

Mirt Komel

## A TOUCHY SUBJECT: THE TACTILE METAPHOR OF TOUCH

### ABSTRACT

*The article proposes an interpretation of metaphors and metaphoric discourse through the perspective of touch. The article first deals with metaphors of touch in the history of western philosophy (especially traditional metaphysics from Plato to Hegel) in order to produce an operative category of touch that will allow, in the second step, to grasp the tactile quality of the metaphors. If metaphors are usually (rhetorics, politics, literature) regarded as a specific form of language able to not only touch the subject matter in the most suitable way but also touch on the target subject (listener/reader), then it is precisely because there is a certain haptic quality involved in language itself, discernible especially in the discourse of those who know how to best exploit metaphors in their endeavours.*

KEY WORDS: Touch, Tactility, Metaphor, Linguistics, Philosophy

### Dotični subjekt: taktilna metafora dotika

#### IZVLEČEK

Članek podaja interpretacijo metafor in metaforičnega diskurza skozi perspektivo dotika. V prvem koraku se ukvarja z metaforo dotika v zgodovini zahodne filozofije (še zlasti metafizike od Platona do Hegla), da bi lahko proizvedel operativno kategorijo dotika, s katero bi, v drugem koraku, lahko zapopadel taktilno kvaliteto metafor. Če se na metafore običajno (v retoriki, politiki, literaturi) gleda kot na specifično formo jezika, ki se ne samo lahko najbolj primerno dotakne dane topike, marveč se dotakne tudi dotičnega subjekta (poslušalca ali bralca), potemtakem je temu tako natanko zato, ker obstaja določena haptična kvaliteta, ki jo poseduje sam jezik, razberljiva natanko v diskurzu tistih, ki znajo najboljše eksloatirati metafore v svojem početju.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: dotik, taktilnost, metafora, lingvistika, psihoanaliza

## 1 Introduction

As always in western philosophy, it all begins with Plato, who not only made out of the gaze and voice the privileged metaphors of thinking, but also coined the metaphor of touch in order to denote the metaphysical contact with the realm of ideas.

To be sure, touch was not completely absent in western philosophy, but as with Plato and Aristotle after him, it was subordinated to the privileged senses of hearing and the related metaphor of voice ("the voice of reason" etc.), and especially to vision and the gaze ("theory" as etymologically connected to the ancient Greek verb for "seeing"), as Descartes *Dioptrics*, Berkeley's *Towards a New Theory of Vision*, Diderot's *Letter on the Blind for the use of those who see*, and other writings demonstrate (cf. Plato 1997; Aristotle 1984; Descartes 1960; Berkeley 2014; Diderot 1916). However, there is a tactile undercurrent in the philosophical mainstream that is definitely worth following, a current that flows from Plato and Aristotle and runs its course in present day psychoanalysis and phenomenology.

The main thesis of this article is that by following this tactile stream of philosophy we can understand how metaphors can most adequately touch upon not only the subject matter, but also the subject itself, precisely because of a certain haptic quality of language itself.

## 2 (Meta)Physics of Touch

Since we are discussing touch and metaphors let us begin with a certain pair of hands, those depicted in the famous fresco *La Scuola di Atene*, where Rafaello portrayed, among Heraclitus, Parmenides, Socrates and others, Plato and Aristotle at its center, the former with his hand pointing up, towards the sky, the latter down to earth. These pair of hands can serve as metaphoric representations for the two distinctive ways in which Plato and Aristotle articulated the question of touch: one pointing towards, "touching", so to speak, the upper realm of ideas, while the other, in contrast and speaking figuratively, "touching ground".

Plato in the *Phaedo* states, speaking in the context of the Socratic discussion of the relationship between soul and body, that "if one wants to touch the truth of the ideas one must forfeit the sensory bodily experiences", especially those related to the gaze and voice (Plato 1997: 65a-c). Touch as a sensory experience is, almost as an inaugural gesture of philosophy itself, replaced by a metaphysical touch on the level of the soul. As I tried to demonstrate with my book on *Socratic touches* (cf. Komel 2015): touch is both repressed and sublimated at the same time – the physical touch is repressed as a false experience, but symptomatically reappears in the sublimated form of a real touch through which the soul can touch the realm of ideas.

