in the 1890s. Its younger competitor Lyons faced equivalent difficulties, this time forced into view by waitresses themselves. Lyons opened its first teashop at 213 Piccadilly in September 1894 and already by the close of 1895 there were a further twelve. With a hint of retrospective mythification, Nell Bacon, one of the first waitresses at No.213, recalled that early Lyons waitresses worked seventy-four hours a week ‘and thought nothing of it’.³⁹ It seems more likely that these long hours were encouraged by Lyons’s payment method rather than any thoughtless self-sacrifice on the part of waitresses. Rather than receiving a basic wage, waitresses received 5 percent commission per sale, any additional income derived from tips. Although this resulted in higher weekly earnings than A.B.C. waitresses, Lyons waitresses – who, significantly, were not required to live with relatives –suffered more deductions for expenses. Of an average weekly wage of 14s., an estimated 11s. 1d. was lost to rent, bus fares, fines for breakages, the washing of caps and aprons, and a weekly deduction to pay for uniforms. Lyons waitresses, unless supported by relatives, therefore had a razor-thin margin of around 2s. 11d. a week to buy food and maintain ‘respectability’.⁴⁰

When in late October 1895 rumours spread that new waitresses would be paid only 2.5 percent commission, Lyons’s waitresses were unsurprisingly horrified. On 23 October waitresses of the Strand and Piccadilly teashops walked out, gathering in St Andrew’s Restaurant at 81 Bride Street to draft their demands. Tom Mann, renowned

³⁸ Report by Eliza Orme, p.207.

³⁹ Nell Bacon, ‘My Days with Lyons’, n.d., LMA, ACC/3527/231, n.p.

⁴⁰ ‘Waitress’s Wages’, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 19 November 1895.

leader of the 1889 London dockers' strike, also attended.⁴¹ Mann's presence gave the waitresses' strike added political significance. Since the strikes of the dockers and the Bryant & May 'match girls' the year before, a wave of 'New Unionism' swept the country.⁴² Excluded from the unions of higher-skilled fellow-labourers, unskilled labourers increasingly organized their own to press their demands and coordinate strikes. By May 1891 New Unionism had gained enough momentum to precipitate the appointment of a Royal Commission on Labour, of which Tom Mann was a member.⁴³ Just a year before the Lyons waitresses' strike, Mann signed the minority report condemning the Commission's 'scanty reforms', implicitly referencing Eliza Orme's evidence by calling attention to the long hours and low wages of many women workers and their limited union representation.⁴⁴ He was, therefore, well placed to advise the waitresses on their next move, his presence adding weight to the comparisons made between the conditions of dockers and waitresses during the first Press campaign against the A.B.C. in 1891.⁴⁵

For their part, the waitresses were reluctant to ally their cause with broader union activity and rejected calls to join with the Women's Trade Union League.⁴⁶ Instead they followed Mann's advice to ask Lyons director Isidore Salmon to receive a deputation outlining their complaint.⁴⁷ Salmon, however, demanded that each waitress apply for

⁴¹ 'The Strike of Waitresses', *Daily News*, 24 October 1895.

⁴² For New Unionism among Bryant & May match girls see Koven, *Match Girl*, pp. 85-95. See also Louise Raw, *Striking a Light: The Bryant & May Matchwomen and Their Place in Labour History*, (London, 2009).

⁴³ Tom Mann, *Tom Mann's Memoirs*, (London, 1923), p.101.

⁴⁴ William Abraham, Michael Austin, James Mawdsley, and Tom Mann, *Minority Report of the Royal Commission on Labour*, 1894, cmd. 7421, p.127.

⁴⁵ See the letters sent by J.E. Skuse to *Woman's Herald*; 'The A.B.C. Girls', *Woman's Herald*, 28 November 1891, p.921, and *The Star*; 'The A.B.C. Girls', *The Star*, 10 December 1891, p.4.

⁴⁶ 'The Strike of Waitresses', *The Times*, 25 October 1895, p.6.

⁴⁷ *The Standard*, 24 October 1895, p.3.

individual hearings. On 24 October the waitresses therefore met again at St Andrew's Restaurant where, under the presidency of New Zealand-famed trade unionist William Belcher, they condemned their 'tyrannical treatment' and called for a public boycott of Lyons teashops.⁴⁸ Whether because of the public response or not, the waitresses brought enough pressure to bear on Lyons for the company to replace the commission system with a fixed weekly wage from 11 November 1895. Yet at only 10s., this did not place them at any advantage over their A.B.C. counterparts, and in fact worsened their economic situation once deductions had been made.⁴⁹ Even after direct action, teashop waitresses struggled to resolve the contradictions between what was expected of them and what they were paid to fulfil those expectations.

Teashop waitresses could not become standard bearers of New Unionism largely because of variations in indirect payment and tipping across companies. While some companies paid minimal wages but supplemented this with cheap board, others paid higher wages but deducted more for laundry and uniform costs. The A.B.C. theoretically did not allow tips whereas Lyons did until November 1895, thereafter encouraging customers to contribute to the teashop's Provident Fund box rather than to individual waitresses.⁵⁰ As Charles Booth argued, this variation in payment made it impossible to establish any standard wage as a ground for union formation. Moreover, while there were already catering unions – two for cooks and carvers, one for waiters – these principally offered emergency relief and matched members with vacancies rather than campaigning

⁴⁸ *The Standard*, 25 October 1895, p.3. Erik Olssen, 'Belcher, William', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, (<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2b15/belcher-william>, 9 April 2016).

⁴⁹ Peter Bird, *The First Food Empire: A History of J. Lyons & Co.*, (Chichester, 2000), pp.45-46.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.46.

on trade union lines.⁵¹ So although waitresses continued to meet at St Andrew's Restaurant to air their grievances until at least February 1896, no collective campaign materialized.⁵² With little means of redress, teashop waitresses, especially those living independently, remained caught in a kind of respectable deprivation, the dangers of which sympathetic commentators were careful to point out. 'Under such circumstances,' Charles Booth wrote, 'and thrown so much into contact with persons of the opposite sex, it is not difficult to perceive what must be the result in some instances.' Although experienced witnesses claimed that 'questionable morality' was more a problem of women in hotels and restaurants, 'this,' Booth claimed inscrutably, 'we are not disposed to assert'.⁵³

Davidson was only nineteen when he allegedly rescued the unfortunate runaway on Thames Embankment. He had just left school, and was two months into the start of his brief professional career as an actor before he began attending Oxford part-time in 1898. The furore over A.B.C. waitresses' wages would repeat itself for the fourth year running that month; the strike of Lyons waitresses would occur in nine months' time. Davidson may have been only at the fringes of these developments but his interest in young women's work was already involving him in the labour conditions shaping, and exposed by, the teashop customer's desiring touch.

⁵¹ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, (17 vols, Second Series, London, 1903), IV, pp.240-243.

⁵² 'Barmaids and Waitresses in Restaurants: Their Work and Their Temptations', *The Girl's Own Paper*, 22 February 1896, p.329.

⁵³ Booth, *Life and Labour*, p.239.

Coventry Street Corner House, 1910: ‘Emotional Labour’ and the Commissionaire’s Regulatory Touch

On 21 May 1932, the eleventh day of the consistory court trial, Davidson took to the witness box for the second time. Examined by Ryder Richardson, his defence counsel, Davidson was not reticent about his contact with waitresses. He claimed to know between four hundred and five hundred Lyons waitresses alone, many of whom he had provided references for.⁵⁴ But his relations with the company itself, he alleged, had long been strained. In 1910, a Lyons commissionaire assaulted Davidson at Coventry Street Corner House. Davidson successfully sued Lyons for the assault, receiving £200 compensation plus costs; Lyons requested that Davidson in future take his custom elsewhere, a request he willfully ignored over the next twenty years. According to Davidson, he was assaulted because he had shown too much interest in waitresses’ pay. Since then, he told Richardson acerbically, Lyons had ‘always had their knife into me’.⁵⁵

When questioned about the matter, Lyons chief inquiry officer Frederick Stevens confirmed that the assault had occurred and that Davidson had been paid damages, though whether Davidson’s explanation was correct he refused to say.⁵⁶ But what is more important than the incident itself is the productive plausibility of Davidson’s account.⁵⁷ The commissionaire’s assault and the question of waitress pay, placed in 1910, reveal

⁵⁴ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 21 May 1932, p.890.

⁵⁵ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 21 May 1932, p.892, p.1002.

⁵⁶ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/1, 1 April 1932, pp.411-412. The commissionaire would most likely have been prosecuted through a summons rather than directly after an arrest, especially if Lyons was sued for as much as £200. Searches through daily newspapers and the summonses registers of Marlborough Street and Bow Street Police Courts, the principle West End courts, has however revealed no trace of the prosecution. Court registers, Marlborough Street Police Court, LMA, PS/MS/A/02/002-003, 1909-1912; Bow Street Police Court, LMA, PS/BOW/A/04/025-028, 1909-1911.

⁵⁷ See Hannu Salmi, ‘Cultural History, the Possible, and the Principle of Plenitude’, *History and Theory*, 50/2, (May 2011), pp.171-187.

something both about waitress labour relations during four years of national labour unrest and about new forms of disorderly and regulatory touch produced by, and giving bodily form *to*, those relations immediately prior to the Great War.

Davidson's apparent interest in waitresses' pay is made clearer in light of his involvement with newsboys the same year. In December 1910, the newspaper printers of the London Society of Compositors launched a strike to campaign for an eight-hour day. The strike rode the crest of what became known as 'the great unrest', a wave of militant trade union action across Britain lasting until the outbreak of the Great War. Newsboys, however, were non-unionized. Crying the news alone on the streets at night, with no union representation, newsboys were visible and vulnerable, and by the time of the printers' strike a new target of philanthropic concern. In October 1910 the Newsboys' Club, funded by voluntary contributions and open to all, opened at 67a Farringdon Street; Davidson was Honorary Treasurer. As Davidson later described it, the Club's purpose was to provide a social centre and 'cheap restaurant' for the newsboys, 'to discourage the boys from vicious habits and associates,' and 'to help them obtain skilled employment'.⁵⁸ The Club provided a gymnasium, washing facilities, bicycle store, and technical classes in crafts like carpentry and boot making. Honorary officers led activities and acted as mentor-friends for each boy.⁵⁹ Despite its moralizing, newsboys themselves seem to have welcomed the Club. By 1912 over twelve hundred boys had signed up, placing severe pressure on the Club's finances and resulting in repeated pleas for funds and personal assistance.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 20 May 1932, pp.821-822.

⁵⁹ *The Times*, 7 June 1910, p.12; *The Times*, 17 October 1911, p.6; T. Vezey Strong, 'The Newsboys' Club', *The Times*, 25 October 1911, p.15.

⁶⁰ *The Times*, 3 April 1912, p.14; 18 April 1912, p.14; 9 May 1912, p.4.

Teashop waitresses in the 1910s faced a comparable predicament to that of newsboys. Pay remained low, weekly hours were limited only by the sixty-five-hour maximum imposed by the 1913 Shops Act – if their employer chose to adopt it over the 1912 Act, which imposed no maximum – and, most significantly, they were similarly non-unionized.⁶¹ In part this was due to the variation in payment methods that had hindered concerted action in the 1890s. But it was also due to the gendered nature and wider problems of the catering industry immediately before the Great War. In contrast with teashop waitresses, waiters in London hotels and restaurants had long been part of clubs and friendly societies. Some of these were international, like the Geneva Association of Hotel and Restaurant Employees, but many were exclusive to London and divided on national lines, like the Italian and Swiss Societies of Hotel and Restaurant Employees. These organizations advertised vacancies, provided old age pensions and relief to the sick, but did not involve themselves in matters of pay or hours.⁶² The first exception to this model was the Amalgamated Waiters' Society, established in 1896, which campaigned for a minimum wage of 30s. a week and a twelve-hour day.⁶³ Yet even with these modest aims the Society struggled to retain members and disbanded in 1904.⁶⁴ Better provided for than teashop waitresses, waiters nevertheless struggled to organize around the conditions of their labour.

Attempts by waiters to unionize were hampered by the deep national divisions cutting across the catering industry prior to the Great War. While French, German, and

⁶¹ Hubert Llewellyn Smith (ed.), *The New Survey of London Life and Labour: Vol VIII: London Industries III*, (9 vols, London, 1934), VIII, p.211.

⁶² Barbara Drake, 'The Waiter', in Sidney Webb and Arnold Freeman (eds), *Seasonal Trades: By Various Writers*, (London, 1912), pp.93-95.

⁶³ Booth, *Life and Labour*, note, p.244; *The Times*, 4 May 1898, p.10 and 21 January 1901, p.4. See also Amalgamated Waiters' Society Rules c.1896, LSE, BOOTH/F/2/5/18.

⁶⁴ 'Amalgamated Waiters Society (London)', in Arthur Marsh and John B. Smethurst, *Historical Directory of Trade Unions*, (6 vols, Aldershot: Burlington, 2006), V, p.252.

Italian waiters dominated the trade in large hotels and restaurants, British waiters were confined mainly to City chop-houses and West End clubs, making common cause difficult to find.⁶⁵ Following the collapse of the Amalgamated Waiters' Society, several friendly societies formed a 'cartel' and successfully secured from employers a fixed weekly wage of 5s. for the youngest boys.⁶⁶ But deepening distrust between British and non-British waiters in the immediate pre-war years weakened the cartel's effectiveness. In Autumn 1909 the Loyal British Waiters' Society was established with the aim of securing preference for British waiters and improving the training of British boys as waiters so that they might displace their foreign competitors.⁶⁷ Regular press articles on 'waiters and patriotism' kept the issue live and by 1912 the Society numbered five hundred members.⁶⁸ Although the International Caterers' Employees' Union, formed in 1909, briefly succeeded in uniting waiters regardless of nationality and organized several 'stay-in' strikes and demonstrations, it fell apart with the onset of war when German and Austrian waiters were interned, French and Italian waiters returned to their own countries, and English waiters were conscripted.⁶⁹

Waiters therefore offered teashop waitresses few options for unionization, or models on which their own union activity might be based. While deeply divided among themselves waiters also found little common ground with waitresses, who occupied what

⁶⁵ Drake, 'The Waiter', p.97.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.95.

⁶⁷ 'Training English Waiters', *Daily Mail*, 15 February 1910, p.5; 'Teaching British Boys to be Waiters', *Daily Mirror*, 21 April 1910, p.9; 'London's Foreign Waiters', *Daily Mirror*, 30 August 1910, p.5.

⁶⁸ 'Waiters and Patriotism', *Daily Mail*, 20 September 1910, p.5

⁶⁹ Wilf McCartney, *Dare to Be a Daniel! A Revolutionary Union in the Catering Trade, AKA The French Cooks' Syndicate*, (3rd edn, London 2013 [1945]), p.14, p.16, p.22; 'Waiters' Tips', *Daily Mail*, 14 October 1911, p.5; 'Waiter's 90-hour Week', *Daily Mail*, 1 April 1912, p.5; 'International Caterers Employees Union', in Marsh and Smethurst, *Historical Directory of Trade Unions*, V, p.259.

Fabian Barbara Drake termed their own ‘special sphere’.⁷⁰ Waiters on average received far higher wages than waitresses, even a *commis de rang* (waiter’s assistant) receiving 20s. to 25s. a week, and had their own systems of deductions and tip distribution, making coordinated action over pay difficult.⁷¹ In other unorganized trades these issues did not preclude unionization, the charwomen of London County Council elementary schools for example successfully organizing to join the National Federation of Women Workers and press for a minimum wage.⁷² Women from the jam and pickle, bottle-washing, and cocoa-making trades, too, joined the strikes erupting throughout 1910.⁷³ But with deepening mistrust between waiters and no potential equivalence in earnings across restaurants and teashops, there were few common issues over which waiters and waitresses could unite. Waitresses, like newsboys in their relations with printers, consequently remained outside of even the limited protests launched by waiters in the pre-war years.

By the time of Davidson’s assault in 1910, teashop waitresses’ labour conditions and representation were therefore little better than in the 1890s. Yet as the trade diversified to meet rising demand, the dangers Charles Booth had associated with those conditions increased. For Barbara Drake, who investigated the condition of teashop waitresses for the Women’s Industrial Council in 1913, the A.B.C.’s requirement that waitresses live with relatives provided little protection. Often a parent died or moved away, leaving the waitress to find cheap lodgings; for those earning 12s. a week or less and paying 2s. on weekly travel fares, plus accommodation, the temptation to receive gifts from customers ‘over and above the regulation tip’ were great. Even without this hardship,

⁷⁰ Drake, ‘The Waiter’, note, p.92.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.101. Teashops also often charged waitresses for breakages though this practice varied considerably between companies. Clementina Black, *Sweated Industry and the Minimum Wage*, (London, 1907), p.70.

⁷² Barbara Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*, (London, 1920), p.47.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.46.

Drake alleged, around 25 percent of teashop waitresses allowed customers to ‘treat’ them with taxi rides, restaurant dinners, or theatre trips. For some couples, especially where the men were of equivalent class status, Drake found the treating ‘innocent enough,’ with marriage often resulting. ‘It is the older man, the married man, the so-called “gentleman” of another class,’ she reported, ‘who is said to be responsible for the dark places of a waitress’s career.’ Here, in the ‘so-called “gentleman”’, was one possible incarnation of Davidson – the version the commissioner assaulted – but also the shadow of another, the customer who to varying degrees exploited or sought to alleviate the waitress’s vulnerable predicament. While there was obvious danger in ‘treating’, Drake avowed that the teashop waitress, required to be ‘a girl of “savoir-faire,” and quick parts,’ was ‘able as a rule to take care of herself’.⁷⁴

Yet sometimes the grey area of teashop treating shaded into more explicitly illicit territory. While the A.B.C. ostensibly guaranteed waitress respectability through its no tipping policy, in the 1910s other, less salubrious, teashops carved out a niche by doing the opposite: encouraging intimate relations between waitresses and customers by creating the financial necessity and environmental opportunity for waitresses to boost tips by kissing and cuddling customers. The trend became visible with the prosecution of Marian Hawes, manageress of the Ashanti Tea Rooms in Hercules Passage, just off Threadneedle Street, in December 1914, and continued into the 1920s. It represented both the enduring economic vulnerability of teashop waitresses and a change in their labour as competition between teashops increased. With no control over the conditions of their labour, and no effective organization to change this, waitresses’ labour-power was already commodified: an abstract quantity to be bought or sold to which individual workers could

⁷⁴ Barbara Drake, ‘The Tea-Shop Girl, being a Report of an Enquiry undertaken by the Investigation Committee of the Women’s Industrial Council’, *The Women’s Industrial News*, XVII/61, (April 1913), pp.125-126.

have no special attachment. But as teashops fought for custom in a crowded market, in some places that labour-power, when put to work, became what Hochschild terms an ‘emotional labour’ – especially one that was metaphorically and physically tactile.⁷⁵ Because of rising competition in the 1910s, waitresses’ labour in some teashops became a matter of easing boundaries between themselves and customers; allowing themselves to be physically and affectively ‘touched’ and ‘touching’ the customer in return. In this way, waitresses became potentially alienated both from their own labour and from the varying levels of ‘touch’ increasingly constituting it.⁷⁶ However, if teashop waiting became an emotional labour, then waitresses at the same time became adept at managing their own emotions within this. As Bailey argues for the sexualized relation between the Victorian barmaid and customer, the ban on touching meant that ‘through its very repression, touch took on a new expressive charge’.⁷⁷ Yet crucially, this was not a case of waitresses ‘performing’ their sexuality for customers, as if it were preformed, but, as with customer desire, deriving that sexuality *from* the particular economic conditions causing the abstraction of their labour.

The Ashanti Tea Rooms first came to public attention on 23 December 1914, when Marian Hawes was summoned before the Lord Mayor at Mansion House court for failing to stamp the insurance cards of two waitresses. But the insurance commissioners’ visits to the tearooms made it clear that insurance fraud was not the only dubious activity the Ashanti was engaged in. Commissioner Henson reported that on one visit he saw a woman

⁷⁵ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, (2nd edn, Berkeley: London, 2012), note, p.7. See also Amy S. Wharton, ‘The Sociology of Emotional Labor’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 35, (2009), pp.147-165.

⁷⁶ Hochschild, *Managed Heart*, p.13.

⁷⁷ Peter Bailey, ‘Parasexuality and Glamour: the Victorian Barmaid as Cultural Prototype’, *Gender & History*, 2/2, (Summer, 1990), p.168.

smoking a cigarette while perched on a man's knee.⁷⁸ Henson's allegation was confirmed the same day when Hawes was also hauled before the City Common Sergeant F.A. Bosanquet to answer charges of misrepresentation. Doris and Monica Conran Smith, purchasers of a four-fifths share of the Bonanza Tea Rooms from Marian Hawes, alleged that at the time of sale Hawes had misrepresented the Bonanza's revenue and outgoings, consequently exaggerating its profitability. But the real nub of the issue, and probable reason for the false account, seemed to be the way the waitresses behaved. The Conran Smiths alleged that the waitresses were not given food but had to have it bought for them by customers, many of whom were 'rather forward young men'.⁷⁹ The subtext behind the allegation, which the Conran Smiths were reluctant to reveal, was that Bonanza waitresses supported themselves through less than respectable relations with customers. This gained added credibility when Hawes admitted that Ashanti waitresses received only 6s. a week plus 1s. commission for every pound of sales, though she denied that anything indecent ever occurred.⁸⁰

A few months later May Perryman, proprietress of Carlton Tea Rooms at 1 Copthall Chambers, just north of the Bank of England, was summoned before Guildhall Justice Room for permitting disorderly conduct between waitresses and customers. Plainclothes policemen had visited the Carlton at lunchtime on five occasions and each time seen conduct of 'a scandalous and disgraceful character,' according to assistant City Solicitor T.G. Vickery.⁸¹ During their first visit on 30 June 1915, DC Challis and PC

⁷⁸ 'The Ashanti Tea Rooms', *Daily Mail*, 23 December 1914, p.2. Lord Mayor Sir Charles Johnston sentenced Hawes to a fine of £10 and 23s. costs or one months' imprisonment per offence for the insurance fraud; Hawes paid. Court register and gaoler's register, Mansion House Justice Room, LMA, CLA/004/04/076 and CLA/004/05/006 respectively, 22 December 1914.

⁷⁹ *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 23 December 1914, p.2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*; See also 'Two City Tea Shops', *Daily Mail*, 23 December 1914, p.2.

⁸¹ 'A City Tea-Room', *Daily Mail*, 19 July 1915, p.7.

Walton ordered two cups of coffee. Waitresses ‘Fifi’ and ‘Dorothy’, both allegedly dressed in ‘rather short skirts’ and ‘low necked blouses’, brought over the order, along with – apparently without asking – two sodas, milk, and two sandwiches for themselves, which they consumed alongside the policemen. Challis and Walton unquestioningly paid for everything. Describing the visit later in court, Challis explained with a sketch map how couches were arranged around the tearoom; on each couch occupied by a customer also sat a waitress. One of these waitresses, ‘Rose’, balanced on the arm of a couch, her feet resting on the seat, her dress raised above her knees. The customer sat at her feet placed his hand beneath her dress. When the customer stood up to leave Rose put her hand on his genitals, outside his trousers; he paid, Rose kissed him, and then handed the money to Perryman.⁸²

Similar scenes repeated on every occasion Challis and Walton visited. Waitresses sometimes kissed and cuddled, sometimes unfastened a customer’s flies and placed their hands inside his trousers, but they apparently never passed beyond passive touch; this was disorderly conduct not public indecency or prostitution. On the fifth visit, 5 July, Challis and Walton were sat drinking their coffees when Rose allegedly pulled her dress up to her thighs and flashed her drawers to waitress ‘Millie’, who, goaded by a customer, flashed hers in return. In answer to a compliment from May Perryman, who was unfazed by the whole affair, Rose said that she was trying to sell a few pairs to Millie and was showing her the size.⁸³ During the trial, Millie denied the accusation and alleged instead that Walton had ‘behaved like a cad,’ trying to kiss her and inviting her to a ‘tennis party’ at his mother’s house in Twickenham. Unconvinced, Alderman Sir George Truscott, who felt it particularly distasteful that men should be wasting their time in such activities while

⁸² Guildhall Justice Room minutes, LMA, CLA/005/06/149, 16 July 1915.

⁸³ LMA, CLA/005/06/149, 16 and 26 July 1915.

others were fighting for their country, found Perryman guilty on all counts.⁸⁴ He ordered a fine of £5 and 2s. 2d. costs or one month's imprisonment per offence.⁸⁵

Perryman's prosecution was just the beginning. In November 1915 T.G. Vickery successfully prosecuted Eveline Fawcett, proprietress of the Café Bean, Bow Lane, and Kathleen Newton, proprietress of the Club Tea Rooms, Bishopsgate, for permitting six and four counts of disorderly conduct respectively.⁸⁶ In each case the details were similar. Provocatively dressed waitresses brought customers their order along with refreshment for themselves, then allowed a limited amount of fondling – though how much this was stereotyped and routinized by police evidence is difficult to tell. Plainclothes officers noted the meagre portions (sandwiches 3 inches by 2½ inches) and high prices; tea and coffee 4d., sandwiches 6d., plus the waitresses' refreshment and an undefined 'service' charge.⁸⁷ Through this arrangement proprietresses maximized revenue, minimized wages, and escaped paying for waitresses' meals, while waitresses supplemented their low wages through commission or tips, if these were subsequently shared. Waitress Millie for example claimed that she received wages of 10s. a week, plus tips of up to 10s.⁸⁸ Contrary to the A.B.C.'s dictum, low wages, and a liberal attitude on the part of some waitresses, had far more influence on teashop disorderly conduct than a waitress's living situation; some of those accused, like Millie, lived with parents while all three waitresses prosecuted

⁸⁴ LMA, CLA/005/06/149, 26 July 1915; 'City Idlers', *Daily Mail*, 27 July 1915, p.3.

⁸⁵ Guildhall Justice Room court register, LMA, CLA/005/02/064, 26 July 1915; Letter from City Solicitor to The Worshipful The General Purposes Committee of Aldermen, Solicitor's Office report books, LMA, COL/CCS/SO/04/029, 17 September 1915.

⁸⁶ Fawcett was fined £33 3s. and Newton £25 5s. LMA, COL/CCS/SO/04/029, 11 November 1915; For Newton see Guildhall Justice Room court register and minutes, LMA, CLA/005/02/064 and CLA/005/06/152 respectively, 10 November 1915. Also, Guildhall Justice Room gaoler's register, LMA, CLA/005/07/002 and 'City Tea-Shop Scandal', *Daily Mail*, 11 November 1915, p.3.

⁸⁷ LMA, CLA/005/06/149, 16 July 1915.

⁸⁸ LMA, CLA/005/06/149, 26 July 1915.

when the Ashanti again came under scrutiny in September 1922 were married.⁸⁹ Even when part-supported, a basic, 'supplementary' wage was insufficient to prevent waitresses from seeking other ways to increase their incomes.

Aware of this fact, City teashop proprietresses facilitated disorderly behaviour through careful spatial planning. Several teashops prosecuted, like the Royal Exchange Tea Rooms below the Exchange, the Mocha Café at 20 Ironmonger Lane, and the Ashanti, were discreetly situated in basement rooms, away from innocent passing custom. Small already, the Mocha measuring only thirty feet by ten feet, they were often further divided by multiple partitions.⁹⁰ As the customer descended the stairs into the Ashanti they came across a 'deep recess' on the left-hand side partitioned by a wall and hangings; further down, another room opened up on the right-hand side, with 'four recesses partitioned by six-foot folding screens'.⁹¹ The Mocha was divided into five sections, each section 'lighted with electric light heavily shaded so as to give the least possible light'; the same was ostensibly true of lighting in the Ashanti.⁹² In the days surrounding Armistice Day, 1918, these material boundaries were temporarily suspended as the wider restrictions on public intimacy eased. On one undercover visit to the Royal Exchange Tea Rooms on 12 November, Detective Johnson saw two waitresses, a sailor, and another man cuddling one another. Returning again on 21 November, Johnson ostensibly heard proprietress

⁸⁹ *Portsmouth Evening News*, 26 September 1922, p.5.

⁹⁰ 'Tea with Kisses', *Daily Mail*, 10 December 1920, p.4. See Letter from City Solicitor to The Worshipful The General Purposes Committee of Aldermen, Solicitor's Office report books, LMA, COL/CCS/SO/04/031, 13 January 1921; Mansion House Justice Room court register and gaoler's register, LMA, CLA/004/04/088, 9 and 22 December 1920, CLA/004/05/008, 22 December 1920 respectively.

⁹¹ 'Women's Conduct in Tea Rooms', *Daily Mail*, 27 September 1922, p.6. Mansion House Justice Room court register and gaoler's register, LMA, CLA/004/04/091, 26 September and 11 October 1922, CLA/004/05/008, 11 October 1922 respectively; Letter from City Solicitor to The Worshipful The General Purposes Committee of Aldermen, Solicitor's Office Report Books, LMA, COL/CCS/SO/04/032, 14 September and 25 October 1922.

⁹² 'Tea with Kisses', p.4; 'Women's Conduct in Tea Rooms', p.6.

Millicent Gibson tease another customer: ‘Kiss me: I haven’t had a peace kiss yet’.⁹³ But mostly the material demarcation of a private public space was necessary to shield waitresses and customers from prying eyes.

Despite T.G. Vickery’s energetic campaign, disorderly conduct in teashops continued throughout and beyond the Great War.⁹⁴ Beginning with the prosecution of May Perryman in July 1915, Vickery launched a further eight prosecutions between November 1915 and October 1922.⁹⁵ The teashops’ resilience was partly due to their system of management and partly because of the limits to the sentence that could be passed if a case was proved. In some cases the manageress prosecuted was also the ‘proprietress’, invariably a leaseholder, and so a successful prosecution could lead to the teashop’s closure or reform. In other cases, though, the proprietress remained at one remove from the teashop’s management and was therefore able to deny knowledge of illicit activity. Following the successful prosecution of manageress Violet Winsor of the Ashanti Tea Rooms in October 1922, Magistrate Sir David Burnett commented that the real responsibility lay with teashop proprietresses, in this case Mrs Tuke, who received

⁹³ ‘Tea-Room Kisses’, *Daily Mail*, 1 January 1919, p.3. Mansion House Justice Room court register and gaoler’s register, LMA, CLA/004/04/084, 31 December 1918 and 15 January 1919, CLA/004/05/007, 15 January 1919 respectively.

⁹⁴ Journalist Sydney Mosely gave a detailed exposé of postwar teashop misconduct in his *The Night Haunts of London*, (London, 1920), pp.34-39.

⁹⁵ The teashops prosecuted included the Carlton Tea Rooms, Café Bean, Club Tea Rooms (twice), Empire Café, Walbrook Café, Royal Exchange Tea Rooms, Mocha Café, and Ashanti Tea Rooms. In addition to references above, see Westminster Police Court registers, LMA, PS/WES/A2/038-039, 15 and 22 March, 4, 11, 15, and 25 April 1918; ‘Police and a Tea Room’, *Daily Mail*, 18 March 1918, p.4; ‘Teashop Peck on the Cheek’, *Daily Mail*, 23 March 1918, p.4; ‘Far and Near’, *Daily Mail*, 26 April 1918, p.4 (all Club Tea Rooms, Spring 1918). Also, Letter from City Solicitor to The Worshipful the General Purposes Committee of Aldermen, Solicitor’s Office Report Books, LMA, COL/CCS/SO/04/029, 12 May 1916; Mansion House Justice Room register, LMA, CLA/004/04/078, 2 and 5 May 1916; ‘Undesirable Tea-Shops’, *Daily Mail*, 3 May 1916, p.3 (Empire Café). Also, Letter from City Solicitor to The Worshipful the General Purposes Committee of Aldermen, Solicitor’s Office Report Books, LMA, COL/CCS/SO/04/030, 18 October 1918 (Walbrook Café).

the profits but escaped punishment.⁹⁶ Devolved management allowed proprietresses to continue unscathed, even if this meant relocating and opening under a new name. It was even difficult to effectively prosecute those directly involved. At the time of Perryman's prosecution in 1915 only the manageress could be held responsible for disorderly conduct; by 1922 waitresses could also be prosecuted for aiding and abetting, but the maximum penalty possible under Section 28 of the City Police Act was a £5 fine per offence plus costs. While this deterred those prosecuted from re-offending, and while the prosecutions had increasing effect after the City (Various Powers) Act of 1920, teashop disorderly conduct continued sporadically until at least 1938, when waitresses at the Swan Café, Great Swan Alley, were prosecuted for kissing and cuddling customers.⁹⁷

The post of teashop commissionaire was the product of official fears over this kind of conduct and the fraught employment conditions encouraging it. Sourced either from the Corps of Commissionaires or the Veteran's Corps, commissionaires were ex-servicemen available for temporary or permanent employment. Although members were discharged, a strict disciplinary code and rank system maintained a military ethos.⁹⁸ By 1913, 95 percent of the 4,750 members of the Corps of Commissionaires worked for specific employers, most performing general duties as messengers, stewards, porters and clerks; they were especially valuable to employers for whom their military experience

⁹⁶ *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 12 October 1922, p.3.

⁹⁷ Section 15 of the City of London (Various Powers) Act, 1920, amended Section 28 of the City of London Police Act, 1839. For the prosecution in 1927 of Ivone Piper and four other waitresses of the Carlton Café see: Guildhall Justice Room register and minutes, LMA, CLA/005/02/081 and CLA/005/06/241 respectively, 23 August 1927; Letter from City Solicitor to The Worshipful The General Purposes Committee of Aldermen, Solicitor's Office Report Books, LMA, COL/CCS/SO/04/034, 1 September 1927. For the prosecution of Mollie Robinson and two waitresses of the Swan Café in 1938 see 'P.C. Tells of "Cuddling Noises"', *Daily Mail*, 11 May 1938, p.5 and 'City Café Kisses Bring £50 Fine', *Daily Mail*, 13 May 1938, p.3.

⁹⁸ Peter Reese, *Our Sergeant: The Story of the Corps of Commissionaires*, (London, 1986), p.35

made them ideal enforcement officials.⁹⁹ Harry Conniham, a music hall artist whom we shall meet again in Chapter Five, for example alleged that shortly before he was arrested for being a ‘suspected person’ in January 1930, he and his companion had been employed by a commissionaire overseeing a party on a ship moored at Embankment. Conniham was tasked with fetching taxis, his friend with guarding the cars parked opposite the ship.¹⁰⁰ After the end of the Boer War in 1902, when nearly 65,000 soldiers returned to Britain seeking work, the number of commissionaires steadily rose.¹⁰¹ The increase met a growing demand for officials to regulate customer conduct in the new public spaces of department stores and, as film transitioned from music halls to auditoriums and increasingly demanded silent spectatorship, cinemas.¹⁰² Immediately before the outbreak of the Great War, when over half volunteered to fight, commissionaires were especially useful to large teashop chains like Lyons and the A.B.C. wishing to regulate customer-waitress touch when independent teashops were actively encouraging it.¹⁰³

The commissionaire’s assault of Davidson, ostensibly provoked by his overkeen interest in teashop wages, showed Lyons’s sensitivity to waitress employment conditions

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.109. W.G. Clifford, *The Ex-Soldier: By Himself*, (London, 1916), pp.74-76.

¹⁰⁰ ‘The Night Patrol’, loose insert in Tower Bridge Police Court minutes, LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/198, 13 January 1930.

¹⁰¹ The increase was, however, very small in the immediate years following the Boer War. Reese, *Our Sergeant*, pp.96-99.

¹⁰² The counterpart to the commissionaire in expanding spaces of commercialized leisure was the private detective, women private detectives especially benefiting from the rise of department stores. See Annette Kerner, *Woman Detective*, (London, 1954) and *Further Adventures of a Woman Detective*, (London, 1955). Also Louise Jackson, ‘The Unusual Case of “Mrs Sherlock”’: Memoir, Identity and the “Real” Woman Detective in Twentieth-Century Britain’, *Gender and History*, 15/1, (April 2003), p.114. On the increasing demand for cinema attendants, some of whom were commissionaires, see National Council of Public Morals, *The Cinema: Its Present Position and Future Possibilities*, (London, 1917), pp. xxviii-xxix and evidence of A.E. Newbould, p.267; Lise Shapiro Sanders, “‘Indecent Incentives to Vice’: Regulating Films and Audience Behaviour from the 1890s to the 1910s’, in Andrew Higson (ed.), *Young and Innocent?: The Cinema in Britain, 1896-1930*, (Exeter, 2002), pp.97-110.

¹⁰³ Reese, *Our Sergeant*, p.110.

in 1910. But it also showed the perceived need to regulate the physical and affective touch between waitresses and customers shaped by those conditions. During Davidson's trial, Richard Levy raised the 1910 assault as part of an explanation for Lyons's antipathy towards Davidson, and of Davidson's alleged misconduct towards Dorothy Burn, a waitress at Lyons's teashop at 15 Walbrook, in Summer 1929. Burn claimed that on Davidson's first visit he followed her around the teashop, 'got hold' of her, and told her she was 'lovely' and 'too good for the job'. After this he became a daily visitor, and refused service by anyone but her. Davidson showed Burn photographs of his actress friends, gave her a card with his London address, and frequently asked her out for tea.¹⁰⁴ According to Levy, this behaviour, although unusual, was part of Davidson's 'campaign' to improve the working conditions of Lyons waitresses, of which his actions in 1910 were a part.¹⁰⁵ According to Roland Oliver, it was unwanted 'pestering'.¹⁰⁶ Lyons inquiry officer Frederick Stevens stated that he intervened when, on 15 August 1929, he followed Davidson out of the teashop into Cannon Street and told him, as he had been told in 1910, to no longer visit.¹⁰⁷ It was not, Stevens claimed, ostensibly altruistic interfering to which Lyons objected, but Davidson's unwanted advances towards waitresses, particularly 'trippies', or waitresses aged below eighteen.¹⁰⁸ But what Davidson's assault and Dorothy Burn's evidence revealed was that the employment conditions in which he interfered and the illicit touch for which he was accused were each a product of the other. Teashop waitresses' straitened labour conditions and scanty representation, and the physical and affective touch between waitresses and customers, were inseparable, and jointly managed through company inquiry agents and the commissioner's regulatory touch.

¹⁰⁴ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/1, 1 April 1932, pp.386-390.

¹⁰⁵ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/1, 1 April 1932, p.411.

¹⁰⁶ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/1, 1 April 1932, pp.407-408.

¹⁰⁷ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/1, 1 April 1932, pp.409-410.

¹⁰⁸ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/1, 1 April 1932, pp.412-413.

The Northern Line, between Tottenham Court Road and Charing Cross, 29 October 1931: Capital and the Nippy's Ordered Body¹⁰⁹

At around noon on 29 October 1931, Davidson caught the tube from Wood Lane to Charing Cross. On changing at Tottenham Court Road, he noticed two young women enter his car laden with luggage. The women, Davidson realized, had performed at a show he had seen at the Shepherd's Bush Empire the night before.¹¹⁰ Taking advantage of the open car space, Davidson shifted over and struck up a conversation. According to Percival Butler, the Arrow's Agency detective trailing Davidson on behalf of the Bishop of Norwich, Davidson told the women about his own 'theatrical experience'. He mentioned performing in *Charley's Aunt*, an immensely popular farce that ran in London and toured Britain in multiple productions between December 1892 and December 1896, at the beginning of his brief acting career.¹¹¹ When the train reached Charing Cross, Davidson carried their luggage across the station and bundled them onto the train to Chatham, but not before taking their address in order to send them the Actor's Church Union lodging book 'so that they would have nice lodgings on their tour'.¹¹²

The ease with which Davidson could join the new passengers was made possible by the reordering of tube car space over the 1920s. By January 1929, the Northern Line had replaced its gate-stock with more spacious 'standard' stock, complete with automatic central doors.¹¹³ As we saw in Chapter Three, this change itself resulted from the

¹⁰⁹ The phrase 'Northern Line' was only coined in 1937; prior to this several variants existed, such as the 'Hampstead & City Line' and 'Edgware-Morden Line'.

¹¹⁰ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 21 May 1932, pp.981-982.

¹¹¹ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 6 April 1932, pp.771-774; 7 April 1932, p.791.

¹¹² NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 21 May 1932, pp.981-982.

¹¹³ Mike Horne, *The Northern Line*, (3rd edn, Harrow, 2009), p.36.

transformation of the tube's capital base as it gradually entered public control after 1921. But at the same time, the post-war economic conditions stimulating this restructuring – and corresponding economy of bodies in tube cars – also reshaped the bodily relations between teashop waitresses and customers *above* ground. It was only incidental that the passengers Davidson met were stage performers. But there was nonetheless a symmetry between their career and the 'acting' increasingly expected of teashop waitresses – acting shaped by the same economic conditions enabling Davidson's conversation as he rattled along on the tube.

Like the tube, Lyons also benefited from rising spending power and customer numbers in 1919. Between June 1919 and June 1920 sales in Lyons teashops were 50 percent higher than they had been the previous year. But also like the tube, Lyons struggled to profit from this due to high capital costs resulting from materials shortages and rising wages; gross profit in June 1920 was the lowest it had ever been in the company's history.¹¹⁴ According to Lyons chairman Montague Gluckstein, between June 1919 and June 1920 foodstuff prices alone rose by 31.5 percent.¹¹⁵ In response, Lyons raised its prices, the price of a cup of tea increasing from 2½d. to 3d. in July 1919 and that of a cup of coffee from 3d. to 3½d. in October 1920.¹¹⁶ Apparently insignificant, these increases drew considerable negative comment in the Press.¹¹⁷

Yet Lyons's financial difficulties put more at stake than the price of a cup of tea. In May 1920, when wholesale prices and national labour unrest were at their height,

¹¹⁴ Report of the Annual Shareholder's Meeting, 17 June 1920, *Lyons Mail* (supplement), (July 1920), LMA, ACC/3527/270, p.1.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.3; Director's Office diary, LMA, ACC/3527/011, 2 October 1920.

¹¹⁶ '3d. Cups of Tea', *Daily Mail*, 29 July 1919, p.7; '3½ d. Cup of Coffee', *Daily Mail*, 4 October 1920, p.5.

¹¹⁷ '3½ d. for a Cup of Coffee!', *Daily Express*, 2 October 1920, p.1; 'Why not Cheaper Cups of Tea?', *Daily Express*, 4 October 1920, p.1; 'Coffeeteering', *Daily Express*, 4 October 1920, p.4; 'Coffee and High Finance', *Daily Express*, 5 October 1920, p.1.

rumour circulated that the pay of Lyons waitresses had been cut from 30s. to 21s. a week and commission from 1s. to 6d. in the pound.¹¹⁸ For the first time since 1895, teashop waitresses organized to counter the change with direct action. Former members of the International Caterers' Employees' Union joined unionist Tom Cann to form the United Catering Trade Union, which, like Tom Mann in 1895, offered logistical advice and support.¹¹⁹ On 21 May 1920 an alleged three thousand Lyons waitresses crammed into Memorial Hall, Farringdon, to draw up their demands, including the payment of 'union rates', a forty-eight-hour week, and the abolition of deductions from pay. Equally contentious was Lyons's alleged 'victimization' of waitress union members, six of whom, Tom Cann told the *Daily Mail*, had been unfairly dismissed.¹²⁰ In response Lyons flatly denied that there was any such thing as a 'union rate', that waitresses were paid anything less than 30s. or worked anything more than forty-eight hours a week.¹²¹

Despite protesting, by 26 May it seemed like the agitation was over after Lyons agreed to most of the waitresses' demands, excepting those concerning pay, and the waitresses agreed to work with Lyons to push for the creation of a trade board.¹²² The proposed strike was called off.¹²³ But the peace was short-lived. Following the dismissal of kitchen-hand F. Sparkes, a widow with three children, for wearing her union badge, hundreds of Lyons waitresses again met to discuss direct action. Immediately voting to strike, the waitresses picketed every Lyons teashop from 7am the following morning, 17 August 1920.¹²⁴ Numbering over five hundred, they marched from the teashops to join a

¹¹⁸ 'Demands of Lyons Girls', *Daily Mail*, 22 May 1920, p.5.

¹¹⁹ McCartney, *Dare to be a Daniel!*, pp.25-26. 'Amalgamated Union of Hotel Club and Restaurant Workers', in Marsh and Smethurst, *Historical Directory of Trade Unions*, V, 252.

¹²⁰ 'Demands of Lyons Girls', p.5.

¹²¹ 'Lyons's Tea Girls', *Daily Mail*, 24 May 1920, p.6.

¹²² 'Lyons's Offer to Waitresses', *Daily Mail*, 26 May 1920, p.3.

¹²³ 'No Lyons Strike', *Daily Mail*, 27 May 1920, p.3.

¹²⁴ 'Teashop Strike', *Daily Mail*, 17 August 1920, p.5.

procession through the West End.¹²⁵ But the strike was, the Press wryly noted, a storm in a teacup. Because Lyons produced nearly all of its food at Cadby Hall in Hammersmith, and because the cooks' and carmens' unions had not joined the strike, the supply of goods to Lyons teashops was relatively unaffected.¹²⁶ Moreover, at a time when demobilization pushed the number of registered unemployed women to 500,000, Lyons easily recruited replacements for strikers.¹²⁷ Two days after the strike began, Lyons director Alfred Salmon told the *Daily Mail* that three thousand women had applied for six hundred vacancies, one thousand of whom had been employed immediately.¹²⁸ Cook and syndicalist Wilf McCartney later wrote that he and Tom Cann had complained to the London Trades Council, with which the United Catering Trade Union was affiliated, about other unions blacklegging the waitresses, but apparently to no effect; the LTC rather claimed it had trenchantly supported the campaign.¹²⁹ Wherever the responsibility lay, by 19 August the strike was effectively over.¹³⁰

If the strike failed to win concessions, it nonetheless encouraged in Lyons an altered attitude towards its waitresses. Waitresses had received formal training ever since Lyons opened a training school at 396 Strand in 1912.¹³¹ But in the years following the strike Lyons redoubled its efforts to manage the professional conduct and public image of its waitresses to the closest detail. In December 1921 Lyons introduced its first post-training school examination for waitresses. Waitresses were tested on their general

¹²⁵ 'May a Tea-Girl Wear a Badge?', *Daily Mail*, 18 August 1920, p.3; *Teashop Strike* (British Pathé Online), 218.29, 19 August 1920.

¹²⁶ McCartney, *Dare to be a Daniel!*, pp.27-28.

¹²⁷ Keith Laybourn, *Unemployment and Employment Policies Concerning Women in Britain, 1900-1951*, (Lewiston: Queenston: Lampeter, 2002), p.8.

¹²⁸ 'Lyons's Strike', *Daily Mail*, 19 August 1920, p.3.

¹²⁹ McCartney, *Dare to be a Daniel!*, p.28; London Trades Council, *London Trades Council, 1860-1950: A History*, (London, 1950), p.114.

¹³⁰ 'Teashop Strike', *Daily Mail*, 20 August 1920, p.3.

¹³¹ 'Training Lyons' Waitresses', *Lyons Mail*, (October 1920), LMA, ACC/3527/270, pp.15-16.

catering knowledge, the best then sitting a final paper covering the finer intricacies of teashop service.¹³² A year later, Lyons required teashop kitchens to display weekly mottoes encouraging good service. Waitresses read such pithy advice as ‘Your temper is your own, never lose it’.¹³³ In January 1925 Lyons completely relaunched the image of its waitresses. Renamed ‘Nippy’, the Lyons waitress was no longer the recalcitrant striker but the obedient ‘symbol of public service’.¹³⁴ A major uniform change signalled the shift: a shorter dress and apron, lower collar, and the replacement of a cap with a coronet more closely approximated contemporary women’s fashions and gave the impression, Bird argues, of service without the ‘servitude’.¹³⁵ The Nippy image struck a careful ‘conservative modernity’; appealing enough to draw comment, but shy to the more avant-garde fashions of the ‘flapper’.¹³⁶ It required waitresses to combine the independence of modern femininity with the efficiency of modern industry (Fig.13). The notebook kept by Nippy Ethel Fage in the 1930s for example gives extremely detailed instructions concerning the correct preparation and service of tea (twenty-two separate points) as well as regulations governing nail manicures (staff may have their nails manicured for 9d. at 59 Shaftesbury Avenue on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays if they make an appointment through their manageress).¹³⁷

¹³² ‘Examinations for Waitresses’, *Lyons Mail*, (December 1921), LMA, ACC/3527/271, p.189.

¹³³ ‘Wisdom for Waitresses’, *Daily Mail*, 20 December 1922, p.5. Nippy Helen McCrae gave a radio talk for 2LO, the BBC’s predecessor, on 7 April 1926 in which she mentioned some of the mottoes still in use. “‘Nippy’ at 2LO”, *Daily Mail*, 8 April 1926, p.7; “‘Nippy’ Calling”, *Lyons Mail*, (May and June 1926), LMA, ACC/3527/276, p.41.

¹³⁴ *The Perfect Nippy*, n.d., illustration of the correct Nippy presentation, LMA, ACC/3527/565.

¹³⁵ Bird, *First Food Empire*, pp.114-115; Bacon, ‘My Days with Lyons’, n.d., LMA, ACC/3527/231, n.p.

¹³⁶ Bird, *First Food Empire*, p.119. On ‘conservative modernity’ see Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism between the Wars*, (London, 1991), c.2.

¹³⁷ Nippy Ethel Fage’s notebook, 1930s, LMA, LMA/4306/A/001, n.p.



|| *A Pause in the Day's Bustle: She Makes Out a Bill*
During the rush hour she has no time to make out bills in advance; waits until one is asked for. Now she has a moment to spare; can do her reckoning beforehand. A successful Nippy is capable, not easily tired. She is something of a mathematician, and possesses remarkable control over her temper.

Fig.13 *A Pause in the Day's Bustle: She Makes Out a Bill*, in 'A Day in the Life of a Nippy', *Picture Post*, 2/9, (4 March 1939), p.33.

Decades later, former Nippies recalled how this image of industrious femininity was strictly enforced. As historian Judith Walkowitz notes, ex-Nippies reminiscing on their experience at Lyons nearly always remembered the severity of the pre-duty inspection.¹³⁸ Nippies were required to have clean collars and cuffs, flat shoes, black stockings without ladders, clean nails, and to have their coronet touching their eyebrows; no lipstick or jewellery was to be worn, except wedding and engagement rings.¹³⁹ The company publication, *Lyons Mail*, distributed monthly to the 18,700 employees subscribing to the Lyons Club, and its commissioned film *Noona Be Nippy* (1929) gave further direction on appropriate waitress habitus. Shot by Bertie Joseph, who introduced waitress examinations in 1921, *Noona Be Nippy* followed the form of *The Rake's Progress*, contrasting the rapid advancement of efficient waitress 'Nora Swift' with the blunders of slipshod 'Noona Sloe'. This time, however, the story took an optimistic turn, showing how 'patient training' could redeem even the most 'unpromising pupil'. The film acted as part-instruction, part-inducement for Nippy viewers, showing for example how to correctly serve a poached egg, how to lay a table and 'pack' a tray, and the heights to which the most skilled waitresses could advance.¹⁴⁰ An annual £100 prize for the most efficient Nippy, introduced in 1927, further tied the microscale ordering of the waitress's body with the streamlining of the whole teashop operation.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Judith R. Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven: London, 2012), p.205.

¹³⁹ Letters of reminiscence from former Nippies: Joy Hadson, 1 March 1990; R. Dobner, n.d.; Nellie Jouney, 9 January 1990; D. Hughes, 7 January 1990; Kathleen Pittman, 10 February 1990; L. Docwra, 19 February 1990, all LMA, ACC/3527/235.

¹⁴⁰ 'Noona be Nippy' and 'An All-Staff Film', *Lyons Mail* (November 1929), LMA, ACC/3527/278, pp.164-165 and p.166 respectively. No complete copy of the film survives, but the British Film Institute holds a section (parts 7 and 8 of 8): 18791. Bertie Joseph directed Lyons' training school for Nippies and also Outdoor Catering, to which Nora and Noona finally progress at the end of the film. (<http://www.kzwp.com/lyons.pensioners/obituary2J.htm>, 20 April 2016).

¹⁴¹ "'Nippy's" £100 Prize', *Lyons Mail* (January 1928), LMA, ACC/3527/278, p.227.