Aristotle follows Plato almost step by step in his *Metaphysics* by stating that thinking relates to itself by touching the object of thought, or more precisely, it is by "embracing the elementary objects of thought" that thought embraces itself, touches upon itself (Aristotle 1984: 1072b14). By contrast, in *De Anima* understood touch mainly as a bodily sense, although privileged in the fact that all the other senses could be understood as forms of

tactility, thus developing the theory of a *common sense* precisely based on touch (Aristotle 1984: 425a30). The difference with Plato is minimal but telling: while Plato employs touch as something repressed on the physical level and sublimated on the level of ideas thus connecting both aspects, Aristotle retains both in two different registers: a metaphysical touch on the level of thinking, and a physical touch on the level of the body.<sup>1</sup>

These inaugural gestures made by Plato and Aristotle will dictate most classical metaphysical investigation in the centuries to come, from Latin Christian Scholastics to German Transcendental Idealism, up until modernity where only the Aristotelian variant remains – the one that understands touch as the common sense of all bodily senses – at least until postmodernism, more precisely, contemporary phenomenology and psychoanalysis.

Speaking from a standpoint with this broader horizon in mind: if on one side Descartes introduced the concept of subject as an autonomous instance of thinking into philosophy,<sup>2</sup> and if on the other side it was Spinoza who defined this very subject as a *modus* of finite existence of the infinite substance,<sup>3</sup> then it was Hegel who redefined both by stating that truth must be grasped “not only as substance but also as subject.” (Hegel 2001: 7) And the same goes for the truth about touch, which is that is, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, discarded at the very beginning as something inherent to mere consciousness as sense certainty and perception (Hegel 2001: 33-45). However, and almost as a Platonic echo, this repression of the physical touch has its sublimated metaphysical counterpart, since we can find it incorporated into one of Hegel’s pivotal concepts, the very concept of *Begriff*, meaning “conception” or “naming”, but at the same time also “perception”, or even more specifically “handling” or “grasping”.

Let us now make a dialectical *intermezzo* in order to explore further certain implications of Hegel’s specific way of handling touch by linking it precisely to the other half of our conceptual endeavor, namely, the question of metaphor.

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1. It is important to note the difference between various Greek expressions used by both authors: Plato in the *Phaedo* uses *hápto* (“touch”, “fasten”, “grasping”) while in the *Kriton* it is *epaphé* (literarily *epi-hápto*, “touching around”, translated in latin as *contagio*, also derived from “touch” as *contacto*). Aristotle in the *De Anima* uses the same *hápto*, from which the concept of “haptics”, “hapticism” is derived, while in the *Metaphysics* he employs the curious *tigein* (“embrace”).
  2. Descartes’ *Meditations* questioned the sensory bodily experience as a source of falsehood derived from a volatile *res extensa* (“physical-things”) which is defined in sharp contrast to *res cogitans* (“thought-things”) as the only source of certain truth (Descartes 1993: 17-23).
  3. Spinoza in his *Ethics* asserted that “the body is not limited by thought nor thought by the body”, both being attributes of an infinite substance that is God and Nature at the same time (Spinoza 1996: 1), thus rewriting the realm of thinking into the physical one: while still retaining the basic distinction and the related privilege of one realm over the other, and therefore between the metaphysical (“thought”) and physical (“body”), what Spinoza introduces anew is an insistence on thinking the very paradoxical infinite substance.

### 3 A Begriff of Touch

A usual approach towards the metaphysical "touch of ideas" is to consider it a mere metaphor, as if by employing "touch" in this or that figurative sense one wants to denote something else than touching, and as if the metaphor in itself does not or is even incapable of containing any metaphysical content, and, even more importantly in our case, any physical content as well.