For the more jaundiced observer, Lyons's efforts to routinize waitress habitus was just one element of the wider routinization of everyday London life. In J.B. Priestley's novel *Angel Pavement* (1930) the Lyons Corner House became a bewildering place where waitress and customer behaviour was reduced to a fine calculation of service on one hand and erotic frisson on the other: a 'citadel' of industrial-scale organization and magnet for young, spendthrift clerks like Mr Turgis looking for love on a budget. Hidden amongst the forest of tables, Turgis was one of those men 'juggling with fractions of a farthing' who knew exactly how long it took a waitress 'to carry a tray of given weight from the kitchen lift to the table in the far corner'. But despite the apparent opportunities for love, Turgis found himself crammed onto a table with three other less than appealing customers, 'shooting amorous glances' to indifferent girls at adjacent tables and served by a 'snappy' waitress.¹⁴² By 1936, in line with his broader intellectual evolution over the 1930s, Priestley had sharpened his social critique.¹⁴³ Seen through Rose Salter's eyes in *They Walk in the City* (1936), London's chain teashops lacked any human dimension, each appearing instead 'nearly as severely business-like as a power-house'. Waitresses 'hastily and efficiently served mathematically regular portions of food and measures of drink,' and 'made you feel that you must have a train to catch outside'.¹⁴⁴ Reading Ethel Fage's notebook, this had a ring of truth about it. Even the entry on baked beans was intimidatingly precise: 'Serve two ladles of Baked Beans in vegetable dish[,] a teaspoon of tomato sauce in centre[;] serve on 8¼ inch plate with four diamonds of toast round edge. Crust to be cut off.'¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² J.B. Priestley, *Angel Pavement*, (London, 1930), pp.171-174.

¹⁴³ John Baxendale, *Priestley's England: J.B. Priestley and English Culture*, (Manchester: New York, 2007), pp.46-56, pp.63-64.

¹⁴⁴ J.B. Priestley, *They Walk in the City: The Lovers in the Stone Forest*, (London, 1936), pp.184-185. See also Paul Cohen-Portheim, *The Spirit of London*, (London, 1935), pp.90-91.

¹⁴⁵ LMA, LMA/4306/A/001, n.p.

Priestley's account of teashop regimentation was part of a wider critique of modern urban alienation.¹⁴⁶ But despite its polemical tone, it highlighted how closely Lyons attempted to manage waitress, and correspondingly customer, behaviour since the 1920 strike. Moreover, it indicated that even by the mid-1930s teashops were still haunted by the spectre not only of disobedient waitresses but also disorderly ones. In the same year as *They Walk* was published, commandant of the Women's Auxiliary Service Mary Allen reported a return of shady teashops, where waitresses in 'abbreviated musical comedy uniforms' accepted 'gross familiarities from customers' and led them into backrooms for sex.¹⁴⁷ It was in this context that Lyons emphasized the Nippy's merits as an efficient worker and potential wife. From April 1927, for example, the *Lyons Mail* began publishing the names of Nippies married the previous month, encouraging readers to think of themselves as wives in training; desirable but also efficient and respectable, a contrast to the easy waitress of the backstreet teashop.¹⁴⁸ While teashops had long presented waitresses as potential wives, Lyons's focus on the idealized femininity and industrious propriety of the Nippy responded both to earlier labour disputes and continued anxiety over potential illicit touch.

Davidson's touch of waitresses exposed the tensions in this evolving routinization of teashop labour. When not pulling manageresses aside for a word, Davidson alleged, he was 'selecting' efficient waitresses to help him conduct affairs with his long-term business partner Arthur Gordon.¹⁴⁹ On entering a teashop, Davidson would scan the floor for a waitress who looked 'quick in her work', touch her shoulder to attract her attention,

¹⁴⁶ For Priestley's conceptualization of the novel see *Midnight On the Desert: A Chapter of Autobiography*, (London, 1937), pp.49-50.

¹⁴⁷ Mary S. Allen, *Lady in Blue*, (London, 1936), pp.236-237.

¹⁴⁸ '78 Happy Brides', *Lyons Mail*, (April 1927), LMA, ACC/3527/277, p.292.

¹⁴⁹ For a detailed investigation into Davidson's business relations with Gordon, see W. Barker, Criminal Intelligence Department report, 29 February 1932, TNA, MEPO 3/750.

and, if she seemed amenable, ask her to take messages for himself and Gordon.¹⁵⁰ Some waitresses, like Dorothy Burn, apparently agreed, although they were occasionally discouraged, Davidson claimed, by the ‘chipping’ of other waitresses jealous of the generous tip given for this service.¹⁵¹ Others, like Kathleen Grant, a Nippy at Maison Lyons on Oxford Street whom Davidson tried to conscript in late August 1930, refused. Giving evidence on 2 April 1932, Grant complained that Davidson’s constant chatter compelled her to wait at his table longer than was necessary, something that was ‘against the rules’. Eventually she took to hiding behind a pillar until certain Davidson had not sat at one of her tables.¹⁵² With Nippies expected to maintain rapid customer turnover while serving smartly, and with the Oxford Street Corner House serving over 28,000 meals over the last weekend of August 1930, Davidson’s attempt to turn waitresses into personal messengers was both a product of and problem for Lyons’s emphasis on ‘Nippy’ service.¹⁵³

At the same time, Davidson’s attentions were born out of the depiction of Nippies as ideal potential wives. As with A.B.C. waitress Phyllis Holt, Davidson also periodically asked Kathleen Grant to the theatre, ostensibly to talk about Kathleen’s mother who was, incidentally, one of Davidson’s parishioners.¹⁵⁴ Davidson was able to extend such invitations liberally as his contacts in theatre meant he was often given tickets to ‘paper the house’; to distribute freely in order to pack audiences and generate interest in a play.¹⁵⁵ During shows he would slip backstage to mingle with the cast and sometimes force his way onstage, appearing, one former undergraduate friend remembered, as a ‘rather odd

¹⁵⁰ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 21 May 1932, pp.874-875.

¹⁵¹ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 25 May 1932, pp.1257-1258.

¹⁵² NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/1, 2 April 1932, pp.448-450.

¹⁵³ Account book: number of meals served each day at the Oxford Street Corner House, 1928-1952, LMA, ACC/3527/058, 30 and 31 August 1930.

¹⁵⁴ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/1, 2 April 1932, p.445.

¹⁵⁵ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 21 May 1932, p.978.

clerical shadow reflected by strong limelight, and marring perhaps a particularly beautiful scene'.¹⁵⁶ The frequency with which Davidson invited waitresses to join him at the theatre led to some joking about the number of 'wives' he had acquired. The waitresses of the Lyons teashop on St James's Street even nicknamed Davidson 'The Mormon'; Mormons, Davidson half-proudly, half-bitterly, explained to Chancellor North, were 'popularly supposed to have an enormous number of wives'.¹⁵⁷ But if Davidson's invitations were motivated by his desire for vicarious wives, they were also an effect of the efforts Lyons and its competitors made to idealize their waitresses' femininity, a femininity to which many customers succumbed. When cross-examined, Phyllis Holt admitted that over 3½ years spent working for the A.B.C. she had had as many as one hundred conversations where customers had invited her out to the cinema.¹⁵⁸ Although persistent, Davidson did not account for all of them.

Davidson's touch of waitresses 'selected' as messengers, and his repeated theatre invitations, were something more than the actions of a predatory teashop customer, however waitresses themselves construed them. They were instances of physical and affective touch figured first by the specific contradictions governing interwar teashops; ways of acting and sensing made possible by being acted *upon* by broader demands of capital structuring teashop life. Since at least the introduction of the Nippy, waitresses were expected to be both ideal potential wives and unobtainable blurs of efficiency. They were expected to at once engage in an increasingly emotional labour, blurring the affective boundaries between themselves and customers, and in a labour *of* emotion that carefully managed the elision. Unable to shape their conditions of labour through striking,

¹⁵⁶ Reginald Kennedy-Cox, *Reginald Kennedy-Cox: An Autobiography*, (London, 1931), p.51.

¹⁵⁷ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/1, 1 April 1932, pp.412-413; NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 24 May 1932, p.1104.

¹⁵⁸ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 5 April 1932, pp.637-638.

and never entirely free from associations of illicit touch, waitresses were expected to achieve a particular mode of abstract exchange with customers – an emotional transaction which nonetheless avoided any tactile or emotional ‘investment’ – that resulted from the abstraction of their own labour as itself an exchangeable commodity.¹⁵⁹

Yet crucially, as Dorothy Burn’s evidence and later positive recollections from former Nippies show, many waitresses were also aware of how this abstract exchange enhanced their desirability even more. While for some it meant unwelcome advances from customers like Davidson, for others it could be used both as a way to repel these advances or, more positively, to develop friendships or find love. Nippy Edith Walker remembered how, when working at the Lyons teashop in Oxford Street, Manchester, the ‘marvellous organist’ who played the Wurlitzer at the local Gaumont Cinema would always sit at her station and give a generous tip of 2d.¹⁶⁰ Florence Wright, a Nippy at 10 Oxford Street, London, in the 1930s, similarly recollected the gifts she received and still treasured the record of *HMS Pinafore* given her by one customer.¹⁶¹ The expectation for Nippies to be desirable but detached could generate unwelcome responses from teashop customers who, like Davidson, transgressed the emotional or physical boundaries it required. But it could equally well be suspended by Nippies, often leading to more positive, if still ambiguous, relationships with customers.

The Nippy’s incarnation in theatre especially revealed this divergence between company expectations of waitresses and the more indeterminate relations of the teashop

¹⁵⁹ Here I draw on William Sewell’s brilliant argument that the abstracting forces of capitalism in eighteenth-century France, and the subsequent development of ‘abstract forms of social relations’, made it both easier and more ‘attractive’ to accept new discourses of civic equality during the 1789 revolution. William H. Sewell Jr., ‘Connecting Capitalism to the French Revolution: The Parisian Promenade and the Origins of Civic Equality in Eighteenth-Century France’, *Critical Historical Studies*, 1/1, (Spring 2014), p.11.

¹⁶⁰ Letter of reminiscence from Edith Walker, LMA, ACC/3527/235, 18 December 1989.

¹⁶¹ Letter of reminiscence from Florence Wright, LMA, ACC/3527/235, n.d.

floor. On 30 October 1930 producer Julian Wylie's new musical comedy *Nippy* opened at the Prince Edward Theatre in London. The play told the story of an ordinary Corner House Nippy caught between love and fame, social distinction and anonymity. When the celebrations of Boat Race night spill into Oxford Street Corner House, Oxford undergraduate and former Etonian Bob Dering abandons his student 'ragging' for 'the most charming and attractive of waitresses,' Nippy Grey, played by Binnie Hale (Fig.14). The very same night, director Albert Crumpet also spots Nippy Grey's charms and offers her a star role in his forthcoming film. Nippy Grey, however, opts for love. She kisses Bob, earning herself an immediate dismissal. But Bob's father, Sir William, predictably disapproves of the match and threatens to disinherit Bob, compelling Grey to abandon her newfound love and accept Crumpet's offer to become a Hollywood actress. The following year Grey returns to Britain a star and, with all social barriers to marriage removed, reunites with Bob.¹⁶²

Nippy epitomized the ideal of what the Nippy was and of what she could become, both dissolving and reinforcing the difference between them. In the words of one reviewer, Binnie Hale, 'in an exalted form,' 'vitalises those swift and dainty girls who people our tea-shops and adorn the surroundings by the grace of their manner and the urbane adroitness of their service'.¹⁶³ Or as *The Tatler* put it, Hale's performance of Nippy Grey 'is not only the embodiment of professional nippiness behind the tea-tray, but the essence of Cockney wit, *savoir faire*, and independence'.¹⁶⁴ What struck reviewers was

¹⁶² The opening to Scene 1, Act 2 was captured on newsreel: *Nippy* (British Pathé Online), 1024.20, 9 February 1931. "Nippy", *The Stage*, 18 September 1930; "Nippy", *The Era*, 17 September 1930, *Nippy*: press and magazine cuttings of reviews, CRL, MS38/4305, both n.p.

¹⁶³ J.T.G., "Nippy", at the Prince Edward', *The Sketch*, 12 November 1930, CRL, MS38/4305, n.p.

¹⁶⁴ 'Trinculo', "Nippy" at the Prince Edward Theatre', *The Tatler*, 19 November 1930, CRL, MS38/4305, n.p.



Fig.14 *Mr Arthur Riscoe (Crumpet) and Miss Binnie Hale (Nippy Grey) in the Tea-Shop Scene*, in “Nippy” at the Prince Edward Theatre’, *The Tatler*, (19 November 1930), p.333

how the ordinary glamour of the waitress invested her with the potential for the extraordinary glamour of the film star, as well as the urbanity and tact of the modern wife. The studied grace of Binnie Hale the dancer and film star elicited and enlarged that of ordinary waitresses: 'She is never at rest; but her ubiquity is not irritating, it is entrancing, because in everything she does there is meaning and the imperceptible effect of study.'¹⁶⁵

Nippy developed this theme through a scene in the second Act, when the audience is screened the opening announcement to the film in which Grey stars. The credits are an endless list of variations on similar-sounding names attached to similar-sounding jobs and announcing the imminence of a film that never arrives; a parody of the self-promoting American 'hyper-super talkie' and foil to the ordinary glamour of the teashop waitress starring in it.¹⁶⁶ The film-within-a-play, revealingly produced by an 'Otto Hogwasch', critiques the difference between British and American productions, musical comedy and film, the contrast echoing the contrast between the waitress's glamour and that of the conventional film star (which Grey herself also parodies).¹⁶⁷ Just as, it was implied, the British could do anything the Americans could do but more honestly, and with irony, so the teashop waitress could be a film star, keep her charm, and marry for love. And yet, the fact that only after *becoming* a film star could Grey marry her social better reinforced her ordinariness and the social distinctions that had precluded marriage in the first place. In *Nippy*, Nippy Grey's discovered talent as a film star amplified the grace of the teashop

¹⁶⁵ J.T. Grein, 'The World of the Theatre', *Illustrated London News*, 15 November 1930, p.878. See also 'The Playhouses', *Illustrated London News*, 8 November 1930, p.848. Hale was already one of the stars of musical theatre by 1930, already having achieved widespread recognition for title roles in *No, No, Nanette* (1925) and *Sunny* (1926). 'Hale, Binnie', in Stanley Green, *Encyclopaedia of the Musical*, (London, 1977), pp.168-169. On her film roles see Rachael Low, *The History of British Film 1929-1939: Film Making in 1930s Britain*, (London: New York, 1997), p.332, p.349, p.371, p.394, p.398.

¹⁶⁶ Harris Deans, "'Nippy" (Prince Edward)', *Sunday Graphic*, 2 November 1930; D.C.F., "'Nippy'", *Theatre World*, December 1930, CRL, MS38/4305, both n.p.

¹⁶⁷ "'Nippy'", *The Observer*, 2 November 1930, CRL, MS38/4305, n.p.

waitress, while also enforcing the waitress's *difference* as an ordinary worker 'behind the tea-tray' which that grace apparently suspended.

Nippy's self-referential form especially foregrounded this tension between what was possible and what was not for the average Nippy. The film in Act Two was – another pun – *The Lady of Lyons*, an adaptation of the romantic melodrama of the same name written by Edward Bulwer-Lytton and first performed in 1838. In its name the film reiterated to its Nippy viewers the common origins of its star actress. In the same way, *Nippy* featured in its chorus Viola Scott from Coventry Street Corner House, the real-life version of the ordinary Nippy who becomes an actress. Scott had auditioned for the part with twenty other Nippies and was ostensibly included in the production to ensure that the rest of the chorus behaved like real Nippies as closely as possible.¹⁶⁸ Those Nippies who saw the show, or who read about it in the *Lyons Mail*, were given a living example of the acting success to which they might aspire while also, through Scott's very involvement in the musical as the monitor of 'reality', being reminded of the difference between the fictional and the real Nippy.

There is no reference to Davidson attending *Nippy*. But given that he liked encouraging Nippies' acting aspirations, started his career in comedy acting, and was unlikely to pass over a musical devoted to Nippies, it would be surprising if he did not once attend, or invite waitresses to. Indeed, it was September 1930, just over a month before *Nippy* opened, that Davidson began asking Kathleen Grant to join him at the theatre. Whether *Nippy* was raised as a possibility or not, Davidson's habit of inviting waitresses to the theatre, and the tactile relations of which this was a part, responded to the trope running throughout the musical that Nippies were both potential wives and star actresses. Yet by *acting* on that trope Davidson upset the balance between the ideal of

¹⁶⁸ 'A Wylie Scott', *Lyons Mail*, (October 1930), LMA, ACC/3527/280, p.133.

waitresses as potential wives and actresses and as disciplined workers which Nippies were expected to hold in tension. Davidson turned the *abstract* exchange between waitress and customer into a *real*, tactile, social relation – even Nippy Grey, when she kissed Bob Dering, could not escape the consequences of this.

Film Set of *Underground*, Waterloo Tube Station, Late April 1928: Film Stars and Tendentious Jokes

Nippy Grey's film success was not entirely beyond reach for the average waitress. In the last week of April 1928 director Anthony Asquith shot *Underground* at Waterloo tube station between 1.30am and 4.30am every morning. The Underground Electric Railways Company of London granted Asquith special permission to transform the station into a 'miniature Hollywood'. For a few hours each day, Waterloo filled with cables, arc lights, and extras dressed as commuters.¹⁶⁹ Ever the opportunist, Davidson, who somehow knew the lead actress Elissa Landi, visited the set each morning and brought along anyone interested in the production: his children, his children's school friends, a few girls selling fruit, and waitresses. Some of these Davidson secured 'crowd work' for, others had to settle for unpaid work and the benefit of a 'cheap film test'. For Davidson, who no doubt also thoroughly enjoyed the experience, the work was an opportunity for waitresses to fulfil their silver screen dreams and supplement their incomes. Extras earned 21s. a day; a significant amount for Nippies earning between 32s. and 50s. a week.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ 'Mr A. Asquith', *Daily Mail*, 17 March 1928, p.13; 'Film of Strube's "Little Man"', *Daily Express*, 28 April 1928, p.3.

¹⁷⁰ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 23 May 1932, pp.997-998; *Picture Post* estimated that Corner House Nippies earned around 50s. a week in 1939 – 25s. in wages and 25s. in tips – whereas ordinary teashop Nippies, though earning higher wages, received less in total due to fewer tips: 32s. was a 'fair average'. 'A Day in the Life of a Nippy', *Picture Post*, 2/9, (4 March 1939), p.31.

As we saw in Chapter Three, *Underground* made visible tacit norms of personal space emerging on the tube in the 1920s. By contrast, however, Davidson's involvement with the film transgressed similar codes of appropriate touch between customer and waitress then forming in the teashops from which its waitress-extras were drawn. Indeed, Davidson's night-time jaunts to Waterloo called attention to the very conditions underpinning those codes of conduct in teashops. This became especially evident in the light of accusations made by A.B.C. waitress Winifred Barker at Davidson's trial. Barker alleged that, besides irritatingly always ensnaring her in conversation while she was busy serving, Davidson once told her she had 'nice teeth,' and then 'patted her under the chin'.¹⁷¹ In a characteristically imprecise response to the accusation, Davidson replied that he found it unlikely that he would have done such a thing in a restaurant, but 'should not in the least hesitate to do it if I wanted to look at their teeth, to see if they were uneven'. Here, an incredulous Chancellor North interjected:

Chancellor. Just attend, because I want you to do justice to yourself. Do you really say that you would pull her lips down and look at her teeth?—A. If a girl was asking me whether she was suitable for film work, and definitely seemed to be interested, supposing her teeth were all completely uneven, I should say: "No, you had better go to a dentist".

Q. You would open her lips and look at her teeth, just as you would a horse?—A. Yes.

Davidson's emphasis on the importance of even teeth to the ideal of modern beauty was not matched by adherence to unspoken rules about public touch, though he did claim he would not examine a waitress's teeth unless the teashop was 'completely empty'.¹⁷²

If Davidson's actions were discomforting for Chancellor North, who vigorously underlined this section of the trial transcript in red pencil, they were not wholly inexplicable. In part they replicated the discourse that teashop waitresses were everyday

¹⁷¹ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 5 April 1932, pp.642-643.

¹⁷² NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 23 May 1932, pp.998-999.

stars: both actresses on the teashop floor and talents waiting to be discovered. Indeed, less than two weeks after Barker gave evidence, the *Daily Express* ran an article framed in these very terms. After a fruitless survey of ‘London’s working girls’ for ‘types’ suitable to feature in British films, the *Express* correspondent hit upon the teashop waitress as the next potential film star. Customers of Coventry Street Corner House, he wrote, often called waitress Barbara Coombes ‘Leila Hyams’ ‘because of her resemblance to the Hollywood actress’ and regularly told her ‘she ought to be on the screen’. Capturing the same paradox as *Nippy*, he suggested that ‘perhaps balancing a tray of steak-and-kidney puddings is a girl who has just the personality that distinguishes film stars from ordinary mortals’.¹⁷³ With a suspiciously immediate response, director Marmaduke Wetherell took the correspondent at his word. A day after reading the *Express* article, Wetherell visited Coventry Street Corner House, chatted with Coombes, and signed her up for his next film, *The Moorland Mystery*.¹⁷⁴ Although Winifred Barker did not visit the set of *Underground*, the treatment she received from Davidson, however unwelcome, resonated with encounters such as these, encounters encouraged by the papers, repeated in shows like *Nippy*, and which Lyons likely had a hand in.¹⁷⁵

In many cases, Nippies did not even have to take the initiative to make their film debut. Around the time of Davidson’s trial, Lyons regularly made its teashops available for filming or lent props and Nippies to producers shooting a teashop scene. On one of the same nights as waitresses sought crowd work in *Underground*, Albert Bramble was

¹⁷³ ‘Teashop Girls with Poise of Film Stars’, *Daily Express*, 21 April 1932. For a retrospective account of Coventry Street Corner House in the 1920s and 1930s see Maurice Gorham, *Londoners*, (London, 1951), pp.102-103.

¹⁷⁴ The completed film was titled *A Moorland Tragedy* (1933). ‘Waitress to be Film Star’, *Daily Express*, 22 April 1932, p.11.

¹⁷⁵ *Lyons Mail* reported the ‘coincidence’. ‘Lyons in the News’, *Lyons Mail*, May 1932, LMA, ACC/3527/282, p.3. *The Tatler* strongly suspected that Lyons’ publicity department was behind the production of *Nippy*. ‘Trinculo’, “Nippy” at the Prince Edward Theatre’, CRL, MS38/4305, n.p.

shooting *Chick* (1928), the story of a City clerk who inherits a marquissate and whose new identity is accidentally revealed in a teashop. Bramble secured permission to film in Lyons's Westminster Bridge Station teashop, across the river from where Asquith was shooting *Underground*, and borrowed Nippies from Coventry Street Corner House to work as extras.¹⁷⁶ And again on 5 April 1932, the seventh day of Davidson's trial, when Winifred Barker gave evidence, director Thomas Bentley recruited six Nippies to serve in the teashop scenes of his film *After Office Hours* (1932). Lyons lent cutlery, tariffs, even hat-racks, to help Bentley get every detail perfect in the Elstree Studios' reconstruction of a teashop. While some Nippies felt the filming experience valorized their work as waitresses, others involved were less enchanted, one apparently claiming 'I think I would sooner be a Nippy than a film star'.¹⁷⁷

For one author this was the sensible response to the trend in Nippy acting. J.B. Priestley's *They Walk in the City* gave a very different message to every director offering Nippies a slice of stardom. As eccentric and inscrutable as Davidson, the character delivering this message provided the fictional counterpoint to Davidson's efforts to encourage waitresses as film actresses. One day when serving in the Copper Kettle, a teashop just off the Strand, Rose Salter noticed 'an untidy fattish man,' with 'thick eyebrows, a turned-up nose, and a loose comical mouth' enter. The customer, a despondent playwright, was initially unresponsive, but on realizing that Rose was new to London he launched into a warning on the perils of London life. London was a 'wilderness,' he said, in which one easily became lost. When Rose returned with the bill the playwright solemnly drew from her a promise: "Promise me," he said mournfully,

¹⁷⁶ "'Nippy" on the Films', *Lyons Mail*, May 1928, LMA, ACC/3527/278, p.19.

¹⁷⁷ 'Nippy on the Films', *Lyons Mail*, May 1932, LMA, ACC/3527/282, pp.10-11; also, 'MacHinery: Film Star', *Lyons Mail*, September 1928, LMA, ACC/3527/278, p.107.

“you won’t ever become an actress and have a temperament and a personality and a book of press cuttings and an agent and two big offers from Hollywood. Now promise!”¹⁷⁸

The warning captured the novel’s central theme that London threatened a loss to its inhabitants’ sense of self. It was as much autobiographical commentary as a criticism of the aspirations that Priestley believed teashops foisted on their waitresses. The playwright’s dishevelled appearance was a recognizable self-portrait of Priestley himself, and his warning an attempt to steady his own feeling of being adrift – a feeling corresponding with Priestley’s own experience in the early 1930s. As the playwright gave his parting words Rose ‘suddenly realized that though he was being clever and grand and patronizing [...], he was a desperately worried, unhappy man, as deeply lost as she could ever be in this ridiculous London he described’. Here Priestley voiced through Rose his confused frustration at the decreasing popularity of his plays in the early 1930s and the, in his view, perverse unpredictability of those reviewing them.¹⁷⁹ Through questioning the expectations placed on teashop waitresses and the effect these had on their sense of self, Priestley also examined the divergent expectations placed on his own work and the damaging erosion of self-knowledge that resulted – an erosion counteracted through explicit self-reflection in the teashop scene.

The disheartened playwright in *They Walk* shone a sidelight on Davidson’s altogether more tactile relations with waitresses. Like the author he stood in for, the playwright had a peculiarly reflexive understanding of the disorientation London caused to an individual’s sense of self. His plea that Rose Salter give up Hollywood aspirations

¹⁷⁸ Priestley, *They Walk*, pp.172-174.

¹⁷⁹ *Dangerous Corner* (1932) only continued through Priestley’s own financial backing; *Eden End* (1934) folded after a few weeks on Broadway. J.B. Priestley, *Margin Released: A Writer’s Reminiscences and Reflections*, (London, 1962), p.198; Vincent Brome, *J.B. Priestley*, (London, 1988), p.164. On Priestley’s distaste for critics, see *Margin Released*, p.206. Priestley later wrote about the maddening inconsistencies in the critical reception of his work in *Midnight on the Desert*, pp.7-10, p.48-49.

was an attempt to re-establish the boundaries of the self, his and hers, which the trope of waitress film stars eroded. By contrast, every one of Davidson's defenders depicted him as a person who, however well intentioned, lacked any reflexivity, especially regarding his actions towards waitresses. Concluding his defence, Richard Levy described Davidson as 'a man who is [...] utterly indifferent – not intentionally so, but by nature – to the way in which other people would regard his behaviour'. Davidson had 'gone about a work upon which he has set his heart which involves conduct which most of us, perhaps, would not be involved in, and he does not realize that that conduct might subject him to misunderstanding'.¹⁸⁰

This indifference was apparently borne out by the way in which Davidson's actions in court seemed to waver between the wry knowingness and mock-innocence of the music hall performer. Laughter in court reflected both the inscrutable nature of Davidson's character as a performer and the hidden connections between labour and desire which that character made explicit.¹⁸¹ When accused of flashing one-pound notes in front of waitress Dorothy Burn during his dealings with Arthur Gordon, Davidson defended himself as if performing another variety show act, explaining how he evaded pickpockets by keeping money wrapped in his socks. Apparently oblivious to the effect it would have on his credibility, if not on the public gallery, Davidson offered to demonstrate how he could remove money with his boots still on. His defence counsel declined the offer.¹⁸² At other times Davidson's responses suggested a more serious tack,

¹⁸⁰ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/2, 2 June 1932, p.1950.

¹⁸¹ For a different interpretation of laughter in court as expressing complicity between parties, and hence reasserting exclusivist social norms, rather than the effect of epistemological uncertainty – how much the defendant knows and how much can be known about them – see Matt Houlbrook, *The Aftermath: The Great War and the Making of 1920s British Culture* (London, forthcoming 2019), c.10.

¹⁸² NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/3, 29 March 1932, p.28; DN/ADR/15/8/9/1, 1 April 1932, p.388; DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 21 May 1932, pp.881-882.

but were made so pointedly as to undercut this, and to do so explicitly, for comedic effect. Accused by Roland Oliver of conspiring with the ‘swindler’ Arthur Gordon, Davidson riposted that he was ‘being charged with sexual immorality, and not with financial immorality’; if the Bishop of Norwich would ‘frame another charge on that,’ Davidson would be ‘delighted to meet it’. Upon Davidson pugnaciously asking Chancellor North whether it was possible to add ‘being a swindler’ to the charge sheet there was such a riotous response from the public that North ordered part of the gallery to be cleared.¹⁸³ On that occasion Oliver had complained of ‘vociferous cheering and clapping’ greeting Davidson’s responses; later in Davidson’s cross-examination his long-suffering defence counsel again stopped proceedings to complain of the ‘great deal of laughter’ that had been permitted in court over the previous hour.¹⁸⁴ As with the music hall entertainer, Davidson seemed caught between innocence and knowledge of the effect his actions had on others, both in his relations with waitresses and his defence of those relations in court. Indeed, the court offered another level at which this neither/nor relationship – neither innocent nor knowing – could operate as his actions in teashops were reproduced as legal narratives. Both his orthodontic examination of Winifred Barker and his later explanation of it to Chancellor North as if it were a routine procedure, for example, exploited the comedic potential of a performance that undercut its own innocence. Throughout Davidson’s trial, laughter erupted in the public gallery both over the ambiguity of what the performer knew – fool and/or wit? – and, more troublingly for Chancellor North, as a result of a deeper anxiety over what could be known about the performer.

At the same time, Davidson’s comic turns captured in microcosm the tendentious quality of his life overall: apparently innocent, but with an end potentially exceeding its

¹⁸³ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 23 May 1932, pp.1042-1044.

¹⁸⁴ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 25 May 1932, p.1338.

superficial value. Just as Davidson's actions in teashops and court appeared by turn innocent and knowing, so observers turned his whole life into that of the holy fool, the social non-conformist who was both risible and revelatory. Two days after Davidson was convicted, on 10 July 1932, his wife Molly granted an interview to the *Sunday Dispatch* in which she apparently exemplified this assessment of Davidson: 'Mr Davidson is a very clever man who has made but poor use of the keen brain he possesses... People – perhaps because they are less limited than I – take off their hats to him. They say to me with bated breath: "What a clever man your husband is" and I mentally register: "What fools you are..."'.¹⁸⁵ For C.L.R. James, newly arrived in London, Molly's interview epitomized the British public's obsession with sordid revelations – not the evidence of 'high civilization' he sought for his audience back in Trinidad.¹⁸⁶ But at another level the article neatly shifted between the innocence and knowingness of observer and observed in the depiction of Davidson as holy fool. As the correspondent ventriloquized Molly, Davidson was both intelligent and ignorant, and Molly was both able and unable to discern between them. Ultimately it remained unclear where the knowledge, which the *Dispatch* deliberately phrased in religious terms, lay: 'He has pirouetted through life on a single text, "Thank God I am not like the rest of men," and most devout is my reply – for the world's sake – "Thank God you're unique."' ¹⁸⁷

If Davidson's actions seemed to some contemporaries to reveal more than superficially appeared, they did so in a way analogous to the tendentious joke.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Molly Davidson cited in the *Sunday Dispatch*, 10 July 1932, in Tucker, *Troublesome Priest*, p.110.

¹⁸⁶ C.L.R. James, *Letters from London*, Nicholas Laughlin (ed.), (Oxford, 2003 [1932]), pp.119-121.

¹⁸⁷ Molly Davidson, in Tucker, *Troublesome Priest*, p.110.

¹⁸⁸ My thinking of tendentious jokes comes from Sigmund Freud, as deployed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. See Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus*, p.24. For a critique of Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, see Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*, (London, 2005), c.7.

Unwelcome and unsolicited, Davidson's poking and prodding nonetheless connected together domains that were normally kept distinct but, through unexpected analogues and convergences, revealed a hidden complicity.¹⁸⁹ By responding to the trope that waitresses could be film stars, and by his touch of those hoping to fulfil it, Davidson exposed the limitations of waitress employment conditions – low wages and increasing emotional labour – and their relation to customer desire. His touch connected the circumspect emotional labour expected of teashop waitresses, and the desire it stimulated in customers, with its economic underpinnings; it connected waitresses' abstract exchange with customers, and customers' correspondingly frustrated desire, to the abstraction of their own labour as workers. The merest graze, the slightest brush, rubbed against and exposed the capitalist conditions making it and the desire underpinning it possible.

Conclusions: On Having Nervous Hands

Davidson, his defence counsel Richard Levy suggested, had 'nervous hands'.¹⁹⁰ Lady Evelyn Waechter, Governess of the Foundling Hospital and long-time friend of Davidson's, agreed, confirming his nervous profusion of publicly displayed affection (Fig.15). Davidson frequently kissed people on the forehead, 'lightly – almost childishly,' or kissed his hand and touched them with it.¹⁹¹ He kissed everyone it seemed, including, according to his landlady at 85 Macfarlane Road, his landlord and the milkman.¹⁹² Indeed, during his examination Davidson admitted that he had 'constantly to restrain myself from touching the learned Chancellor,' to which the ruffled Chancellor replied 'You had

¹⁸⁹ Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus*, p.24.

¹⁹⁰ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/1, 31 March 1932, p.292.

¹⁹¹ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/2, 1 June 1932, p.1879.

¹⁹² NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/2, 27 May 1932, p.1517.



Fig.15 The Rector of Stiffkey, Harold Davidson, with Lady Waechter de Grimston on the steps of Church House, Westminster, after hearing the judgement delivered against him, 8 July 1932, PA Archive/PA Images, 4570956.

certainly much better not'.¹⁹³ As Davidson explained, he 'emphasize[d] things much more by the sense of touch' – and for Davidson there was much to emphasize. Davidson also touched in order to gain another's attention or give direction. He would not, he claimed, 'hold a waitress's hand in public' but would certainly 'touch her arm,' perhaps 'constantly'. 'If they are hurrying by, and you want to attract their attention, instead of letting them slip by [...] I would just touch their arm, so that they would have to stop.'¹⁹⁴ In all of this, though, Davidson assured his defence counsel that he did not 'feel' or 'intend to convey' anything immoral.¹⁹⁵

When concluding the defence, Levy emphasised this apparent nervousness to Davidson's touch. Levy elaborated Lady Waechter's evidence to argue that 'when he [Davidson] puts his arm upon people and [k]isses them upon the forehead or upon the cheek [...] that is a sign, not of immorality, but of friendship, sometimes merely of kindness'.¹⁹⁶ Levy further framed this in a language of sensuous Christian discipleship. Citing the Archbishop of York, he asserted that 'Christianity does not consist in abstaining from doing things that no decent man would do, but in doing things that nobody would dream of doing but for the touch of the Spirit of Christ'. A kiss, Levy claimed, was 'enjoined' by the New Testament 'not as a thing foul and indecent' but as 'a sign of holiness and of friendship'.¹⁹⁷ As Levy explained it to Chancellor North, Davidson's hugging and kissing was a sign of Christian love and, because of this, both innocent and indiscriminate. In keeping with the holy fool trope, Davidson's touch, sanctioned by the touch of Christ, paradoxically fulfilled society's ideals of Christian discipleship through its own non-conformity.

¹⁹³ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 21 May 1932, p.877.

¹⁹⁴ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 21 May 1932, p.877.

¹⁹⁵ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/4, 21 May 1932, p.877.

¹⁹⁶ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/2, 2 June 1932, p.1952.

¹⁹⁷ NRO, DN/ADR/15/8/9/2, 2 June 1932, pp.1958-1961.

At the same time, Davidson's touch uncomfortably revealed something deeper for his contemporaries. Davidson ostensibly chased after and grabbed manageresses to talk about their waitresses. He was assaulted for either over-zealous interest in waitresses' pay or in waitresses themselves. Whatever the truth in these specific incidents, each time, in a different way, touch established a connection between the economies of labour and desire that transcended Davidson's own eccentricity. Davidson's touch bodied forth decades of straitened labour relations as well as revealing, in the effect these relations had on the expected emotional and tactile labour of waitresses, the shifting conditions for customer desire. The labour in which he intervened, and was assaulted for intervening in, and the desire which his touch also expressed, were bound by the same mode of abstraction, one economic the other social, characterizing the life of the interwar teashop. Davidson's touch, to adapt William Sewell's phrasing, gave *embodied* form to that economic and social abstraction, at the same time as being its libidinal, and frustrated, embodied effect: the materialization, as a squeeze of the arm or kiss on the cheek, of that which made it possible.¹⁹⁸

As in his trial, so afterwards Davidson showed the same inscrutable 'indifference' to the perception of others. Even before North delivered his verdict on 8 July 1932 Davidson was performing music hall skits at the Embassy Skating Rink in Birmingham.¹⁹⁹ The performances, which included parodies of preaching and melodramatic acting, aimed at recouping Davidson's court expenses (£750 compared with the prosecution's £8,205) and providing a platform for his defence through afternoon lectures on 'Christian Ideals in Social Life'.²⁰⁰ Found guilty, deprived of his living, and

¹⁹⁸ Sewell, 'Connecting Capitalism', p.16.

¹⁹⁹ 'Stiffkey Rector in Rink Recitals', *Daily Express*, 6 July 1932, p.1.

²⁰⁰ 'Stiffkey Rector Gives a "Turn"', *Daily Express*, 7 July 1932, p.9; Letters from Harold Davidson to the Archbishop of Canterbury (22 January 1937) and editor of *Sunday Referee* (4 June 1936), LPL, MS 4873.

with the prosecution's costs awarded against him, Davidson became ever more desperate to earn money and clear his name. Between Summer 1932 and Summer 1936, Davidson set himself up as a Blackpool Beach entertainer, performing for the crowds and protesting his innocence with speeches and cartoon postcards. Beginning with a ten-day fast in a barrel in 1932, by 1936 he was performing in a recreation of Hell in which a mechanical devil appeared to jab him in the backside with a pitchfork.²⁰¹ For Summer 1937 Davidson contracted to perform in showman Fred Rye's lion cage at the Pleasureland amusement park in Skegness. Davidson would deliver a short speech before entering the cage and posing with the lions.²⁰² Whether aware of the irony or not, he would act the part of 'Daniel in the Lion's Den', vindicating himself before the world with God's approval.²⁰³

But Davidson was not so fortunate as Daniel. During the evening show on 28 July Davidson startled one of the lions, who set upon him and dragged him to the corner of the cage while a terrified crowd fled. Only after sixteen-year-old lion tamer Renee Somer beat the lion off with a whip and drove an iron bar into its mouth was Davidson freed.²⁰⁴ Two days later, Davidson died at Skegness Cottage Hospital. Rye kept the show closed a mere three days. On 1 August the public was invited to return to 'See the Lion that Mauled the Rector!'²⁰⁵

It is difficult to know, in the snatched conversations with holidaymakers, whether Davidson convinced many about his impulse to touch – nervous or otherwise. He certainly made it into the collective memory of Blackpool, featuring still five years after his death

²⁰¹ 'From Pulpit to Barrel', *Daily Express*, 6 September 1932, p.9; Tucker, *Troublesome Priest*, p.127; 'Can Nothing Be Done About It?', *Blackpool Gazette and Herald*, 18 April 1936, LPL, MS 4873.

²⁰² Tucker, *Troublesome Priest*, pp.141-143.

²⁰³ Mass Observation founder Tom Harrison made the analogy in *Britain Revisited*, (London, 1961), p.150.

²⁰⁴ 'Lion Mauls Ex-rector of Stiffkey', *Daily Express*, 29 July 1937, p.1.

²⁰⁵ 'Ex-rector Dies, Show is Still to Go On', *Daily Express*, 31 July 1937, p.1.

in the cheap ‘cracks’ that pub entertainers sprinkled between songs.²⁰⁶ Davidson’s story was too big to ever be properly explained, even in a twenty-four-day trial, and easy to reduce to a tawdry joke. It has equally been impossible to give more than a fraction of his life here, which was a fraction of the shifting sensory world in which it was entangled. Piecing together Davidson’s story returns us to Marx’s claim that ‘the *forming* of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present’.²⁰⁷ But, in the wider story of capital and desire of which it was a part, it also urges us to think of how that formation is in part a history *of* labour and of the everyday touches reshaping, revealing, and rubbing against our narratives of its conditions.

²⁰⁶ Mass Observation, *The Pub and the People: A Worktown Study by Mass-Observation*, (London, 1943), p.260.

²⁰⁷ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Mulligan, (Moscow 1959), (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/comm.htm>, 2 May 2016). For a critique from an anthropological perspective see David Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory*, (Ann Arbor, 2003), pp.204-229.

Chapter Five

Law and London Fog: Making Sense in the Police Court

“‘It’s only for love,’” Mary Jones told the arresting constable, “‘—he is not paying.’” Perhaps more savvy to the law on public indecency, her partner Albert Parker demurely said “‘all right,’” and buttoned up his trousers.¹ The night of Tuesday 9 December 1924 might have seemed a good time to have sex outside the Commercial Buildings in Southwark, south London. On Monday night an anticyclone from Germany had pushed westwards into the British Isles, hanging a cloudless sky over a chilly London: ideal conditions for fog to grow by Tuesday afternoon. Tuesday night was the foggiest of the year, the beginning of three consecutive days’ fog – the longest duration in London since Christmas 1916 – and the occasion for new delights and dangers beneath the murky pall.² While burglars made the most of the opportunity, an anxious London General Omnibus Company posted fifty-four ‘fogmen’ with hurricane lamps at street junctions ‘to pilot buses into their proper street.’ Even then, two 123B buses inching in opposite directions at only walking pace collided head-on in the gloom.³

¹ Tower Bridge Police Court (hereafter TBPC) minute book and register, LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/139, PS/TOW/A/01/158 respectively, both 10 December 1924.

² ‘The Worst Fog of the Year’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 11 December 1924, p.9; ‘The Weather of December, 1924’, *Meteorological Magazine*, 59/708, (January, 1925), pp.295-297.

³ ‘Jewel Thieves’ Coups in Great Fog’, *Daily Mirror*, 11 December 1924, p.2; ‘London Fogbound for 36 Hours’, *Daily Mail*, 11 December 1924, p.9.

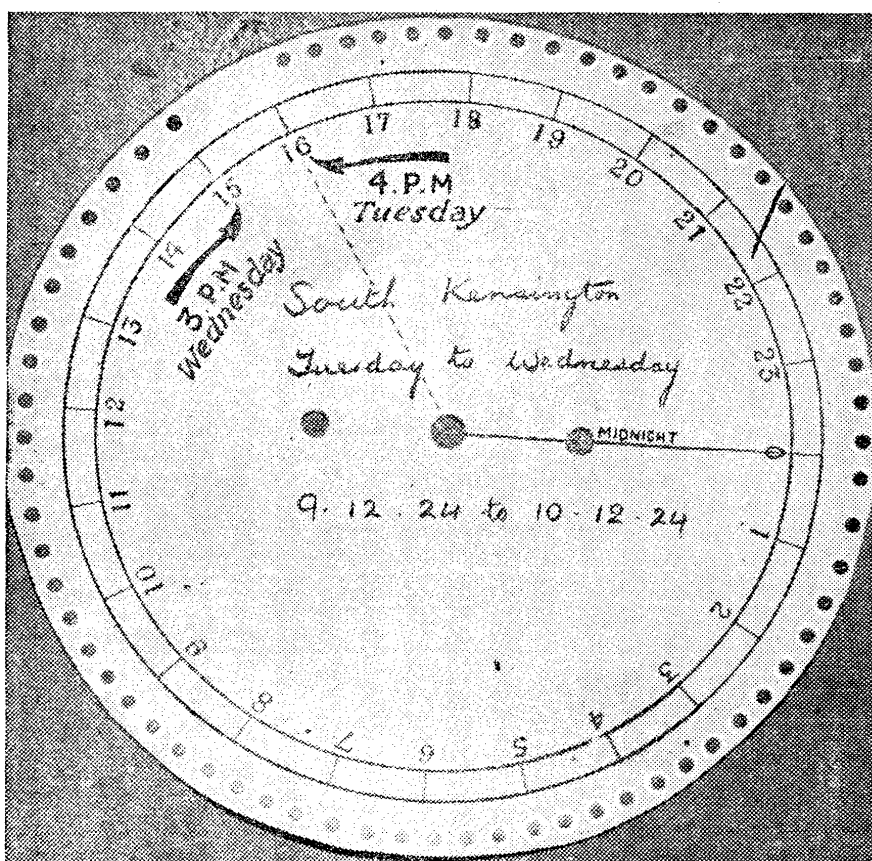
Meteorologists lyricized the fog's sensory disorder. Describing his ascent in a kite balloon over Croydon Aerodrome on the Tuesday night, C. Biddlecombe recalled breaking through three hundred feet of fog into 'brilliant moonlight'. During the ascent 'nothing was visible in any direction, and all sounds coming up from the ground were muffled to an indistinctness that made them appear very far away.'⁴ Meteorological observations intersected with a different kind of moonlighting that night: public sex. The record of the Meteorological Office's fog-filtering apparatus allows us, remarkably, to track hourly fog density during Jones and Parker's stolen intimacy. A circular card exposed to siphoned air at hourly intervals trapped fog particulates, fog density being marked by that of the spots staining the card.⁵ The record between 4pm on 9 December and 3pm on 10 December showed fog density peaking around midnight, barely forty minutes after Jones and Parker were arrested (Fig.16). Yet despite this, the weather, inevitably, let them down.

I am less interested, though, in what fog concealed than in what it revealed – or more accurately, what it *did*: what relationships between touch, the street, and law it brought into being as an agent itself in the early twentieth century. At first glance the former path seems more promising.⁶ The fog of December 1924 allegedly encouraged a spate of Mayfair robberies by burglars exploiting the thickened night. Between 10 and 11 December 1924 at least six burglaries occurred on the mile-long walk between Norfolk Street in Bayswater and 37 Park Lane in Mayfair, a sweep of London's grandest Regency and Victorian property. The houses of revue dancer Lady Rosemary du Cros and malted milk magnate Sir Ernest Horlick, Numbers 31 and 27 Norfolk Street respectively, were

⁴ C. H. Biddlecombe, 'London Fogs from above', *Meteorological Magazine*, 59/708, (January, 1925), p.277.

⁵ 'London Held to Ransom by the Fog Fiend', *Daily Mirror*, 11 December 1924, p.1.

⁶ On fog as a 'cover' for crime, see Christine Corton, *London Fog: The Biography*, (Cambridge, MA: London, 2015), pp.148-153.



A record of London's fog from 4 p.m. on Tuesday to 3 p.m. yesterday, secured with the instrument. The ring of dirt spots on the edge show how the fog increased in density towards midnight, lifted slightly in the early morning, and gradually thickened again during the day.

Fig.16 A record of London's fog, in 'London Held to Ransom by the Fog Fiend', *Daily Mirror*, 11 December 1924, p.1.

entered merely an hour apart.⁷ The burglaries were uncannily close to those attributed to the famous ‘cat’ burglar Robert Delaney a few weeks later, and it is tempting to suggest that, if he committed these earlier offences, fog was key to his success.⁸ Newspapers drew similar links between fog and rising ‘cosh attacks’ during the Great Smog of December 1952: when sixteen-year-old shop assistant Wendy Hanchett was stabbed in the back with a stiletto on 8 December the *Daily Mail* described the assault in self-consciously filmic terms, inverting cinema’s own appropriation of fog as the ‘*mis-en-scène*’ to the crime genre after Hitchcock’s *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog* (1927).⁹

But it would be a mistake to see fog in these cases as either the ‘setting’ or ‘cover’ for criminal touch; both interpretations reducing the environment to binaries of nature and society, and passive objects and active causes.¹⁰ Fog did not merely occupy space, nor govern activity within it, but through engulfing it made the bodily experience of being *within* space, and that experience’s relation to law, visible. Through examining how this interplay between embodied experience and law was ‘translated’ by fog, we think about weather outside a zero-sum choice of either determinant or passive ‘intermediary’ and instead as something which mediates, and transforms, relations between other domains.¹¹ By materializing space, and bodies within it, fog highlighted how the physical nature of

⁷ ‘Park-lane Raids’, *Daily Mail*, 12 December 1924, p.9; ‘Cat Burglar Again’, *Daily Mail*, 11 December 1924, p.7; ‘Cat Burglars’ £3,000’, *Daily Mirror*, 12 December 1924, p.2; ‘Jewel Thieves’ Coups in Great Fog’, *Daily Mirror*, 11 December 1924, p.1; du Cros was likely away on tour. See Rosemary du Cros, *ATA Girl: Memoirs of a Wartime Ferry Pilot*, (London, 1983), pp.13-20.

⁸ “‘Cat’ Suspect for Trial’, *Evening News*, 30 January 1925, n.p.; ‘King of “Cat” Burglars’, *News of the World*, 13 November 1927, n.p., both in TNA, HO 45/22919; ‘Suspect Found in Duke’s Garden’, *Daily Mirror*, 24 January 1925, p.2. I am grateful to Eloise Moss for these references.

⁹ ‘Girl Stabbed with Stiletto in the Fog’, *Daily Mail*, 9 December 1952, p.1; Charlotte Brunsdon, *London in Cinema: The Cinematic City Since 1945*, (London, 2007), p.46.

¹⁰ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, (Oxford, 2005), pp.114-115.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.39-40, p.108; see also Lynda Nead, *The Tiger in the Smoke: Art and Culture in Post-War Britain*, (New Haven: London, 2017), p.22.

the street – its constraints on sight, movement, and touch – conditioned the plausibility of statements made in court, and how the court created the street as a legal entity; how it *created*, rather than presupposed, the phenomenological categories by which the street could be understood.¹² Fog showed, in other words, how the phenomenology of the street shaped what counted as a legal ‘fact’, and how law in turn converted that phenomenology into a legal object, re-shaping its conceptual existence – and the way that individuals acted upon it – in the process.

This is hinted at in the case of Parker and Jones. When cross-examined, Constable Collyer claimed to have stood only five yards away from the couple, a distance from which he ‘could see perfectly,’ despite the fog. Constable Atkinson, however, stated that he and Collyer had stood twelve yards away, rescuing the contradiction with his claim that the couple was illuminated by a nearby lamp, which Collyer neglected to mention. In the court minutes there follows a short line and a paraphrase of Parker’s defence: he and Jones had not had sex but would have done – but no one would have seen in dense fog anyway.¹³ At one level this was wrangling over the facts of the night; the distance, for example, at which the constables observed the couple. But it also points us to how the sensory possibilities of the street shaped whether those facts became *legal* facts – that is, facts insofar as they were instances of something already defined within law – and, inversely, how law brought those sensory possibilities into being as legal facts in the first place.¹⁴

¹² Alain Pottage, ‘Introduction: The Fabrication of Persons and Things’, in Alain Pottage and Martha Mundy (eds), *Law, Anthropology, and the Constitution of the Social: Making Persons and Things*, (Cambridge, 2004), p.3.

¹³ LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/139, 10 December 1924.

¹⁴ See Latour’s distinction between ‘matters of fact’ and ‘matters of concern’, based upon Yan Thomas’s analysis of the Roman legal concept of *res* (‘thing’): Latour, *Re-assembling the Social*, pp.87-120; Alain Pottage, ‘Law After Anthropology: Object and Technique in Roman Law’, *Law, Culture & Society*, 31/2-3, (2014), pp.150-151.

As with prostitution cases, police officers and magistrates depended on a ragbag of by-laws and public control orders in the absence of any statute specifically dealing with public indecency. Seeking order across this assortment, *Vincent's Police Code* for 1924 stressed the potential for the offence to affect others and, as a corollary, the nature of the space in which it was committed as the variable factors determining the possibility of a charge. Whereas borough council by-laws did not necessarily *require* that the offence cause a nuisance to passers-by, the Town Police Clauses Act (1847) only applied to those 'who in any street *to the annoyance of residents or passengers* willfully and indecently exposes his person' (emphasis in original). A 'street' was 'any place of public resort or recreation ground belonging to or under the control of the Local Authority, and any unfenced ground adjoining or abutting upon any street in an urban district'.¹⁵ Yet the Commercial Buildings, where Jones and Parker were arrested, resisted categorization: situated on an alley so minor it was not marked on contemporary maps, they seem to have been between Doon Street and Stamford Street, northeast of Waterloo Station, according to two further indecency cases for 1927.¹⁶ Described as a 'cement passage' in 1899, the alley was neither unambiguously public nor private.¹⁷ Johnston's *Metropolitan Police Guide* for 1922 also stated that indecency 'must be committed in a public place' but this was not, rather confusingly, necessarily 'a place open to the public; if many persons may be offended by it and several see the act it is sufficient'.¹⁸ But in Jones and Parker's case

¹⁵ Charles Edward Vincent, *Vincent's Police Code and General Manual of the Criminal Law*, (16th edn, London, 1924), pp.124-125.

¹⁶ TBPC minute book, LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/167, 21 April 1927; Report of Sergeant P. Rosie, 24 November 1927, in Criticism of Elderly Judges' Treatment of Homosexual Offences (1922-28), TNA, HO/144/22298. I am grateful to Matt Houlbrook for this reference.

¹⁷ Walk with Sergeant Saltmarshe, District 31 (Lambeth and St Saviour's Southwark), 28 April 1899, Charles Booth Police Notebook, LSE, B363, p.39.

¹⁸ J. A. Johnston et al., *The Metropolitan Police Guide: Being a Compendium of the Law Affecting the Metropolitan Police*, (7th edn, London, 1922), p.1246.

the issue of visibility called this requisite into question and continued to do so even in clear weather: contrary to Constable Atkinson's claim, the alley was described by a fellow officer three years later as 'a badly lighted thoroughfare,' suggesting that multiple witnesses to indecency committed there were unlikely.¹⁹ In such cases the police were hamstrung, and the *Metropolitan Police Guide* knew it: '[i]t appears to be still undecided whether or not an indictment for indecent exposure can be sustained by evidence of one actual witness, and of the fact that other persons might have seen the exposure.'²⁰

What an examination of fog and touch therefore points us towards is the way in which the objectivity of touch and law depended on squaring the sensory possibilities of the street with legal discourse. This was not an *opposition* between a tangible street and intangible law, where law 'inscribed' meaning into the street or 'constructed' it from scratch.²¹ This squaring, through every misplaced lamp and indecency defendant denying its existence, *collapsed* the division between the embodied experience of the street and the abstraction of law, revealing how each subsisted *through* the other. Never wholly autonomous, law subsisted on tactile practices in the street and court that it simultaneously

¹⁹ TNA, HO/144/22298.

²⁰ Johnston, *Metropolitan Police Guide*, p.1246. On the ad hoc ways in which the police dealt with this ambiguity see Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957*, (Chicago: London, 2005), pp.27-31.

²¹ See Russell Hogg cited in David Delaney, *The Spatial, the Legal and the Pragmatics of World-Making: Nomospheric Investigations*, (Abingdon, 2010), p.7; also p.22. The notion of law 'inscribing' meaning into the material world lingers in legal geography even when critiqued. See for example Irus Braverman et al. 'Introduction: Expanding the Spaces of Law', in Irus Braverman, Nicholas Blomley, David Delaney, and Alexandre Kedar (eds), *The Expanding Spaces of Law: A Timely Legal Geography*, (Stanford, 2014), p.1, p.17. Latour importantly critiques social 'construction', where 'the social' exists *a priori*. Here I take construction to mean the making of touch, and law, through their participation in an assemblage of human and non-human actants. The social in this instance occurs only in the moment of associations made and remade between these actants, which themselves possess no intrinsic 'social' quality. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p.8, p.65, pp.91-93, p.103. Delaney (p.8) has coined the term 'nomosphere' to explain how law and space are always already 'constitutive of' one another, but neglects any historical transformation within that dialectic.

brought into being as legal objects, transforming them and itself in the process.²² Yet this squaring also, in early twentieth-century Britain, *established* that division between embodied experience and legal abstraction as their condition of possibility. Almost all significant jurisprudence textbooks from 1880 until the 1950s, primers for every police court magistrate's training as a barrister, assumed the existence of underlying principles of 'Law', contained in a discrete domain but manifested in individual laws that could be 'applied' to particular circumstances.²³ This was also the predicate of the *Metropolitan Police Guide* introduced in 1895, even while, as with indecency, it admitted the indeterminate relation between those principles and the case in hand. What comes into view, then, is a dual process across street and police court of the separation and comingling of touch and law, tangible and intangible, 'natural' and 'cultural'.²⁴ Neither distinct nor reducible to one another, these domains formed an assemblage mediated and revealed, I argue, through the history of London fog.

By the 1930s, this antagonistic unity of touch and law began to crack. As the work of London's dwindling Bench exponentially increased, those tactile court objects and practices making and made by the embodied experience of the street – the ordering of

²² Pottage, 'Law After Anthropology', pp.154-155. This resists Latour's conceptualization of Law as a discrete 'mode of existence'. See Alain Pottage, 'The Materiality of What?', *Journal of Law and Society*, 39/1, (2012), p.167, pp.172-174. On the way that law 'seduces' historians by appearing an autonomous domain to be known and interpreted, see Carolyn Steedman, 'A Lawyer's Letter: Everyday Uses of the Law in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *History Workshop Journal*, 81, (2016), p.63. For an invaluable introduction to materiality in and of law that has much influenced my argument, see Tom Johnson, 'Medieval Law and Materiality: Shipwrecks, Finders, and Property on the Suffolk Coast, ca. 1380-1410', *American Historical Review*, 120/2, (2015), pp.407-432.

²³ See for example T. E. Holland's *Elements of Jurisprudence* (thirteen editions from 1880 until 1924), which established the positivism of John Austin's *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (1863) as orthodoxy from the 1880s. Gerald J. Postema, *Legal Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: The Common Law World*, (Dordrecht, 2011), pp.18-19, p.26.

²⁴ In Latour's words, a dialectic of 'purification' and 'hybridization' central to modernity. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter, (Cambridge, MA, 1993).

paperwork and bodies within courts – themselves came under strain. If law subsisted on these tangible forms, then the very possibility of law, and the street it made, was transformed by the straitened working conditions of the courts. Yet by accentuating law's 'immanent' contingency on every file and streetlamp, these developments widened the contradiction with the 'purity' of law claimed by the legal positivism then dominating jurisprudence.²⁵ In one typical formulation, jurisprudence examined 'the basic elements on which law *qua* law is built' not 'a body of fortuitous phenomena in a particular setting'. The focus was on 'the scientific synthesis of the essential principles of law,' not the instantiation of those principles within particular moments.²⁶ While fog brought the embodied experience of the street, and its immanent relation with law, into being, jurisprudence suspended law in a metaphorical 'fog' until critically revised in the 1950s. This chapter therefore tacks between ethnographies of south London's streets and police courts, the micro-practices of touch and abstraction of 'Law', and between the acrid sting of London's fogs and the metaphorical fog of twentieth-century jurisprudence.

Weighing Fog

Although a regular occurrence, London's fogs varied wildly in severity between the 1870s and 1950s. Peaking around 1890, with December that year suffering twenty days' fog, the average annual number of foggy days declined in the 1900s.²⁷ Major fogs lasting several

²⁵ Pottage, 'Law After Anthropology', pp.154-155.

²⁶ Carleton Kemp Allen, *Legal Duties and Other Essays in Jurisprudence* (1931), cited in Postema, *Legal Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, p.27.

²⁷ Frederick J. Brodie, 'On the Prevalence of Fog in London during the 20 Years 1871 to 1890', *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society*, 18/81, (January 1892), pp.40-45; 'Some Remarkable Features in the Winter of 1890-91', *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society*, 17/79, (July 1891), pp.160-161; and 'Decrease of Fog in London during Recent Years', *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society*, 31/133, (January 1905), pp.15-28; Robert Scott found no discernible increase in fog

days were a seasonal expectation between the 1870s and 1890s but declined to the point of nostalgic connoisseurship by the 1920s: only 1916, 1924, 1948, and 1952 saw comparable spells.²⁸ The ‘elderly men’ ‘button-holing friends, acquaintances, and total strangers to inflict upon them histories of [invariably worse] bygone London fogs’ were nothing new, but by 1916 their tales contained just enough irritating truth to justify satirizing. One newspaper correspondent related how, during his two-hour train journey into the City, fellow passengers competed for the most fantastical account until one recollected a fog lasting from 5 November 1852 until 26 February 1853 that ‘was so thick that the City Corporation had eventually to dynamite it, section by section’.²⁹ In the face of a declining incidence of London fogs, storytellers had to make the most of dwindling opportunities to downplay present fogs in relation to those past.³⁰

Meteorologists’ attempts to trace variations in fog incidence concealed continuing uncertainty over when exactly a fog could be called a fog. Fog’s ephemerality and tricky nature seemed to some whimsical observers to make the causal relation between smoke and fog, like fog itself, beyond reach.³¹ Even when meteorologists did, from the mid-

prevalence between 1870 and 1890, but the frequency of major episodes over this period as a whole was still markedly greater than in the twentieth century: Robert H. Scott, ‘Fifteen Years’ Fogs in the British Islands, 1876-1890’, *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society*, 19/88, (October 1893), pp.229-238; Peter Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800*, (Ohio, 2006), p.128.

²⁸ Charles G. Harper, *Queer Things About London: Strange Nooks and Corners of the Greatest City in the World*, (London, 1923), p.36; See ‘Occurrences of fog which may be comparable in duration or intensity with that of December 5-9, 1952’, n.d. (c.1953), TNA, MH 55/2659.

²⁹ ‘Fog Fables’, *Daily Mail*, 28 December 1916, p.5.

³⁰ The *Daily Mail*, reported a ‘gradual diminution’ in London fogs from forty-one in 1905 to four in 1909. ‘Fog-Free London’, *Daily Mail*, 14 March 1910, p.4; E. G. Bitham, ‘On the Variation in the Incidence of Bright Sunshine and Fog in London during the 45 Years 1881 to 1925’, March 1930, Disamenities (Smoke etc), New Survey of London, LSE, NSOL/1/5/3, p.3.

³¹ Meteorologist Rollo Russell made one of the first attempts to determine the causal relation between smoke and fog: Rollo Russell, *Smoke in Relation to Fogs in London: A Lecture*, (London, 1889); ‘Haze, Fog, and Visibility’, *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society*, 23/101, (January 1897), pp.10-24. Writer James Bone preferred

1920s, narrow down the smoke-fog relation they continued to emphasize its dependence on a plethora of contingencies.³² Yet despite this uncertainty, at least since Harold des Voeux, president of the Coal Smoke Abatement Society, coined the term ‘smog’ in 1904, reformers, journalists and council officers invariably connected smoke emissions with fog incidence: substituting coal with cleaner power sources therefore became crucial to reducing fog.³³ Already in 1910 the *Daily Mail* attributed the recent paucity of fogs to the growing popularity of gas cookers, electrical heating, and the recent electrification of the Underground.³⁴ By 1923 a more convincing case was possible: the London County Council (LCC) Public Control Department calculated that between 1902 and 1922 the number of gas appliances sold or on hire by the three major London gas companies increased from over 623,000 to over 2,109,000; roughly the same period saw the number of electric units sold for lighting, power, and heat increase from over 66,265,000 to over 449,546,000. Although gas and electricity production emitted smoke this was ostensibly more easily filtered at source, and certainly less polluting in place of household coal fires. For the Public Control Department, these changes lessened, if not fog frequency, then the

to maintain their distinction: James Bone, *The London Perambulator*, (London, 1925), pp.53-54.

³² Meteorologists Napier Shaw and John Owens provided a more detailed account of the smoke-fog relation but this outlined only the correlation between smoke build-up and fog formation, not their causal relation. Napier Shaw and John Switzer Owens, *The Smoke Problem of Great Cities*, (London, 1925), pp.13-16, pp.117-119. Greater statistical evidence was available by 1953 to strengthen causal claims: C. K. M. Douglas and K. H. Stewart, ‘London Fog of December 5-8, 1952’, *Meteorological Magazine*, 82/969, (March, 1953), p.70. Yet even these were subject to cautionary caveats: A. L. Kelley, ‘Fog and Smog’, *Smokeless Air*, XXIV/89, (Spring 1954), WL, SA/EPU/H/1/2/1/6, p.140.

³³ ‘The Origin of “Smog”’, *Smokeless Air*, XXV/91, (Autumn, 1954), WL, SA/EPU/H/1/2/1/7, p.12.

³⁴ ‘Fog-Free London’, *Daily Mail*, 14 March 1910, p.4. Despite the *Mail*’s optimism, Harold des Voeux and John Owens calculated that average annual soot deposit for the following year (June 1910-June 1911) totalled 260 tons per square mile in London. ‘Appendix D: Soot-fall of London’, in Julius B. Cohen and Arthur G. Ruston, *Smoke: A Study of Town Air*, (London, 1912), pp.84-85.

conditions for the formation of fog.³⁵ While this gave reason to be optimistic about decreasing fog incidence, it also highlighted the need to accurately measure and control smoke nuisances; still in 1923 London consumed an estimated eighteen million tons of coal a year.³⁶

The LCC's effort to calculate the effect of smoke on fog formation emerged from earlier attempts to measure fog itself. This research meant that by the 1920s LCC officials increasingly thought of fog in terms of its tangible qualities rather than only its visible effects: fog *as* matter, rather than the matter of fog. In the first official inquiry into the incidence of London fog, commissioned by the LCC in the winters of 1901-02 and 1902-03, firemen across London recorded the degree to which fog obscured objects at a set distance from their stations. Recognising the impossibility of achieving a common measure of this, in the second year they switched to measuring the degree to which fog impeded traffic, a change nevertheless maintaining emphasis on the effect fog had on visibility.³⁷ But from 1912, and especially after the refinement of the Meteorological Office's fog-filtering apparatus in 1920, researchers increasingly attempted to capture samples of the particulates suspended in fog, and from these estimate the weight and concentration of fog itself.³⁸ Although smoke abatement inspectors continued to visually estimate the density of smoke, rather than gather samples to weigh, in 1931 the LCC

³⁵ Extracts from minutes of proceedings of the Council, 3 July 1923, LMA, LCC/PC/GEN/01/016, pp.1-2.

³⁶ LMA, LCC/PC/GEN/01/016, p.3.

³⁷ *London Fogs. Report of the Meteorological Council* [...], (London, 1904), p.6, p.16.

³⁸ The independent Committee for the Investigation of Atmospheric Pollution was established in 1912 and received annual funding from the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research from 1917 until absorbed by the Meteorological Office in 1919. The LCC began contributing £100 to the scheme annually in 1926. Shaw and Owens, *Smoke Problem*, pp.vi-viii; extract from a report of the London County Council Housing and Public Health Committee, 15 May 1934, LMA, LCC/PC/GEN/01/016, p.1. The fog-filtering apparatus was designed by John Owens, the Committee's Honorary Secretary. Harold Lake, 'The Man Who Weighs Fog', *Daily Mail*, 6 November 1920, p.6.

attempted to establish for the first time a direct, statistical relation between the opacity of smoke and the quantity of its particulates, enabling inspectors to visually estimate the weight of smoke itself.³⁹ Increasingly, LCC researchers and inspectors conceptualized fog as an *object itself*, one that at once occupied and *displaced* space, rather than as a visual effect manifest only through its occlusion of other objects.

Linkboys and Phantom ‘Bus Rides: Fog’s ‘Uncanny’⁴⁰

Supposedly consigned to winters past, the mid-century return of fog threw London out of joint. Between 5 and 9 December 1952 fog suspended the capital in an earlier era, its association with the drab Victorian city juxtaposed with the Technicolor modernity of the forthcoming Coronation.⁴¹ As visibility dropped to less than forty yards in some places, ‘[e]ighty-mile-an-hour police patrol cars, answering 999 calls, crept through the murk guided by constables walking with torches.’⁴² While such reports highlighted the anachronism of fog in an age of rapid response cars, they also indicated its anachronistic effects: torch-bearing constables fumbling through the gloom hinted at how fog put bodies *out of time and place*. Fog caused the return of anachronistic figures, like linkboys, at the same time disrupting how the rhythms of the street intersected with the bodily rhythms of pedestrians.⁴³ The enduring importance of coal fires between the 1870s and 1950s meant

³⁹ Herbert G. Clinch, *The Smoke Inspector’s Handbook: Or, Economic Smoke Abatement*, (London, 1923), pp.70-75; report by the Chief Officer of the Public Control Department on Atmospheric Pollution, 22 June 1931, LMA, LCC/PC/GEN/01/016, pp.1-2.

⁴⁰ Nead, *Tiger in the Smoke*, p.39.

⁴¹ Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society*, (New Haven: London, 2010), p.27, p.39, pp.122-123.

⁴² ‘Weather of December 1952’, *Meteorological Magazine*, 82/968, (February, 1953), p.63; ‘Burglar gets £12,000 in fog’, *Daily Mail*, 8 December 1952, p.1.

⁴³ Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore, (London: New York, 2004), pp.17-18.

that Londoners were doubly displaced by perennial fogs; first from their ostensible modernity and second from their own bodily perceptions of time and space.

Linkboys, employed by pedestrians to blaze a passage through the fog, united this double displacement. Formerly a common nocturnal sight until made redundant by gas lighting, linkboys reappeared during fogs throughout the early twentieth century, recalling an earlier, darker period. During bad fogs in the 1910s, the newspaper vendor near Somerset House relayed people across the Strand brandishing lit rolled newspapers; elsewhere, boys carrying naphtha torches charged a penny a journey.⁴⁴ The marked increase in speed and prevalence of motorbuses after the Great War compelled the London General Omnibus Company to even create its own cohort of linkboys in 1919 to direct vehicles along key routes.⁴⁵ Commentators were struck by what Nead terms the temporal ‘uncanny’ of this pre-Victorian spectacle. James Bone recorded how one night during the 1900s a man returning home in fog saw Edward VII escorted by footmen and policemen bearing flaming torches. The King ‘had been dining with a Court lady in Portman Square, and, finding it impossible to go by carriage in the fog, had decided to summon torches and a guard and walk just as a Stuart king would have done.’⁴⁶ Yet linkboys also embodied the perceptual uncanny of fog itself. ‘Phantom voices came from out the grey cloud,’ according to one correspondent during Christmas 1904;

they were from human beings a few yards away but quite invisible. Feeling one’s way through the greyness up what used to be the Strand, the wanderer became aware from the tramping feet and shouts and the clinking of harness that there was a confused mass of halted traffic. Boys carrying lighted candles or bull’s-eye lanterns sprang out in front of pedestrians and said, “Light you home for a penny, sir” [...].⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Bone, *London Perambulator* (London, 1925), p.56; ‘Our London Correspondence’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 18 November 1901, p.5.

⁴⁵ ‘The New Link Boys’, *The Times*, 29 October 1919, p.13.

⁴⁶ Bone, *London Perambulator*, pp.55-56; also ‘The King in the Fog’, *Daily Mail*, 14 October 1912, p.5.

⁴⁷ ‘London’s Great Christmas Fog’, *Daily Mail*, 23 December 1904, p.5.

Out of place in historical time, linkboys also here exemplified fog's disturbance of the rhythms of everyday life intersecting in the sensate body. The reference-point, or 'measure', that the rhythm of omnibus traffic provided for pedestrians broke down within an acoustic and visual confusion that distorted the bodily perception of time and space: a discordance of un-locatable voices, indiscernible spaces, and surprising proximities.⁴⁸

Knocked out of sync, pedestrians struggled to recover their bodily rhythms as fog intruded on every sense. One reporter described how fog 'attacked people who were abroad in the streets, stinging their eyes and throat, causing headache and a general lassitude,' a description strikingly similar to the reports of travel in the smoke-filled tunnels of the Metropolitan Railway.⁴⁹ In fact, commenting on fog five years earlier, one reporter described how '[t]he whole of the great City was transformed into a species of gigantic underground railway tunnel, full of blinding, stifling vapour. Every one [*sic*] had smarting eyes and a raw throat.'⁵⁰ And at the same time as the debilitating steamy atmosphere of the tube pervaded the street, thousands escaping the street flooded the tube – notably only two months after the first District and Metropolitan electric services began running in September 1905, clearing the tunnels of steam:

Carriages were packed until passengers overflowed on to the guard's platform. The "straphanger" was a much-envied individual, for there were not enough straps to go round. [...]

On the Metropolitan carriages which had no middle doors many passengers in the centre seats were carried past their stations because they were physically unable to get out. "I've played Association Football in my time," said a middle-aged passenger, "but I failed to get out at Blackfriars when I tried to. [...] I don't believe an ordinary Rugby player would have done it [...]"⁵¹

The disordered rhythms of the street, and of the fog-choked pedestrians fleeing underground, intersected with new tactile dispositives forming on the tube. Amid the

⁴⁸ Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, p.20.

⁴⁹ London's Great Christmas Fog', *Daily Mail*, 23 December 1904, p.5.

⁵⁰ 'Densest Fog of the Year', *Daily Mail*, 1 December 1899, p.3.

⁵¹ 'Ghostly Throngs of Excited Passengers', *Daily Mail*, 12 December 1905, p.7.

crush, straphangers adopted new tacit rules of standing space, while scrums in unrenovated Metropolitan carriages amplified calls for middle doors to ease passenger flow. Sensory displacement above ground alternately mirrored and propelled that below ground.

While tube passengers managed the squeeze, fog victims ‘groped about in the inky darkness.’⁵² Besides its temporal uncanny, fog also created a spatial one.⁵³ It made familiar space unfamiliar while, paradoxically, accentuating a pedestrian’s sensory awareness (Fig.17). ‘Even the great arc-lamps were invisible at a distance of a few yards,’ reported the *Daily Mail* in October 1901. ‘People blundered against omnibuses and cabs, retreated precipitately on to the pavement and found themselves on the wrong side of the road’. With visibility gone, the experience of being a *body* within space, rather than a de-corporealized viewer, was made immediate. This is glimpsed in the same winter, when blind people acted as street guides aided, apparently, by their acuter awareness of body and place.⁵⁴ In contrast to tube travel, where proximity forced passengers to improvise bodily boundaries, the near-invisibility of other passengers during fog made the experience of omnibus travel eerily embodied. ‘Ghostly figures could be seen slipping past on omnibuses,’ commented one reporter, and the sensation of riding one was ‘that of moving slowly through space surrounded by impenetrable darkness’. Suddenly passengers would be ‘aroused by a voice that came from the darkness demanding the fare.’⁵⁵ Normally absent from consciousness, which is consumed with disembodied vision, in fog bodies were brought to presence once more. Because the body is the ground for the world, fog’s transformation of the perceivable world in turn transformed the body

⁵² ‘A Christmas Fog’, *Daily Mail*, 24 December 1900, p.5.

⁵³ Nead, *Tiger in the Smoke*, p.39.

⁵⁴ *Daily Mail*, 28 October 1901, p.3. *Daily Mail*, 6 November 1901, p.5.

⁵⁵ ‘A Christmas Fog’, *Daily Mail*, 24 December 1900, p.5.



Fig.17 Bob Collins, *London Fog*, 1945-1955, Museum of London, 827713.

as a ground for knowledge. By obscuring vision, fog returned the body to itself, reminding travellers of their existence both as objects *within* space and as embodied subjects *perceiving* it.⁵⁶

What is more, by re-calling the absent body, fog also made present the space of the street. Rather than concealing the space between buildings, by re-corporealizing the body fog made that space a tangible presence, literally casting the street *into relief*. ‘Stung they ever so sharply your eyes and lungs,’ James Bone remembered in 1925, ‘their chemistry precipitated your sense of London anew [...]. There is a rough, fantastic, Gargantuan goblin London lying waiting for these fogs, taking corporal [*sic*] existence only when the hour comes; a London’s Particular makes visible a certain world whatever it may obscure.’⁵⁷ Fog made visible a world that was, like a photographic negative, the negative of the world it materialized. Its paradoxically *immaterial* presence accentuated the *material* nature of the street and experience of being a body within it. ‘In whichever direction the bewildered pedestrian turned,’ reported one newspaper in December 1904, ‘he was confronted at a distance of four feet by a solid grey wall which his eyes could never penetrate and which his hands could never touch. It was no longer real London with tangible objects in it, but just a grey, level desert with no obstructions and nothing real except the ground beneath one’s feet.’⁵⁸

Presenting a ‘solid grey wall’ that nevertheless remained intangible, fog revealed the impossible duality of the air it filled: at once coterminous with space and a form of matter, fog was both the ground of being for people within it and an object itself. It was an absence to be in and a presence to contend *with*, the self-erasing ground for being and

⁵⁶ Drew Leder, *The Absent Body*, (Chicago: London, 1990), pp.1-5.

⁵⁷ Bone, *London Perambulator*, pp.53-54.

⁵⁸ ‘London Fog-Bound’, *Daily Mail*, 22 December 1904, p.5.

implicated *in* being.⁵⁹ As one reporter hinted in 1904, this duality paradoxically made fog a ‘solid’ imprint of the buildings it surrounded and a nebulous ‘cloud’ effacing them: ‘London had suddenly become a strange new city. [...] The spacious streets had become a solid mass of grey, just as solid as the mass of grey which hid the buildings on each side. The world was suddenly an intangible, invariable grey cloud, through which one saw pin-points of light.’⁶⁰ By bringing the body and the space it occupied to presence simultaneously, fog made pedestrians acutely conscious of their locality yet unable to perceive it. For the phrenologically minded – those who believed mental faculties were deducible from a skull’s contours – fog was therefore ‘the chance for the Londoner proud of a “bump for locality”’:

Feeling his way by the house-walls he perceived that his conviction that the tube station was the fifth on the left was gradually oozing. [...] When the fifth turning to the left failed for the first time in a dozen years to produce a tube station and he found an unknown street in a quarter where he supposed “every brick” familiar, he began discounting his topography.⁶¹

Even those with a ‘bump for locality’ resorted to the equally hopeless tack of bumping into things. The most habituated commuter was outwitted by the experience of being a body newly sensitive to its locality but maddeningly ignorant of it – all due to the intangible tangibility of fog.

The Burden of Space in Police Court Law

Commentators associated fog’s baffling effects with disorder in the street and court. James Bone noted how fog engendered ‘a spirit of misrule’: ‘newsboys play tricks and

⁵⁹ Steven Connor, *The Matter of Air: Science and the Art of the Ethereal*, (London, 2010), pp.30-31; Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader, (London, 1999), pp.8-9.

⁶⁰ ‘London’s Great Christmas Fog’, *Daily Mail*, 23 December 1904, p.5.

⁶¹ ‘Fog-Bound Land’, *Daily Mail*, 28 November 1921, p.9.

cry strange news, and straight-laced citizens find themselves in public-houses, [...] people go to the wrong theatres, accidents occur and the ambulance gets lost'.⁶² Burglars contributed to the misrule by capitalizing on their newfound obscurity. According to the manager of a major insurance company, fog was the burglar's 'atmospheric jemmy'; 'the City's burglar's season' closely coincided with that of November's fogs.⁶³ Opportunistic thieves did equally well during daytime, as jeweller Charles Lewis of Kingsland Road, Hoxton, discovered to his cost on 22 January 1908 when six men smashed his shop window, grabbed what they could, and dissolved back into the fog.⁶⁴ If the effects of fog were sometimes farcical, newspapers rarely missed an opportunity to point out their more sinister side.

This was true in the case of Luke Brannan, a former stoker on H.M.S. *Pembroke*, who shot dead Florence Staples, alias Florence Dukes, or 'Dark Flo', one particularly foggy November night in 1909. Brannan had an immaculate service record but was invalided at Chatham Hospital in September 1909 and shortly after certified as an alcoholic and insane.⁶⁵ Staples had married a flower seller in 1907 but separated after a few months and, according to her mother, 'lived with a man named Richard Dukes, who travelled with a theatrical company.'⁶⁶ Since being discharged Brannan paid Staples for sex but when his money ran out it seems Staples cold-shouldered his subsequent advances. Late on 6 November he accosted Staples at her house in Etham Street, Borough,

⁶² Bone, *London Perambulator*, p.55.

⁶³ 'Fog Brings Burglars', *Daily Mail*, 5 November 1907, p.5.

⁶⁴ 'The King in the Fog', *Daily Mail*, 22 January 1908, p.5; see also 'Robberies in the Fog', *Daily Mail*, 28 January 1909, p.5.

⁶⁵ 'Murder in the Fog', *Daily Mail*, 8 November 1909, p.5; 'Tragedy in the Fog', *Daily Mail*, 12 November 1909, p.10; TBPC register, LMA, PS/TOW/A/01/104, 8, 16, 18, and 24 November 1909; Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.2, 16 July 2015), December 1909, trial of BRANNAN, Luke, (t19091207-15).

⁶⁶ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, (t19091207-15); 'Tragedy in the Fog', *Daily Mail*, 12 November 1909, p.10.

which they left together with Staples' friend Ada Evans. At the corner of Blackhorse Court, Staples allegedly said to Brannan, '[i]f you've got a couple of shillings you may come, otherwise keep away,' stating that she would 'be at London Bridge Station in the morning at 11'.⁶⁷ Brannan shot her as she walked away and then, the *Daily Mail* later reported, 'got clear away under the cloak of fog.'⁶⁸ Besides seemingly cloaking murder, the fog also provided a means for Brannan to disclaim responsibility when he appeared at the Old Bailey. He alleged he had only wanted to frighten Staples by firing the revolver on the ground but 'he caught the hammer and it went off'. As the clerk recorded, '[i]t was a very foggy night and he could not have seen the deceased if he had intended to aim at her.'⁶⁹ Because of its disorienting effects, Brannan claimed, the fog made it equally valid to assign the shot to accident as to intention. Unconvinced, the jury judged him guilty but recommended him to mercy on account of his depression and naval service rather than because fog precluded an accurate aim.⁷⁰ The cloak of fog condemned as much as it exonerated when it came to murder.

The assumed relation between fog and crime continued into the 1950s. In fiction Margery Allingham's *The Tiger in the Smoke* (1952) conscripted fog as the pathetic fallacy for blackmail and as the cause of criminal deception within the plot itself.⁷¹ Reporters continued to enrol fog as a meteorological metonym for, and explanation of, crime, tapping into prevailing anxiety over violent juvenile delinquency through direct or indirect links between rising cosh attacks and the Great Smog.⁷² Fog was the

⁶⁷ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, trial of BRANNAN, Luke, (t19091207-15); 'Murder in a Fog', *Daily Mail*, 9 November 1909, p.12.

⁶⁸ 'Murder in the Fog', *Daily Mail*, 8 November 1909, p.5.

⁶⁹ Old Bailey Proceedings Online, trial of BRANNAN, Luke, (t19091207-15).

⁷⁰ 'Sentence of Death', *Daily Mail*, 9 December 1909, p.8.

⁷¹ Margery Allingham, *The Tiger in the Smoke*, (London, 1952), p.9, p.23; also Maurice Lane Richardson, 'On the Run', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 1 August 1952, p.497.

⁷² Kenneth Allsop, 'Fear in the Suburbs', *Picture Post*, 6 December 1952, p.37; 'Burglar gets £12,000 in fog', *Daily Mail*, 8 December 1952, p.1.

materialization of crime – the spectre haunting the Big Smoke – and the cause of crime itself.⁷³ Yet this tautology overlooked the more fundamental relation between crime and the embodied experience of the street that fog made tangible. It overlooked how the peculiar experience of fog as a tangible presence and intangible absence revealed a deeper relation between the embodied experience of the street, the possibilities for crime, and the narratives presented about crime in court. Neither passive metonym for, nor active cause of crime, fog *translated* a relation between the embodied experience of the street and the policing and trial of crime that *exceeded* any particular spell of weather. By associating a spatial uncanny with crime, fog revealed the way in which the ability to see, move, and touch in a particular locality conditioned what narratives of crime were viable in court and how the court, in turn, narrated, and re-shaped the embodied experience of the street. It revealed, in short, an ineluctable entanglement of touch and law.

This entanglement was especially evident in south London in the early twentieth century, and with crimes subject to police court law. It was not that south London was markedly foggier, though that was a common claim of novelists and social investigators.⁷⁴ Rather, its confusion of streets exemplified the close interdependence of *specific* embodied experiences of the street and the stories told about them in court. The shooting of Florence Staples, for example, occurred in a knot of narrow streets, the idiosyncrasies of which shaped how the act could be made into a legal case in court. Etham Street, where

⁷³ See also the film *Footsteps in the Fog* (Dir. Arthur Lubin, 1955), based on the play *The Interruption* by W. Jacobs (W. W. Jacobs, 'The Interruption', in W. W. Jacobs, *Sea Whispers*, (London, n.d. 1926), pp.257-284) and the film version of Allingham's novel, *Tiger in the Smoke*, (Dir. Roy Baker, 1956). In fiction, see Christianna Brand, *London Particular*, (London, 1952), Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans', in Arthur Conan Doyle, *Complete Sherlock Holmes & Other Detective Stories*, (Glasgow, 1994), pp.1080-1098, and Sax Rohmer, 'The Si-Fan Mysteries', in Sax Rohmer, *The Fu-Manchu Omnibus*, I (4 vols, London, 1995 [1917]).

⁷⁴ Carmel Haden Guest, *Children of the Fog: A Novel of Southwark*, (London, 1927); F. Klingender, 'Southwark', October 1930, in *Borough background: Shoreditch to Willesden*, New Survey of London, LSE, NSOL/1/8/4, pp.3-4.

Staples lived, was ‘one of the darkest in the Borough,’ Constable Sommersgill told Charles Booth ten years earlier. A narrow, cobbled street of two-storied houses, it was the haunt of ‘thieves, prostitutes, [and] ticket-of-leave men’ – of whom Brannan was evidently one.⁷⁵ The shooting occurred where Great Dover Street intersected Tabard Street through Black Horse Court, a small street with a pub on one side, two houses and a shop on the other. Tabard Street was notorious for a series of houses owned by a local widow and ‘let out in rooms for single nights and short periods,’ mainly to prostitutes and ‘shady people’.⁷⁶ The ‘character’ of these streets was clearly important to legal arguments made in court. But Booth’s descriptions also indicate how every physical difference in the street might shape those arguments too. While fog was central to the legal narratives in this case, it revealed the more basic relation between those narratives and the particularity of space that it filled – a relation transformed when in 1910 Tabard Street fell to LCC slum clearance and was reincarnated as the Tabard Garden Estate.⁷⁷

The tangle of south London streets intersected with a defining feature of police-court law: summary jurisdiction. If legal narratives were contingent on particular embodied experiences of the street, then they also depended on the potential for magistrates to recognize those experiences. This was more likely in London police courts, where a single, permanent magistrate, often with intimate knowledge of his district, passed judgement, rather than a panel of jurors.⁷⁸ Magistrates accumulated this knowledge through ‘surprise visits’ and comments from the police, warrant officers, court

⁷⁵ Walk with Police Constable Sommersgill, District 32 (Trinity Newington and St Mary Bermondsey), 25-26 May 1899, Charles Booth Police Notebook, LSE, B364, p.31.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.19-21.

⁷⁷ LSE, NSOL/1/8/4, pp.1-2.

⁷⁸ Thomas Burke, *City of Encounters: A London Divertissement*, (London, 1932), p.182. See also Cecil Chapman, *From the Bench*, (London, 1932), p.44.

missionaries, and, after 1907, probation officers.⁷⁹ During the trial of Giovanni and Salvatore Grassi, charged in March and April 1930 with managing the Empress Hotel at 54-60 Waterloo Road, Lambeth, as a brothel, Sergeant Harold Parker gave evidence tying Waterloo's warren of streets with the problems of policing the area and making cases in court. Waterloo Road, he told the magistrate of Lambeth Police Court, was 'a difficult neighbourhood'. Prostitutes frequented the road nearest the train station, where there was 'considerable traffic' and cheap hotels charging around 7s. 6d. a night, mainly to those who missed their trains.⁸⁰ The constant flow of travellers provided a regular customer turnover and the hotels inexpensive accommodation, and the fact that many who missed their trains lacked luggage meant prostitutes could pose as the partners of their similarly empty-handed clients. This meant it was difficult to determine the incidence of prostitution *and* to turn it into a credible case in court. Only after fifteen nights' observation, during which time Parker and Constable Alexander Kinkaid saw 180 couples enter, including forty-two women known as prostitutes, did the police prosecute.⁸¹

Parker's account of Waterloo did more than admit the qualified nature of evidence possible in such a case – the identification of known prostitutes, unstocked hotel 'kitchen', guestbook discrepancies, fleeting stays, and absent luggage of hotel guests. It asked the magistrate to excuse these weaknesses on the basis of his knowledge of the physical *locale* and the type of fugitive intimacies possible within it. 'All great railway stations,' *The London Perambulator* corroborated, 'surround themselves with a sort of debatable land

⁷⁹ Hugh R.P. Gamon, *The London Police Court: To-day and To-morrow*, (London, 1907), p.104; Chapman, *From the Bench*, pp.34-35.

⁸⁰ Lambeth Police Court minute book (hereafter LPC), LMA, PS/LAM/B/01/092, 11 April 1930.

⁸¹ LPC minute book, LMA, PS/LAM/B/01/092, 21 April 1930; LPC minute book, LMA, PS/LAM/B/01/091, 26 March 1930. The case was heard at Lambeth Police Court on 17 and 26 March, 3, 11, 15 and 21 April 1930, and at Sessions House, Newington, (the Court of Appeal under the Summary Jurisdiction Act, 1879) on 30 May 1930: LPC registers, LMA, PS/LAM/A/069-070.

that is neither residential, commercial, industrial, trading, nor theatrical. It has shabby hotels and makeshift lodgings, bawdy houses, pawnbroker's shops, second-hand dealers [...]. A strange temporary look hangs about the place as though the denizens were always packing up, many of them moving on, [...] and the place was organized for the immediate disposal of their goods.' Waterloo in 1925 exemplified this 'sinister side of the drama of coming and going, [...] with its shabby confusion of railway arches and rows of dark little houses lying in ambush in its intricacies, its second-rate music-hall rendezvous, and a particular South London blight near the river suggesting wharfland.'⁸²

The 'South London blight' fastened on the railway station, spreading out far beyond. Walking north under the arches of the South Eastern Railway on Waterloo Road, the street-goer came to the aptly named Elbows Corner on York Road, where, since at least the 1890s, 'the poorer music hall artists loaf[ed] in hope of a job.'⁸³ One of these was Harry Fowler, out of work from mid-December 1919 and arrested for importuning men on 5 January 1921. During his trial, Fowler claimed he had spent the evening drinking in the Hero pub opposite the station until 10pm, when he left and walked up the road towards Waterloo Bridge to a coffee stall, possibly the same one that worked outside 17 Waterloo Road just before the War. He claimed to have been waiting for a bus to Victoria.⁸⁴ Constable Ernest King recounted a different story, detailing Fowler's encounter with a sailor outside the Hero. "'Hello Jack you seem lonely". The sailor said "Just a bit". Prisoner said "I'm looking for one of you for the night" and he touched the sailor in his private parts. The sailor put himself in a fighting attitude.' Fowler allegedly

⁸² Bone, *London Perambulator*, pp.143-145.

⁸³ LSE, B363, p.33.

⁸⁴ TBPC minute book, LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/087, 6 January 1921.

hurried towards Waterloo Bridge and tried his luck with two other sailors before King arrested him on the corner of York Road.⁸⁵

Besides unemployed music hall artists, York Road accommodated many of their agents, as well as a rash of brothels.⁸⁶ Narrow streets connected York Road with Belvedere Road, lined with ‘low, dirty, and half-derelict wharves looking on to a welter of black mud except at the high tide.’⁸⁷ Here in January 1921, Constable King arrested Jean Campbell and Thomas McEleney for indecency. McEleney, one of those travellers who ‘hadn’t got a train for some time,’ met Campbell near the new Victory Arch entrance to Waterloo Station on York Road: ‘I’d been told by Dr to mix with opposite sex to help me to talk as I was suffering from neurasthenia’.⁸⁸ Back on York Road, and only a week later, two constables noticed Charles Warnham accosting men between the Duke of York saloon bar and a urinal in adjacent York Street. On entering the bar they allegedly heard him ask another man ‘Come on, old sport, aren’t you going to have a blow through down the hole in the wall?’ The Hole in the Wall bar squatted beneath the railway arches running up to Waterloo East Station on the opposite side of Waterloo Road. One of the constables made its alternative meaning, and possibly alternative purpose, clear when he gave evidence that, on his arrest, Warnham was ‘wearing a pair of trousers with a large split over the backside.’ Warnham alleged a police set-up: he did not go to any bar of that name, and had received the hole at the police station, where the station officer told him to bend down, put his hand to the trousers, and ripped them. His mother Eliza, who had patched them up previously, corroborated.⁸⁹ Whatever the truth of the matter, the

⁸⁵ LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/087, 6 January 1921.

⁸⁶ LSE, B363, p.37.

⁸⁷ Walter Besant, *London: South of the Thames*, (London, 1912), p.81.

⁸⁸ LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/087, 1 February 1921.

⁸⁹ PS/TOW/B/01/087, 8 February 1921; See also the case of Ellen Perrin and Janny Flack, arrested for harassing a drunk American soldier on York Road in December 1924 and

magistrate had to be alert to the way that the topology of south London not only created possibilities for illicit encounters but also became a local lexicon *of* those encounters as well.

Heading back to Elbows Corner and turning north towards the Thames, the street-goer approached the Empress Hotel, let by Giovanni Grassi since November 1918. Outside the hotel one January evening in 1923, Elsie Leonard allegedly grabbed the arm of a passer-by and flashed an insinuating question. Constable Marshman arrested her and her companion Peggy Robinson for soliciting – ‘Damn it, kid, give us a chance.’ Leonard, who lived in the notorious Oakley Street between Blackfriars Road and Waterloo Road, claimed she didn’t touch the man and was only waiting for a bus over Waterloo Bridge; the man had approached her asking for 2d., which she refused.⁹⁰ Constable Charles Barber arrested Florence Lucock and Lily May for the same offence at the same spot almost exactly two years previously. Lucock and May had come arm-in-arm from Stamford Street, at the intersection of York Road and Waterloo Road.⁹¹ Stamford Street was ‘one of the ugliest and most sordid streets in London,’ according to Walter Besant in 1912. This was another haunt of prostitutes, music-hall agents, and ‘poverty-stricken actors waiting for engagements’.⁹² Just off it ran the passage where Mary Jones and Albert Parker were arrested for indecency in 1924. It also gave onto Coin Street, where Lewis Hodgkinson and Nellie Smith were arrested for indecency in February 1914. Allegedly caught in the act, Smith bombarded Constable Walter Rake with all possible extenuating circumstances. ‘I’m hard up, it’s my first night out, he didn’t do it but he tried to feel me.’

referring to the barman of the Duke of York as an alibi: LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/139, 10 December 1924.

⁹⁰ TBPC minute book, LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/115, 17 January 1923.

⁹¹ LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/087, 4 January 1921.

⁹² Besant, *London: South of the Thames*, p.81; Walk with Sergeant Waters, 1-2 May 1899, Charles Booth Police Notebook, LSE, B363, p.55.

But the place, as much as the evidence itself, was against her: Hodgkinson was fined only 10s., Smith £5, far more than even the usual inequality required by a law that penalized female prostitutes rather than their male clients.⁹³

Had Constable Rake kept to Waterloo Road, ‘a broad road flanked by bad architecture, and noisy with omnibuses, trams, cabs, and heavy vans,’ his task would not have been easier.⁹⁴ Walking south towards St George’s Circus, the street-goer passed the Aubin Street lodgings of railway porters, known for their variable earnings and reputedly heavy drinking. The whole street was swallowed up by station redevelopment, completed in 1922.⁹⁵ To the east, the street-goer passed the Union Jack Club, opened in 1907. Located at 91 Waterloo Road, opposite the station, the Club provided a library, billiard and coffee rooms, and 204 guest rooms for non-commissioned servicemen visiting London. In theory, the Club closed at 12.30am, ‘after which hour no one except those staying at the Club or wishing to occupy a bedroom [we]re admitted’; in practice, the individual rooms made it a good place for guests to bring back partners met outside.⁹⁶ Like the Empress Hotel 31 doors down, the Club’s street-front was also popular with those soliciting the passing trade, especially its footloose armed services constituent. As the locus for servicemen thronging London during and immediately after the Great War, it subtly shifted the nature and geography of prostitution as the seasoned ‘professional’ of the West End, increasingly targeted by the police, gave way to the more youthful, and more dispersed, ‘amateur’. This increasingly prevalent ‘type’ ostensibly did not ply out of necessity but for ‘an evening out,’ and was found ‘around the bus-stops and in the tea-

⁹³ TBPC minute book, LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/001, 9 February 1914.

⁹⁴ Besant, *London: South of the Thames*, p.81.

⁹⁵ LSE, B363, p.29.

⁹⁶ Edward, D. Ward, ‘The Union Jack Club: What We Want’, in H. F. Trippel (ed.), *The Flag: The Book of the Union Jack Club*, (London, n.d. (c.1908)), pp.108-109; Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p.121.

lounges of the cheap-rich hotels,' Thomas Burke alleged. 'It began in khaki-mania, but it is now for many a settled course of life.'⁹⁷

Whatever her motivations, Sibyl Thomas was spotted soliciting outside the Club in January 1921. She had been testing the waters with sailors outside the Fire Station – 150 Waterloo Road, and another hotspot for soliciting since it opened in 1910 – before crossing to the Club and the Hero pub fifty yards up.⁹⁸ The large number of servicemen passing through its doors – 42,000 alone using its sleeping accommodation in the first nine months – also made it one of London's most important queer cruising grounds.⁹⁹ In mid-January 1927, Joseph Phillips, his face 'covered with powder, eyebrows penciled, lips rouged,' accosted four men outside the Club before walking down to Wellington House, opened in 1928 as the David Grieg department store at 133-155 Waterloo Road, where he approached another. He was arrested in Cornwall Road when, mistaking the plain-clothes constable shadowing him for a potential client, he angled again. 'Well Jack would you like to spend a night with me. [...] I want love and affection – not money so much, altho' I could do with a little. [...]'¹⁰⁰

'Misery Junction', people called it.¹⁰¹ Here, in acute form, space mattered – both to the possibility for illicit touch, and to the parameters of legal narratives possible in court and the effect those narratives had on subsequent illicit encounters on the street. If fog revealed the relation between embodied experiences of the street and the actual and legal existence of illicit touch, then north Lambeth and Southwark in the early twentieth century exemplified this relation. Its warren of streets *enabled* fleeting sexual encounters

⁹⁷ Thomas Burke, *The London Spy*, (London, 1922), pp.220-221.

⁹⁸ LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/087, 4 January 1921. See also, in the same minute book, cases of Alice Keen and Lottie Haynes on 20 January, and of Rose Rutter, TBPC minute book, LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/059, 17 December 1918.

⁹⁹ Ward, 'The Union Jack Club', p.108.

¹⁰⁰ TBPC minute book, LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/164, 17 January 1927.

¹⁰¹ Besant, *London: South of the Thames*, p.81.

at the same time as it *constituted*, through the magistrate's local knowledge and summary jurisdiction, the law governing and shaping them. Rather than existing in a relationship *with* police court law, specific embodied experiences of the street – the ability to touch, be touched, and to get away with it without being seen – were stitched into that law, while that law was stitched into those experiences of the street, and brought into being through them.

Tropics of Touch

11.30pm on Christmas Eve, 1920. Constables Armstrong and Northcote were standing outside the Rockingham pub at Elephant and Castle, a junction just south of St George's Circus. Glancing across the street, Armstrong saw what he called a 'scuffle' within the crowd clamouring around the tram – but nothing requiring immediate attention. Minutes later, he was approached by William Beckwith, who alleged that he had been punched as he attempted to board the tram. 'What the f---g hell are you looking at?' demanded the man blocking his entry, who with two others pushed Beckwith back and gave him a 'nasty clout' on the mouth. When Beckwith returned to the tram with the two constables, he later claimed at the trial in Tower Bridge Police Court, he identified his assailant – a costermonger named Samuel Rowen – and his two accomplices, one of whom was Albert Bentley.

Here the story presented in court frayed at the edges. After Beckwith identified the men, he claimed, 'Rowen broke away and I could not hold him'; he was chased and arrested in Tarn Street, named after the large bus company located there. But Constable Armstrong gave a different account. Instead, he shifted the magistrate's attention away from Rowen and onto Bentley. He stated that even before he left the Rockingham he had

noticed Bentley blocking the footboard of the 56 tram, so allowing fellow pickpockets to work among the tumble of bodies pressed against the entrance. When he approached, Bentley was repeating the ruse for another tramcar. Armstrong put his hand on Bentley's shoulder; Bentley threw his overcoat at him and bolted, Rowen covering his escape by tripping up the pursuing constable. Only at this point did Rowen come to his attention not, apparently, because Beckwith had identified him as a culprit. Yet this contradicted Beckwith's evidence that it was *Rowen* initially blocking the tramcar entrance – the cause of their fracas and the assault – and that when he returned to the tram it was the third man 'not in custody' holding the rails, *not* Bentley. It also contradicted Armstrong's own evidence that when he first saw the defendants across the street they were not doing anything for which they could be arrested.¹⁰²

If this sounds confusing then it should. These contradictions indicate the messy reconciliation between the embodied experience of the street and police court law. They show how a street's physical constraints on sight and touch conditioned not only possibilities for criminal touch but also the plausibility of narratives about that touch in court and therefore its existence as a legal 'fact'. When Beckwith reported his assault to the constable, he later recounted, he was asked whether he had 'felt any hands in my pockets'. He replied that he had not and was 'merely charging Rowan [*sic*] with hitting me in [the] face,' to which the constable responded bluntly '[a]ll you can do is to summon him'. As this was an arrest and not a summons, the constable was implying, the police, not Beckwith, would define the charge.

This marked a redirection from Beckwith's original claim of assault to a police charge of pickpocketing, with assault as a subordinate charge: an easier case to make stick given the timing of the tramcar tussle during the return home of last-minute Christmas

¹⁰² TBPC minute book, LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/088, 27 and 29 December 1920.

shoppers, with their presents and extra provision of cash. This redirection developed into a contested geography of the street as each witness tried to jam the sensory experience possible within it into a different charge that made sense – literally and figuratively – in law. According to Beckwith, he walked one hundred yards to the Rockingham from the tram, which stopped outside a fruiterer's on Walworth Road; he couldn't recall whether there was a lamp standard by the shop. But Armstrong claimed that the tram ran short of the fruit shop, stopping only twenty yards from where he had stood. He further added that there was a lamp standard directly opposite to where the tram stopped, strengthening his claim to have detected Bentley's obstructionism from a distance. The contradictions reached a head when Constable Northcote alleged that the defendants had tried pickpocketing Beckwith after assaulting him – which Beckwith flatly denied.¹⁰³

These tensions between the street and its incarnation in law were only resolved through tensions in law itself, which shifted between registers of formality during the trial. Legal formality and minute book form shifted in tandem. After Beckwith rejects Northcote's evidence there is a line in the minute book, followed by the court clerk's interpolation. The clerk records that the magistrate refuses to admit evidence of Rowen and Bentley's previous convictions but there then follows a long list of exactly that, along with a marginal note that the magistrate 'raises no objection to this informal method of bringing the evidence of previous convictions before the Court.' It was then short work for the magistrate to disregard Beckwith's narrative of the street and convict the defendants as 'rogues and vagabonds' rather than for assault.¹⁰⁴

What this highlights is the often uneven fit between the embodied experience of the street and its existence in law – and the tricky search for their immanent relation. 'The

¹⁰³ LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/088, 29 December 1920.

¹⁰⁴ TBPC register, LMA, PS/TOW/A/01/146, 27 December and 29 December 1920.

magistrate is often not over-punctilious in his regard for the rules of evidence,’ wrote Hugh Gamon, a social investigator for the Toynbee Trust, in 1907. ‘They are exceedingly technical, and somewhat unreasonable at certain points. They have been devised more for the regulation of trial by jury than for the magistrate of legal knowledge and practical experience.’ In a ‘drunk and disorderly’ case, for example, the magistrate might simply ask the assistant-gaoler or clerk if they recognized the defendant in order to confirm suspicions of guilt.¹⁰⁵ And yet, for indictable cases sent to a higher court, ‘the evidence is more strictly guarded against a breach of the technical rules of Law’ and ‘the depositions of evidence are more carefully written down by the clerk, and signed by the witness’.¹⁰⁶

The particular nature of the case against Rowen and Bentley meant that *both* these statements were true. The list of their previous convictions was long: nine for Rowen between July 1908 and August 1920, including three for assault and two for loitering, and nine for Bentley between December 1913 and March 1920, including five for successful or attempted larceny and two for being a suspected person.¹⁰⁷ Rowen lived at 27 Millcot [Milcote] Street, Blackfriars; Bentley, a stone’s throw away at 140 Blackfriars Road, part of the Peabody Estate social housing opened in 1871.¹⁰⁸ This suggests they were both well known at Tower Bridge, probably as accomplices, long before their convictions were ‘informally’ presented in court. What was an offence for the police court – being rogues and vagabonds – therefore also had potential as one for a higher court – being ‘incorrigible rogues’, which required the judgement of a jury.¹⁰⁹ Potentially referable to Quarter Sessions, the ‘technical’ accuracy of evidence had added importance. Yet at the same time, the impossible contortions of the street sensescape into credible *legal* accounts of

¹⁰⁵ Gamon, *London Police Court*, p.151, p.153.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.89.

¹⁰⁷ LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/088, 29 December 1920.

¹⁰⁸ LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/088, 29 December 1920.

¹⁰⁹ J. R. Roberts (ed.), *Stone’s Justices’ Manual*, (52nd edn, London, 1920).

the street compelled the magistrate to abandon that accuracy in order, paradoxically, to preserve it; in order to make possible a legal case which could subsequently re-appear at Sessions before a jury.¹¹⁰ Precisely *because* the rules of evidence were stricter in higher courts they had to be bent in police courts when the embodied experience of the street translated poorly into a case in law. As J.A.R. Cairns, Thames Police Court magistrate, cautioned in 1923, '[i]n indictable offences a prisoner should not be committed for trial unless the evidence is such that a jury would probably convict.'¹¹¹ But in order to establish that evidence, rules had to be broken. Magistrate Henry Waddy was strongly of this opinion:

It is simply futile to keep on telling a garrulous woman in the witness-box, whose burning passion is to interject every few seconds to the man in the dock, "Oh, you scoundrel!" that she must give the precise words that were used, use the first person and not the third, not make statements that are hearsay, and so on.

The very next moment she exclaims, "All the neighbours know him; he only came out of prison last week!"

If a magistrate insists in this matter on the standard of the High Court of Justice, he may easily miss the truth. It is often from some aside, in itself wholly inadmissible, that the thread appears by means of which an apparently hopeless tangle may be undone.

After all, a magistrate is a lawyer, and he sits without a jury; he must learn to discard.¹¹²

An aside revealing a defendant's previous conviction might be just what the magistrate needed in order to judge a case adequately concrete for indictment.

Consequently, Detective Inspector Webber presented the list of previous convictions *before* Rowen and Bentley gave evidence or a judgement was reached, enabling the magistrate to settle upon a charge which allowed for conflicting narratives of the touch and vision possible in the street: both were tried under Section Four of the

¹¹⁰ On the complexities involved in the magistrate's 'preliminary inquiry' of indictable offences see J. A. R. Cairns, *The Sidelights of London*, (London, 1923), pp.97-98.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.110.

¹¹² Henry Waddy Turner, *The Police Court and Its Work*, (London, 1925), pp.60-61.

Vagrancy Act as ‘suspected persons and thieves’.¹¹³ They were convicted as rogues and vagabonds and committed to Quarter Sessions at Newington where, on 13 January 1921, Justice Allan Lawrie and twelve jurors convicted them as incorrigible rogues and suspected persons, sentencing Rowen and Bentley to nine and six months hard labour respectively; the assault charge had fallen out of the picture.¹¹⁴ When the street could not be converted into a narrative in law then law had to accommodate the street by suspending its own rules of evidence.

Yet it worked the other way round too: while embodied experience conditioned the making of law, law also brought that experience into being as an object through narratives woven in court. Crucially, though, these narratives were not wholly discursive but themselves existed only through the *material* workings of the court: through tangible paperwork and embodied practices that materially conditioned the reproduction of the street in legal form. The legal objectivity of the street, of its embodied experience, still existed only through files that could be circulated, compared, and collated, connecting the particulars of a case with the general, and through bodies that could be arranged into a particular habitus and spatial relationship which allowed those connections to emerge as legal ‘truths’.¹¹⁵ Rather than bringing into being the ‘Law’ which, conceptually speaking, and as it was understood by contemporary jurisprudence, already existed, these objects and practices brought that Law into being *as a concept itself* through each instance of their use, so collapsing its ostensible autonomous existence *as* ‘Law’.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Evidence of previous offences committed would usually be inadmissible until judgement had been reached and a sentence was to be decided upon. *Ibid.*, p.109, p.111.

¹¹⁴ TBPC register, LMA, PS/TOW/A/01/145, 5 January 1921; Inner London Sessions Register, LMA, ILS/B/04/019, 13 January 1921.

¹¹⁵ Bruno Latour, *The Making of Law: An Ethnography of the Conseil d’Etat*, trans. Marina Brilman and Alain Pottage, (Cambridge: Malden, MA, 2010), c.2.

¹¹⁶ This makes an important distinction from arguments that reduce ‘Law’, assumed *a priori*, to its material manifestations or ‘social’ causes, as found in critical legal theory or

The case of Harry Conniham, a twenty-three-year-old music hall artist, and Robert Wright, a twenty-one-year-old hairdresser, charged together with being suspected persons in January 1930, is an example. In order to prevent police narratives of the street being incorporated into one another, so unfairly invalidating his own, Conniham requested that each constable present their evidence without the presence of the other in court. In a system where, only two decades previously, clock-watching magistrates seldom bothered to exclude other witnesses from court and defendants were ‘seldom aware’ of their right to do so, this showed considerable nous.¹¹⁷ Remarkably, Conniham drafted questions to quiz each constable with independently, so precluding corroborating evidence that might challenge his own account of events. But more remarkable is the way he presented this evidence as, appropriate to his profession, a play. ‘The Night Patrol’, submitted in a blue exercise book framed with flowers, was a play of two acts, the second of which exhaustively outlined Conniham’s movements in the predawn hours of 12 January. Accompanying the play was a sketch map of the route he took from Embankment to Southwark Street, along with arrival times at each location.

The action began with an offer of work. At 10.30pm on Saturday 11 January Conniham got talking with a Commissionaire who offered him ‘a chance to earn a few shillings fetching taxis for people attending a party on his ship when they started going home at one o’clock.’ Wright was to guard the cars parked nearby. Performing their duties until the ship’s pier closed at 4.30am, they ambled along the Embankment until reaching Waterloo Bridge, where they had a cup of tea at The Free Travelling Café (Fig.18).¹¹⁸ The café, also known as The Silver Lady, was a coffee-van providing tea, socks, mufflers, and

legal realism. See Pottage, ‘The Materiality of What?’ pp.178-181, and Ronald Dworkin, *Law’s Empire*, (Oxford, 1998), pp.12-14.

¹¹⁷ Gamon, *London Police Court*, pp.156-157, pp.90-91.

¹¹⁸ ‘The Night Patrol’, loose insert in TBPC minute book, LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/198, 13 January 1930.



Fig.18 The Welcome – Free to the Needy travelling café, 1930, Daily Herald Archive/National Media Museum/Science and Society Picture Library, BY-NC-SA.

bread and dripping for down-and-outs. It began operating in August 1929 and became increasingly important as the Depression bit harder and a growing tide of unemployed from distressed areas flooded London. The van opened on the Embankment at 1am, before driving to Trafalgar Square, up to Bayswater Road, and then back to its pitch opposite Cleopatra's Needle on the Embankment between around 5am and 6am. Each area attracted its own different 'colony' of drifters, with young men like Conniham and Wright preferring Embankment; older men settled themselves further away, under the covered section of Craven Steps off the Strand, but still close to the van.¹¹⁹ Conniham claimed that he and Wright chatted at the van between 4.35am and 4.40am and then walked along Embankment; the clock on the new Lever House read 4.43am. Crossing Blackfriars Bridge, they stopped at another coffee stall on Blackfriars Road, where they had tea, doughnuts and cream. They then turned into Southwark Street and, after five hundred yards, paused to count the five strikes of Big Ben. Both being interested in football, they bought copies of the *News of the World* and *Sunday Express* at a nearby newspaper depot and then continued towards London Bridge.¹²⁰ Constables Hormaid and Woolf arrested them outside a 'closed refreshment house' opposite St Saviour's Public Baths.¹²¹

Through these narratives Conniham sought to control the law's formulation of the embodied experience of the street. His to-the-minute timings and detailed topography of Southwark aimed at shaping how law extracted the exemplary from the incidental. In magistrate's discourse, he introduced new *facts in issue*, 'facts which are alleged by the prosecution and denied by the accused,' and precluded others by meticulously providing

¹¹⁹ Clodagh Anson, *Book: Discreet Memoirs*, (London, 1931), pp.306-316; For an account of the van and the micro-geography of down-and-outs see the memoirs of Dorothy Peto, the Superintendent responsible for Metropolitan policewomen from April 1930: Dorothy Peto, *The Memoirs of Miss Dorothy Olivia Georgiana Peto*, (Bramshill, 1993), p.64.

¹²⁰ Evidence of Harry Conniham and 'The Night Patrol', TBPC minute book, LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/198, 13 January 1930.

¹²¹ LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/198, 13 January 1930.

additional *relevant facts*, facts close enough to facts in issue that they make them ‘probable or improbable.’¹²² He said, for example, that when the constables arrested him they claimed to have started their observations from Embankment, but when they arrived at the police station they claimed they had only done so ‘from a doorway in Southwark Street’. Conniham asked which of the two was correct. He continued,

You also said that you saw us stop at a coffee stall in Blackfriars Road yet you watched our approach from a doorway in Southwark Street which is the first turning from the Bridge on the left of Blackfriars Road and the first shop doorway is three or four hundred yards from that corner. May I ask you how you could have seen us at the coffee stall from the position stated.¹²³

By multiplying facts in issue and delimiting the possibility for others through a precise urban topology, Conniham constricted how law could reproduce the embodied experience of the street. He constricted how law knitted together different accounts of that experience into a single narrative, matching it up with the existing body of legal files in order to make it a particular instance of a general *case* within law; in this instance, being a suspected person.¹²⁴

But the material differences in his narratives – a map, a play, a list of questions – highlight how narrating the street was not only a matter of abstracting the general from the particular but turning that particular back *into matter*: into files that could be assembled and reassembled, circulated, and towards which it was necessary to take a particular *bodily* attitude.¹²⁵ If law necessitated the knitting together of files, then material variations between and tactile practices towards those files counted as much for the law’s making of the street as the narrative content they materialized.

¹²² Cairns, *Sidelights of London*, p.108.

¹²³ ‘The Night Patrol’, TBPC minute book, LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/198, 13 January 1930.

¹²⁴ Latour, *The Making of Law*, p.85. i.e. a particular instance of a general case *in law* (like indecency) rather than simply a case brought before a court.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* pp.211-212.

Conniham's play, pencilled in a standard lined exercise book but pinned with the court minutes, was caught between sincerity and whimsy. At one level it was an earnest plea for acquittal; at another, a tongue-in-cheek suggestion that truth was staged, rather than simply related, in court. By providing a transcript for his evidence in court, it scripted him as an actor who bodily *performed* truth in the dock. This performance passionately countered the cultivated 'indifference' towards files adopted by every magistrate's habitus: what Magistrate Cairns called the 'judicial temper'. It was essential, Cairns wrote, to resist forming an opinion until the last possible moment, essential to hesitate at every opportunity: only then might judgements ultimately be given unequivocally and peremptorily.¹²⁶ Hesitation, and the justice dependent on it, stemmed from mental and bodily self-control and a calculated 'equable' habitus towards other bodies in court: '[a]n unfortunate prisoner should not be made the victim of a disordered digestion.'¹²⁷ Through a comportment of disinterest magistrates *embodied* that hesitation essential to sifting the relevant from the irrelevant. Explaining why he easily cried at the theatre but never at the police court, Marylebone magistrate Alfred Plowden mused that 't]he stage to me is the world of reality – the world, nothing but a stage. In the one I feel, because I am *free* to feel. In the other, being just an actor like all around me, I have learnt [...] how to conceal every natural emotion.'¹²⁸ 'The Night Patrol' responded to this truth, confirming that law was not only performed in the translation of 'documents' into 'files' but in the embodied performance of, and towards, those documents themselves – in each postural stance and grip and shun of *paper*.

¹²⁶ Latour, *Making of Law*, pp.211-212, pp.221-222.

¹²⁷ Cairns, *Sidelights of London*, pp.100-102; Latour, *Making of Law*, pp.211-212.

¹²⁸ Alfred Chichele Plowden, *Grain or Chaff? The Autobiography of a Police Magistrate*, (London, 1903), pp.283-284. This 'judicial temper' contrasts with the tearful theatricality of mid-Victorian courtrooms, indicating a significant shift in emotional regimes. See Thomas Dixon, 'The Tears of Mr Justice Willis', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 17/1, (2012), pp.1-23.

But accompanying the play were very different documents: an address card – 5 Sloane Court, in affluent Chelsea – and letter to the court clerk from Lady Clodagh Anson, daughter of the Marquis of Waterford. Anson volunteered at the travelling coffee-van and had served Conniham and Wright on the morning of 12 January. She knew Conniham as ‘Charlie Chaplin’, an alias he acquired by copying the comedian ‘in pit queues or in the smaller cinemas when one of the Chaplin films was being shown.’¹²⁹ Anson’s letter, however, failed to fit Conniham’s account. As a character testimonial that even mistook his name – ‘Harry Calindale’ – it could not support Conniham’s intervention in law’s linking of documents in order to extract a case. The letter gave no information on the morning encounter and closed with Anson’s assertion that she had ‘never known him expect money in exchange for his services’ or to ‘cadge for money,’ a hair’s breadth from contradicting his account of fetching taxis for party-goers.¹³⁰ The first Act of the play, crossed out, was in fact a defence against this charge made by a constable on a separate occasion – ‘I saw a gentleman having a little difficulty in opening a cab door from the inside so I offered assistance by opening the door from outside. He then offered me some coins for my help so I did not refuse them.’¹³¹ Anson did not know Conniham well. Her letter ineffectively shaped how documents were chained together in order to reproduce the embodied experience of the street and assess its possibility *as a case* in law.

Anson’s memoirs revealed this, and the fact that it was concealed from her, all too clearly. In parts her account, published a year later, accorded with Conniham’s careful delineation of the street; what was sensorially possible and factually probable within it. She wrote that when Conniham and Wright left the coffee-van ‘[t]hey were walking

¹²⁹ Anson, *Book*, pp.326-327.

¹³⁰ Letter from Clodagh Anson to the clerk of Tower Bridge Police Court, loose insert in TBPC minute book, LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/198, 13 January 1930.

¹³¹ ‘The Night Patrol’, TBPC minute book, LMA, PS/TOW/B/01/198, 13 January 1930.

slowly, as they meant to get to the fish market about five.’ Billingsgate was a magnet for down-and-outs seeking work and as Conniham and Wright were arrested at 5am walking towards London Bridge, which abutted the market, this was highly likely. But when it came to events in court, which she did not attend, she claimed that the ‘kind-hearted’ magistrate, finding that the defendants had not been carrying any implement with which to break and enter, acquitted them and rebuked the constables for suspecting guilt simply on the basis of the state of their clothes.¹³² In reality, the magistrate found both guilty of being suspected persons and sentenced them to one day’s hard labour.¹³³

What this showed was not only the weakness of Anson’s corroboration, and her ignorance of this, but, more importantly, how it conflicted with the play *as a letter*. Contrary to the play, which scripted Conniham’s performance, the letter apologized for Anson’s absence in court: it stood in for that absence, situating the truth of its narrative not in its performance but in the status behind it. If the play countered the magistrate’s bodily indifference to files, Anson’s decision to send a letter ignored it altogether, failing to influence how it was turned into a case through a process of embodied doubt. Which is strange, given that she, like Cairns, similarly worried about the magistrate’s bowel movements. ‘The magistrate,’ she decried, ‘is a complete law unto himself.’ If he was sympathetic then he could do much good, ‘but if he suffers from indigestion, or has allowed himself to get strong and very unreasonable prejudices’ then he might turn ‘perfectly harmless human beings into bitter criminals’.¹³⁴

¹³² Anson, *Book*, pp.326-327. This was not the last time that Anson was deceived, whether for good or bad intentions, by the down-and-outs on whose behalf she intervened. ‘Viper Fable in Real Life: Man Who Defrauded Lady Clodagh Anson’, *Daily Mirror*, 25 October 1932, p.5.

¹³³ TBPC register, LMA, PS/TOW/A/01/172, 13 January 1930.

¹³⁴ Anson, *Book*, pp.326-327. This antipathy was likely the result of a recent public bruising Anson had received from Magistrate Oulton, of Marlborough Police Court, who criticized her for employing twenty-year-old Cyril Cronshaw to covertly verify the

The ordering of bodies and documents shaping the extraction of a case depended on a proper ordering of court space. Through enclosures, elevations, panelling, and thresholds, court space materialized the logic of the legal process reproducing the embodied experience of the street. A collocation of bodies and documents, it circumscribed the way in which the embodied experience of the street emerged in law; became part of the body *of* law. Tower Bridge, where Conniham and Wright were tried, was the ‘culmination of police-court building ideals’ when it opened on 211 Tooley Street, just east of London Bridge station, in 1906.¹³⁵ Entering beneath a colonnaded balcony via a flight of shallow stone steps, the litigant passed into ‘a spacious and lofty hall, panelled in oak, with benches set against the walls’. Here congregated applicants for summonses, heard when the court opened at 10am, ‘prosecutors, witnesses, complainants, defendants, friends and loafers,’ all pacing restlessly, talking in ‘eager knots’, or sat against the wall, ‘dull, listless, and silent.’ The hall gave onto the principal courtroom, a large, square room ‘with a clerestory of wood and glass rising out of the roof’. Despite its famously poor acoustics, which threatened both the giving and receiving of evidence, Gamon felt it possessed an ‘unostentatious grandeur’ conducive to the sober exactitude of law.¹³⁶

The court floor was ‘as full of partitions as the bottom of a fishing cobble’. At the far end of the room, ‘on a carpeted dais and beneath a canopy,’ stood the magistrate’s oak and red leather ‘throne’. Running in front of the dais was ‘a paling of finished woodwork,

statements of unemployed patrons of the coffee-van. ‘A Free Coffee Stall’, *Daily Mail*, 14 October 1930, p.7; Anson, *Book*, pp.324-325.

¹³⁵ Gamon, *London Police Court*, p.57; Designed by John Dixon Butler (1861-1920), Metropolitan Police Architect and Surveyor since 1895, Tower Bridge Police Court exemplified the ‘austere’ interpretation of Free Classic architecture for which Butler became known. A. Stuart Gray, *Edwardian Architecture: A Biographical Dictionary*, (London, 1985), p.132.

¹³⁶ Gamon, *London Police Court*, pp.57-64, pp.72-73; Waddy, *The Police Court*, p.61, pp.203-204.

cutting his worship off from all contact with the common herd.’ This physical distance aimed at preserving the objective one underpinning the magistrate’s judicial temper. To the magistrate’s left and right were ‘solemn cupboards, devoted to the repose of heavy legal tomes,’ while before him was ‘a writing-table, piled with reference books and papers.’¹³⁷ With the law, quite literally, at his side, the magistrate confronted a heap of jostling depositions, each requiring reconciliation with one another and with the law of which they aspired, or refused, to be a case.

This spatial mediation situated the magistrate at the centre of a legal one. Unique to petty courts, where one or both sides often lacked solicitors, magistrates played a ‘double part’, cross-examining witnesses on behalf of unrepresented litigants at the same time as assessing the viability of the extracted case within law.¹³⁸ The magistrate acted as ‘counsel and judge’, turning the embodied experience of the street into a legal object while simultaneously judging the final product.¹³⁹ This shift was spatially marked if the defendant chose to step down from the ‘narrow iron dock’, raised in the centre of the room on a wooden platform, and walk across the room to instead give evidence as a witness under oath in the box adjacent to the magistrate and facing the clerk.¹⁴⁰

Both the clerk’s bodily disposition and spatial position kept the magistrate’s dual role in creative tension. For the magistrate, Gamon wrote, ‘the Law is elastic’; for the clerk, ‘it is red tape’. Compared with the magistrate’s cultivated indifference, the clerk had ‘an air of critical precision about his mouth and garments’.¹⁴¹ His desk was ‘[i]n a little pen at the feet of the magistrate, but outside the pale’: ‘The clerk sits on a little elevation of his own, facing the left wall of the court, his desk at right angles to the

¹³⁷ Gamon, *London Police Court*, p.57-64.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.102; Plowden, *Grain or Chaff?*, p.246.

¹³⁹ H.L. Cancellor, *The Life of a London Beak*, (London, 1929), p.14.

¹⁴⁰ Gamon, *London Police Court*, pp.57-64.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp.106-107.

magistrate's table, and his chair a little to the left of the magistrate but within a few feet of him; so that at the signal he can get up, lean over the magistrate's desk, and confer with him without being overheard by any one.'¹⁴² This ability to confer was essential to the clerk's role as assistant and check on the magistrate's balancing act as counsel and judge. If the magistrate was 'on the wrong path' it was 'for the clerk to get up quietly and by a whisper arrest his steps'; or the magistrate might 'apply to him for the law', or ask the clerk's opinion on 'what he thinks the proper punishment should be'.¹⁴³ Where we see the clerk's parenthetical appearance in the minutes to Rowen and Bentley's trial, any of these occurrences might have taken place. Equally, the clerk might have got up to consult the magistrate on the admissibility of Anson's letter as evidence. While the magistrate mediated between the extraction of a case and its judgement in law, the clerk's attitudinal and physical perpendicularity regulated 'the legal sanity of his decisions'.¹⁴⁴

Clodagh Anson's letter was not a one off. She and others often sent letters to police courts intervening in the extraction of a case.¹⁴⁵ More than only discursive interventions, these were part of the stuff and substance *of* law: of law's subsistence on the embodied experience of the street, an experience that at once conditioned the legal narratives that could be told, was reproduced *through* those narratives, and was judged as a case *within* law by the configuration of bodies and papers embodying law in court. Proceedings at Tower Bridge, the model police court in the heart of Southwark, reveal this immanent, ongoing relation of touch and law; the public, standing at the back with 'staring eyes,

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.57-64.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.106-107.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.108-109.

¹⁴⁵ Clodagh Anson, *Another Book*, (n.pl.: privately published, 1937), p.211; Cairns, *Sidelights of London*, p.152. See reference to a 'chitty' (a letter or note) sent as an affidavit for Evan Rowlands, charged, alongside Ernesto Randolfi, with indecency in Dulwich Park lavatories in October 1937. LPC minute book and register, LMA, PS/LAM/B/01/284, PS/LAM/A/01/097 respectively, both November 1937.

puckered brows, and parted lips’, confirming its reproduction through its spectatorship.¹⁴⁶ In the London police court, the hand conjured up *through* law, and accepted as an instance of a case within it, constituted the hand *of* the law, and it was this that the public came to see – and vicariously feel.

The Body of Law Under Strain

In April 1928, Sir William Holdsworth, Vinerian Professor of Law at Oxford and author of the fifteen-volume *A History of English Law* (1903-1914, rewritten 1922), published a new book. *Charles Dickens as a Legal Historian* explored what contemporary legal historians might glean from Dickens about the functioning of English law in the mid-nineteenth century. Holdsworth was especially taken by the account of ‘physical fog’ with which *Bleak House* opens, finding it ‘the finest piece of descriptive writing in the whole of Dickens’s works’ and an apt metaphor for ‘the moral fog which enveloped the procedure of the Court of Chancery’ when the novel was set, in around 1827. ‘This moral fog had been produced by a variety of causes, operating through centuries; and its density had made the court the most crying abuse of an age in which there were many abuses.’¹⁴⁷

Yet matters were far from perfect in 1928, either. The previous year a series of sentences passed by London magistrates caused alarm throughout the legal profession concerning both how legal narratives reproduced actual and potential touch in the street, and the tactile procedures enabling and evaluating that reproduction in court. In August 1927, Magistrate Frederick Mead convicted Major Graham Bell Murray for drunk and

¹⁴⁶ Gamon, *London Police Court*, pp.70-71.

¹⁴⁷ William S. Holdsworth, *Charles Dickens as a Legal Historian*, (New Haven: London, 1928), p.85; For analysis of the role of fog in *Bleak House* in relation to the Court of Chancery see Corton, *London Fog*, pp.51-63.

disorderly conduct while shortly after, Magistrate Chartres Biron convicted Frank Champain for serious disorderly conduct; both convictions were subsequently quashed by the London Sessions on appeal. What might have been seen as the proper functioning of law was, due to the high status of the defendants involved, the spark for public outcry over its perceived decrepitude. Commentators were split between whether it was more worrying that the convictions depended on uncorroborated evidence, itself conditional on a policeman's 'physical and moral vision', or that this evidence was accepted by two of London's most experienced magistrates.¹⁴⁸

For *The Law Journal* the problem was one of law: because victims of offensive public behaviour typically refused to give evidence, and soliciting, for example, required evidence of annoyance caused, magistrates necessarily relied on uncorroborated statements.¹⁴⁹ Consequently, police officers, unable to prove that a defendant caused annoyance and perhaps unable to see the whole encounter, reproduced the embodied experience of the street through stereotypical phrases; the victim 'seemed to be annoyed' was a favourite.¹⁵⁰ This line of argument encouraged Home Secretary Sir William Joynson-Hicks to appoint a Street Offences Committee on 14 October 1927 to probe the question further.¹⁵¹ But for *The Law Times* the magistrates' judgemental oversight was due less to problems in the law than in police-court procedures. It commented that in recent years 'quite a large number of convictions by Metropolitan police magistrates have been set aside on appeal'. Magistrates, it claimed, were making an uncommon number of

¹⁴⁸ 'Street Offences and Police Evidence', *The Law Journal*, LXIV, 1 October 1927, p.206; 'The Police Courts and the Public', 164/4409, *The Law Times*, 1 October 1927, p.225; 'Police Courts and the Public', *The Law Times*, 165/4444, 2 June 1928, p.449. For more on the effect Champain's acquittal had on police procedure see Houlbrook, *Queer London*, pp.28-29, pp.31-32, pp.208-209.

¹⁴⁹ 'Street Offences and Police Evidence', p.206.

¹⁵⁰ 'The Police and the Public', *The Spectator*, 8 October 1927, p.533.

¹⁵¹ *Report of the Street Offences Committee*, (London, 1928), Cmd. 3231.

mistakes because they were ‘overworked’.¹⁵² In January 1928 it reported that no fewer than five magistrates were indisposed by sickness, apparently work-related, leaving only twenty to cover the whole metropolitan area.¹⁵³ A Law Society deputation brought this to the Home Secretary’s attention on 26 March 1928, highlighting intolerable delays in London’s police courts and requesting the appointment of additional magistrates. Seven months later Joynson-Hicks appointed a Committee on Metropolitan Police Courts and Juvenile Courts.¹⁵⁴ Rather than pointing to the difficulties of obtaining precise, corroborated evidence on the street, this inquiry shifted attention to the breakdown in embodied procedures simultaneously eliciting and assessing that evidence in court.

Stress-induced illness was nothing new on the Bench. Contrary to Cairns’s injunction that the magistrate’s day should begin with a ‘deliberate effort to acquire the judicial temper’, persistent headaches and ‘agonizing attacks of facial neuralgia’ meant that twenty-five years earlier Magistrate Plowden’s ‘first waking thought’ was whether his head was in pain and, correspondingly, whether his day would be ‘bright’ or ‘depressing’.¹⁵⁵ The nature and environment of the work were much to blame. When Plowden was writing, an electric fan had recently been fitted to Marylebone Court, but still the air was ‘poison[ed]’ by ‘[l]urid gas-jets’, without a hope for their replacement by electric light.¹⁵⁶ Decades later, little had changed. According to the secretary of the Church of England Temperance Society, police courts had a ‘peculiar, nauseating acidity’, their stale air producing a feeling of ‘frowsy stuffiness’.¹⁵⁷ In these trying

¹⁵² ‘The Police Courts and the Public’, p.225.

¹⁵³ ‘Metropolitan Police Courts’, *The Law Times*, 165/4424, 14 January 1928, p.27.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Metropolitan Police Courts’, *The Law Times*, 165/4435, 31 March 1928, p.276; *Report of the Committee on Metropolitan Police Courts and Juvenile Courts*, (London, 1929), LMA, LCC/CH/D/04/003, p.3, pp.5-6.

¹⁵⁵ Cairns, *Sidelights of London*, p.101; Plowden, *Grain or Chaff?*, pp.83-84.

¹⁵⁶ Plowden, *Grain or Chaff?*, pp.313-314.

¹⁵⁷ J. Hasloch Potter, *Inasmuch: The Story of the Police Court Mission, 1876-1926*, (London, 1927), pp.24-25.

conditions magistrates had to complete long lists of cases, constantly switching from one point of law to another. Director of Public Prosecutions Sir Arthur Bodkin thought this especially hard on magistrates, most of whom relied on clerks for note-taking; during the trial itself a magistrate had to ‘memorise the evidence and keep his mind absolutely fixed all the time.’¹⁵⁸ This was not easy if his mind was not properly rested. Each magistrate was supposed to sit between 10am and 5pm for only three days a week during the period when annual leave was not taken, and to cover colleagues on the days it was. But unplanned absences, combined with the statutory requirement that the courts remain open every day of the year except Sundays, Christmas Day, and Good Friday, meant that by 1929 some were forced to sit up to six days a week.¹⁵⁹ This placed a heavy strain on magistrates already performing a taxing task. Accounting for the ongoing illness of one fifth of magistrates, Acting Chief Magistrate R.F. Graham Campbell bleakly summarized their work as ‘a strenuous life in an atmosphere which is none too good.’¹⁶⁰

Besides increasing the pressure on remaining magistrates, absences caused further congestion in the courts. Magistrates trying to keep up with their lists already struggled to grant complicated cases much time, resulting in repeated adjournments.¹⁶¹ This was even more marked where magistrates covered absent colleagues at other courts and were unable to hear cases over successive days.¹⁶² It could take weeks before enough time was found to conclude a complex case. In his evidence to the committee on police courts, Chartres Biron pointed to how illness-induced absences compounded the shortfall in magistrates but, perhaps because his misjudgement had triggered the inquiry in the first

¹⁵⁸ Metropolitan Police Courts and Juvenile Courts Committee (MPCJCC), TNA, HO 73/120, p.6, p.14.

¹⁵⁹ LMA, LCC/CH/D/04/003, p.4.

¹⁶⁰ MPCJCC, TNA, HO 73/120, p.8.

¹⁶¹ MPCJCC, TNA, HO 73/120, p.1.

¹⁶² MPCJCC, TNA, HO 73/120, p.20.

place and, as a member of the concurrent committee on street offences, he wished to shift attention from magistrates to the law, he was adamant that this was an unfortunate coincidence, not the result of overwork.¹⁶³ Yet more candid witnesses admitted the inescapable link between rising absenteeism and the mounting work of magistrates. Archibald Bodkin had ‘heard,’ he testified, ‘the most woeful jeremiads about the overpressure on certain of the London Police magistrates, terrible breakdowns now and again, and never being able to get through their lists.’¹⁶⁴ If the making of law depended on a particular mental attitude, performed through a careful bodily disposition to documents and other bodies, then stuffy courtrooms, burgeoning paperwork, chronic absences, and ailing magistrates threw this into confusion.

The increasing burden of the magistrate’s list was a product of the growing list of statutes supplying it. It was not the caseload that changed significantly, but its nature and complexity. Over the 1920s the total annual number of arrests in London actually fell from a pre-war average of 126,000 to one of 54,000 between 1928 and 1932.¹⁶⁵ However, much of this decrease was due to a decline in drunkenness cases, an effect of the rising popularity of the cinema over the pub, and these had always been swiftly cleared in the courts. Over the same period the explosion in motorcar ownership and associated crime – smash-and-grab robberies, obstruction, traffic offences – significantly increased the number of time-consuming cases heard in the police courts.¹⁶⁶ This was especially the case after the 1930 Road Traffic Act required all private motorcars to be insured, so guaranteeing lengthy wrangling over compensation claims where responsibility for an

¹⁶³ MPCJCC, TNA, HO 73/120, p.8.

¹⁶⁴ MPCJCC, TNA, HO 73/120, p.5.

¹⁶⁵ Basil Thomson, *The Story of Scotland Yard*, (London, 1935), pp.298-299; Chartres Biron, *Without Prejudice: Impressions of Life and Law*, (London, n.d. [1936]), p.254.

¹⁶⁶ Michael John Law, *The Experience of Suburban Modernity: How Private Transport Changed Interwar London*, (Manchester, 2014), p.23.

accident was not self-evident.¹⁶⁷ The establishment, under the 1908 Children Act, of an autonomous system of juvenile courts also added to the pressure on magistrates. Magistrates had been empowered to try children as juveniles since 1879 and so the formalization of independent juvenile courts did not immediately change the nature of their caseload. But the growing number of statutes concerning offences by and against children, and the increasing procedural distinction between juvenile and police courts, affirmed by the 1920 Juvenile Courts (Metropolis) Act, increasingly complicated that caseload and demanded increased specialization within an already struggling Bench.¹⁶⁸ A 1929 inquiry into the police and juvenile courts noted the growing strain this dual system placed on magistrates but could find no way of relieving the pressure.¹⁶⁹

Fog permeated this crisis in the police courts in more than the figurative manner of *Bleak House*. Although severe fog outbreaks were rare by the 1920s, the LCC continued to press local sanitary authorities to prosecute industries for high levels of smoke pollution.¹⁷⁰ Following a Departmental Committee on Smoke and Noxious Vapours in 1921, new smoke abatement legislation considerably widened the terms under which offenders could be prosecuted. The 1926 Public Health (Smoke Abatement) Act for the first time defined a smoke nuisance in terms of its measurable *quantity* and not just, as with previous legislation, its visual appearance.¹⁷¹ At the same time as LCC researchers were developing ways of measuring fog in terms of its matter rather than its

¹⁶⁷ MPCJCC, TNA, HO 73/120, p.12, pp.30-31.

¹⁶⁸ *Report of the Departmental Committee on the Treatment of Young Offenders*, (London, 1927), Cmd. 2831, p.11, p.27, p.36; Louise A. Jackson, *Women Police: Gender, Welfare and Surveillance in the Twentieth Century*, (Manchester: New York, 2006), pp.140-145; Houlbrook, *Queer London*, pp.232-236.

¹⁶⁹ LMA, LCC/CH/D/04/003, pp.10-11.

¹⁷⁰ Extracts from minutes of proceedings of the London County Council on 3 July 1923, LMA, LCC/PC/GEN/01/016, pp.5-6.

¹⁷¹ These provisions were 'consolidated' through the Public Health (London) Act (1936). Steer, *The Law of Smoke Nuisances*, (2nd edn, London, 1948), WL, SA/EPU/H/4/1, p.12, p.14, pp.30-32.

appearance, police court law also increasingly rendered smoke a tangible object itself. Despite the wider definition of smoke nuisances, the 1926 Act did not significantly increase the number of prosecutions brought before the police courts.¹⁷² But it did represent the broader process by which the widening scope and complexity of interwar legislation placed increasing demands on a Bench of magistrates, the maximum number of which had been fixed at twenty-seven nearly ninety years earlier.

By 1937, the increasing complexity of police court business pushed London's magistrates to breaking point. The Bench was, writer Robert Sinclair reported, populated by 'aged and tired-looking men' dispensing justice 'in an atmosphere that would kill a miner's canary.' Several of these 'died in harness – worn out, according to Mr Cairns, a surviving London magistrate, who protested that the servants of the Home Office were driven by poverty and an inadequate pension to remain on the bench when past their powers.'¹⁷³ Whether out of poverty or defiance to his detractors, Frederick Mead, for example, was eighty-six by the time he finally retired in 1933; he had been in post for so long that his appointment in 1889 predated the year (1895) after which new magistrates were required to retire at age seventy.¹⁷⁴ Less than a decade after the previous one, again the Home Secretary appointed a Departmental Committee to investigate.

This Committee's findings made the tactile basis of police court law, and the harm done when it broke down, even clearer than the last. It reported that congestion in the courts sometimes meant the delay between an application for summons and a hearing could reach three months, compelling witnesses to give evidence that was either a

¹⁷² Robert Sinclair, *Metropolitan Man: The Future of the English*, (London, 1937), p.181.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp.146-147; 'London Magistrate Ill', *Daily Mirror*, 25 April 1933, p.3.

¹⁷⁴ 'MEAD, Frederick', *Who Was Who*, online edn, Oxford University Press, 2014 (<http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U229161>, 21 Sept 2015); Letter from the Home Secretary to J. H. Hills, 30 January 1923, Appointment and age of retirement of magistrates, 1896-1926, TNA, HO 144/5421.

‘recollection of a note made at or near the time [...] or a statement thought over so often that it has become hard in outline.’ This meant that events were often related in a piecemeal or stylized manner, and incidental details ‘lost beyond recovery.’¹⁷⁵ The Committee also reported that magistrates burdened with time-consuming cases might have to rush to complete their lists. As a result, litigants ‘may fail to keep up with what is being said or done’. Magistrates, equally, might be unable to discern the ‘distinguishing features’ of one case from those of another.¹⁷⁶ No longer could judgement depend on the magistrate’s embodied hesitation. The fact that clerks had to write in longhand compounded this further. While cases were becoming increasingly rushed, the importance of recording them, notably where insurance companies were involved, increased more than ever. The clerk’s handwriting, already ‘the terror of judges’ in the case of Mr Nairn of Tower Bridge, was pushed to the limit, making it even harder for magistrates buried in piles of paper to extract a case.¹⁷⁷ These problems did not make police courts, in Holdsworth’s words, ‘the most crying abuse’ of the age. But they did show that, by the late 1930s, the breakdown in tactile practices sustaining police court law threatened the very means by which law produced and assessed its own world of ‘fact’.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ *Report of the Departmental Committee on Courts of Summary Jurisdiction in the Metropolitan Area*, (London, 1937), LMA, PS/LAM/H/013, p.11.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.12.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.35; Cecil Chapman, *The Poor Man’s Court of Justice: Twenty-Five Years as a Metropolitan Magistrate*, (London, 1925), pp.180-181.

¹⁷⁸ For a brilliant account of paperwork’s contradictions during the French Revolution see Ben Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork*, (New York, 2012), c.2.

The ‘Fog’ of Jurisprudence

Seeking reassurance, anxious magistrates would have found little in the textbooks they first read as trainee lawyers. As defined by John Austin in 1832, and how it continued to be defined in the 1930s, the purpose of jurisprudence was to elucidate the tenets of an autonomous domain of ‘Law’, without regard to the moral beliefs and social conditions of a particular era.¹⁷⁹ Jurisprudence did not examine Law as the sum of its parts – laws – but the ‘rules of law or legal principles’ subtending them, reiterated John Salmond in 1893.¹⁸⁰ With little variation, jurisprudence reified Law as a domain distinct from the world in which it was practised, perpetuating this distinction through the fiction that change in the law, or divergent ‘interpretations’ of it, merely represented the ‘discovery’ of principles always already extant within it.¹⁸¹ Rather than revealing the ‘moral fog’ of the police courts, the breakdown of their procedures revealed the inverse: the fog of positivist jurisprudence that could not account for the immanent existence of law and touch in one another.

In police court practice the reality was quite different. Here, far from being the implementation of principles ‘behind’ itself, law emerged through each particular embodied experience of the street and configuration of bodies and documents in court. Rather than, as Latour has suggested, this configuration maintaining the fiction of law’s self-founding existence, its conditionality also upon the sensory possibilities of the street *beyond* the court – what glimpses and glances were possible in the thicket of streets around Waterloo – dissolved it.¹⁸² While burying the streets beneath a smoky pall,

¹⁷⁹ Postema, *Legal Philosophy*, pp.31-32.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.18-19.

¹⁸¹ On this see Dworkin, *Law’s Empire*, p.6.

¹⁸² Latour, *Making of Law*, p.191.

London's fogs revealed those sensory possibilities, associating them not only with the ability to illicitly touch but also to formulate credible narratives of illicit touch in court. Yet at the same time, those sensory possibilities were not merely an 'objective' reality pre-existing their legal formulation but were conceptually *made by* that formulation and, in turn, articulated it on the street.¹⁸³ Not only did police and defendants play language-games in court, so contesting the credibility of a charge through their narration of the street, they *acted out* those games on the street, seeking or avoiding those actions which might fit what sensory possibilities were required for a case to stick. The Royal Commission on Police Powers and Procedures reported in 1929 that police witnesses occasionally tried to secure convictions 'in charges of a vague character, such as "loitering with intent to commit a felony,"' by presenting evidence in 'stereotyped phrases' which had 'an air of sameness and unreality'.¹⁸⁴ By turn, defendants like Harry Conniham, charged with that very offence nine months later, meticulously narrated the embodied experience of the street to preclude such stereotyping.

To adapt Yan Thomas's phrasing, touch was the integument of law – that which delimited and contained it, and within which it lived – and law that of touch.¹⁸⁵ In the police court, with its creative interpretation of the rules of evidence and its magistrate strung between counsel and judgement, each existed *insofar* as they were part of the other. This made police-court law particularly susceptible to changes in the nature of magistrates' caseloads: as the business of police courts increased in complexity, a growing sick list, delays, and the rush of trials limited the possibility of the law that could be made and the touch that law could make in narratives reproducing the street. But rather

¹⁸³ Pottage, 'Law After Anthropology', pp.154-155.

¹⁸⁴ *Report of the Royal Commission on Police Powers and Procedure*, (London, 1929), Cmd. 3297, p.103.

¹⁸⁵ Yan Thomas on the 'property of law', cited in Pottage, 'Law After Anthropology', p.154.

than representing, as jurisprudence might have put it, a breakdown in the application ‘of’ Law, these developments instead represented the particular, tactile ‘*dispositif*’ through which law emerged; a *dispositif* illuminated by fog, and under strain by the time that physical fog was, almost, a thing of the past.¹⁸⁶

In jurisprudence, there was, though, a glimmer of light. Shortly after his appointment as Chair of Jurisprudence at Oxford on 1 April 1952, H.L.A. Hart gave a paper that presaged a fundamental rethinking of jurisprudence.¹⁸⁷ Hart argued that the established means of defining concepts of and within law had led to a gulf between jurisprudence and the ‘study of law at work’.¹⁸⁸ Ever since Austin, jurisprudence had segregated itself and its object from the everyday practise of law by assuming the *a priori* existence of the concepts it analysed. The result was that jurisprudential theories ‘seem to the lawyer to stand apart with their heads at least in the clouds’ – or fog. Rather than taking law and its concepts as explainable givens, Hart proposed instead that their existence was something to be explained and depended entirely on context. The word ‘law’ did not ‘stand for’ any finally determinable concept behind it but acquired meaning solely in the context of its use.¹⁸⁹ This meant that the object of jurisprudence – the concept of law, and the concepts and principles constituting it – could not be treated abstractly but only analysed *in action*. The meaningful existence of Law depended, in some manner, on law as practised.

¹⁸⁶ My thinking here has been much shaped by the discussion of *dispositifs* in Pottage, ‘The Materiality of What?’, pp.180-182; see also Giorgio Agamben, ‘What is an Apparatus?’, in Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, (Stanford, 2009), pp.2-12.

¹⁸⁷ Nicola Lacey, *A Life of H.L.A. Hart: The Nightmare and the Noble Dream*, (Oxford, 2004), p.156.

¹⁸⁸ H.L.A. Hart, ‘Definition and Theory in Jurisprudence’, in H.L.A. Hart, *Essays in Jurisprudence and Philosophy*, (Oxford, 1983), p.21.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.25, pp.31-33.

Hart elaborated this in lectures that later became *The Concept of Law* (1961). In part he maintained a split between law as an autonomous object and law in practice. There was a distinction, he argued, between ‘primary’ rules that governed everyday action and ‘secondary’ rules that governed the action of people in institutions such as courts and legislatures that instituted, maintained, and enforced those primary rules. Yet Hart also argued that secondary rules, which conditioned the functioning of primary rules, were themselves valid only insofar as they were maintained by a ‘rule of recognition’. The rule of recognition established the ‘criteria’ by which all other rules within the system of law were deemed valid. Importantly, as the ground for the existence of law, the rule of recognition was not part *of* law but established only through its continued acceptance – its recognition – by the courts ‘applying’ the law. It, and the whole autonomous system which depended on it, was therefore conditional on a historically specific ‘social fact’.¹⁹⁰ *The Concept of Law* made Law’s distinction from the world conditional upon its dissolution.

This did not entirely disperse the ‘fog’ of jurisprudence. Hart still claimed for law an entirely discursive existence. But by foregrounding the court’s historically particular functioning as the condition for Law he made possible law’s conceptualization as *made through* the objects and tactile practices which might otherwise be taken to express or be subject to it. While fog returned to London in December 1952, in jurisprudence a century of fog began to lift.

¹⁹⁰ Postema, *Legal Philosophy*, pp.269-271.

Conclusion: The Uses of Touch

How do we make sense of the history of touch in Britain? The historical uses of touch provide powerful new ways of thinking about wider economic, political, intellectual, and cultural histories of modern Britain, and of selfhood and the body beyond it. When Londoners fumbled their way home in a sooty fog, or bunched up in tube station lifts, their touch was not a natural given. What they did, what they felt, and how they thought about it and about their bodies changed significantly over the early twentieth century. Whether in scientists' self-experiments or waitresses' efforts to avoid the advances of customers, these changes in the tactile uses and experiences of the body in turn shaped much broader histories, from shifting notions of scientific objectivity to debates over labourers' rights. Touch had a history, and caused it.

One key element of this history was a change in the understanding of how touch *worked*. Despite their differences, neurologists, psychologists, and blind writers making sense of touch in the early twentieth century increasingly understood touch as a process that was as mediated as much as it was mediating. By the 1920s, touch was no longer treated as only an interaction happening outside the body, transmitted unchanged, like a telegraph message, from skin to brain. Instead, it was increasingly imagined as also a series of transformations occurring in, and conditioned by, the mediating influence of the body itself. In that sense it was much like, in practice, a telegraph message, which depended still on the unruly bodies of the network's operators. In neurology, this new understanding meant examining previously unimagined levels within and patterns across the nervous system. In the psychology of blindness, it meant switching from a belief that

tactile compensation was automatic to one in which it depended on a reciprocal and learned relation between mind and body. But in both contexts touch was reconceived as not simply mediating relations across space but as mediated *by* the newly inferred space of the body itself, whether that of the nervous system or the space ‘between’ body and mind. Touch, in this formulation, was not merely an instrument of sensation but subject *to* its own action in the body.

If this was true in understandings of how touch worked, then it was also true in the ways touch was used. Whether in foggy streets, Piccadilly teashops, or schools for blind children, the uses of touch shaped both what it was *possible* to sense and peoples’ experience of themselves *as* sensing bodies. We might think about the eurhythmics exercises introduced into many schools for blind children in the 1920s; exercises intended to heighten schoolchildren’s sense of the position of their limbs and of themselves as bodies in space. Or we might consider the way that London’s winter fogs raised the disoriented commuter’s awareness of both their bodies and of the streets they normally passed unthinkingly through. Londoners in the 1900s themselves drew a connection between these embodied experiences by employing the services of blind guides to lead them through thick fogs. But the potential for touch to shape both what could be felt and the experience of the body as a thing was equally true in neurology. Here, Henry Head’s new method of experimenting on regenerating nerves fundamentally conditioned how he interpreted his feelings and explained them in new physiological terms. For all of these cases, the things that people sensed, and their sense of themselves as things, were shaped each time by particular uses of touch.

Neither unchanging nor universal, these sensations and self-perceptions in turn shaped much broader intellectual, economic, social, and political histories. Indeed, it was precisely because the objectivity of law and science depended on particular tactile

practices in laboratories and courtrooms that scientists and jurors tried to abstract their findings from the electrometers and dusty court registers on which their objectivity was based. While this was true long before the twentieth century, it took a new form in the 1920s as neurologists turned away from self-experiments and towards a newly mediated method of experimentation. If Head saw his experience of touch as the guarantee of objectivity, subsequent neurologists adopted a new experimental (and epistemological) arrangement in which touch was abstracted from the one experiencing it and broken down into its constituent elements. By the 1920s, objectivity in neurology meant adding a new degree of separation between scientist and object, even if, as with the relationship between magistrates and legal cases, the two remained inescapably bound by touch.

Beyond science and law, the contingent sensation by and of the body—its historically specific subjectivity and objectivity—also shaped other histories central to modern Britain. Head's self-experiment was never just a personal archaeology of sensation. It was also shaped by Ruth Mayhew's interpretation of her own sensations and the way this interpretation inflected a wider language of love and sensory reflexivity derived from aesthetic literature. We could make a similar point about touch in teashops, where waitresses were increasingly expected to 'touch' customers without touching or being touched in return. Here, too, how waitresses and customers responded to this expectation shaped what they could feel and their sense of themselves as bodies, in turn shaping wider debates about labour rights in the service economy. The point is made explicit in discussions on the psychology of blindness. When Alfred Hirst claimed his sense of touch more than compensated for blindness, he made a connection between what he could sense, his sense of himself as a body, and assumptions about the sensory basis of citizenship, so intervening in a far broader political debate. The history of touch was not only about shifting conditions of possibility for feeling nor how people thought

differently of themselves as bodies. It was always also about how these changes drove much wider histories: of objectivity, love, labour relations, and citizenship.

By shaping these histories, the history of touch also shaped the nature of modernity in Britain. Fundamental to *what* the body sensed and to the sense *of* the body, changing uses of touch also redrew the subjective boundaries which bodies mediated: boundaries of self and other, person and thing. Rather than remaining fixed, these boundaries were dependent on the constitution of the body as both a sensing subject and sensible object: they were dependent on touch. During the cram of the rush hour commute, or the solitariness of near-deserted platforms, tube passengers contingently remade the personal boundaries dividing themselves from others. The teashop waitresses featuring on the film *Underground* brought this into their work above ground, where each use—or deferral—of touch also reshaped their emotional relationship with themselves and with others. It was not just, as we have already begun to learn, that selfhood was only ever a particular social relationship, but that this relationship depended on an immanent relationship the self had with *itself* through use of the body. Although this self-relationship was not exclusive to modern Britain, it assumed added significance in Britain after the Great War when changes across multiple domains—from labour unrest to tube overcrowding—combined to make it increasingly indeterminate.

Modern selfhood in Britain, this thesis has argued, was above all characterised by this un-decidability in the relationship the self had with itself through touch. Much more than instrumental, then, the historical uses of touch *created* the subjects deploying it, in turn conditioning the social relationships into which those subjects could enter. Examining the history of touch compels us to retrace this sensory constitution of selfhood,

both within and beyond modern Britain. But it also compels us to re-examine our own ‘touch’ of the subjects we study every time we untie the cord of a crumbling archive file.¹

¹ Emily Robinson, ‘Touching the Void: Affective History and the Impossible’, *Rethinking History*, 14/4, (December 2010), pp.503-520; Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, trans. T. Scott-Railton, (New Haven, 2013), pp.7-12, p.66.

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Lubienska

London Transport Museum Archives and Depot, London

Frank Pick Collection:

PA: Papers dealing with London transport

PB: Papers dealing with art, architecture, and design

PC: Papers dealing with miscellaneous subjects

PE: Personal belongings: books, pamphlets, and catalogues

Tube Vehicles:

1981/543: Section of GNP&BR 1906 'Gate stock' motor car

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1997/7453: Metropolitan Railway 1904 electric stock trailer carriage

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NCW 1/2/1: The Commandery

NCW 1/2/1: Worcester College for the Blind

NCW 1/3/1: Worcester College for the Blind prospectuses

NCW 2/1: Chorleywood College prospectuses

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RS/7/3/D: Miscellaneous papers from Worcester College

RS/7/3/E Box 1: Sunshine Homes

RS/7/4/B Box 9: College of Teachers of the Blind

RS/7/4/D Box 6: Intelligence testing of blind children

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