However, let us consider Hegel's own reflection on the origin and nature of metaphors in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (cf. Hegel 1988: 404): starting from a very general consideration about language he says that "every language already contains a mass of metaphors. They arise from the fact that a word which originally signifies only something sensuous is carried over into the spiritual sphere." The emphasis I would like to stress out is on the "sensuous" that is "carried over" and thus not simply discarded, but rather retained and preserved in the "spiritual sphere", which is, as it is known, or should be known, Hegel's usual dialectical procedure of *Aufhebung*.<sup>4</sup>

The examples given in order to demonstrate that metaphors contain a certain sensorial element that is preserved in their spiritual meaning are *fassen* and *begreifen* and all the other words that "relate to knowing, have in respect of their literal meaning a purely sensuous content, which then is lost and exchanged for a spiritual meaning, the original sense being sensuous, the second spiritual." Then a certain genealogy of metaphor language is given as if the metaphorical element in the use of such words slowly disappeared and the word changed "from a metaphorical to a literal expression", thus forming a three-step development: first we have plain, simple words denoting mere sensuous content; then metaphors arose from this sensuous content pointing towards something else than their original meaning; and in the last instance we have a literal expression that articulates a pure spiritual content without any sensorial meaning.<sup>5</sup>

The interesting part is the reason why "the word changes from a metaphorical to a literal expression": because "owing to readiness to grasp in the image only the meaning, image and meaning are no longer distinguished and the image directly affords only the abstract meaning itself instead of a concrete picture." It is no coincidence that the verb used in the "readiness to grasp in the image only the meaning" is the same as the example that follows, namely, *begreifen*: "If, for example, we are to take *begreifen* in a spiritual sense, then it does not occur to us at all to think of a perceptible grasping by the hand" (Hegel 1988: 404-405), as if by grasping the meaning inside the image it is already employing

4. Nancy points out in his *Speculative Remark: One of Hegel's Bons Mots* that there is no distinctively Hegelian dialectics without the concept of *Aufhebung*, which means "abolition" and "preservation" at the same time, thus enabling the dialectical progression from content to content; however, despite the fact that in the last instance anything can be *aufgehoben* there is at least one concept that cannot be, and that is the concept of *Aufhebung* itself (cf. Nancy 2001).
5. Hegel's procedure here is the same as at the very beginning of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (A. Consciousness. I. Certainty at the level of sense-experience - the "this" and "meaning") where the sensorial is retroactively turned into the conceptual: the original sensorial word can be the basis for the metaphor and the metaphor in turn for the conceptual since the very origin is already contaminated with the conceptual (cf. Hegel 2001: 33-38)

an implicitly metaphorical use of the concept of *Begriff*. Language as such, not only the metaphysical one, therefore has an inherently dialectical tendency towards pure meaning, while in order to purify itself from any physical residuum it needs metaphors as an intermediate step from sensorial towards spiritual, and this is true not only for Hegel's own dialectical procedure but for metaphysical philosophy, and in the last instance, language in general.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, speaking in strict Hegelian terms, one could say that touch is *aufgehoben*, dismissed on a physical level as a sense among senses, and at the same time preserved as metaphor inside the very core of *the* – and not “a” or “one of” – metaphysical concept *par excellence*, *Begriff*, paradoxically designing not only touch (“handling”, “grasping”), but the concept itself (“conception”, “naming”). Hegel's dialectics therefore implicitly presupposes a specific and paradoxical way of handling touch: as a sensory experience it must not only be discarded as a source of falsehood, but also preserved as the truth inherent to the very concept of conception, thus implying a certain tactile quality of language itself, as it can be speculatively grasped through the two contradictory meanings of *Begriff*.

We propose to adopt a similar dialectical conception of touch in order to grasp the very tactility of language itself, and, more specifically, metaphors, a conception that is, however, unbound by traditional boundaries between physics and metaphysics, a dialectical touch therefore that constantly overlaps from the sensorial realm onto the conceptual one.

#### 4 Haptocentric Humanities

As already sketched above, in contrast to the Platonic tradition of thinking touch as a metaphysical entity, empiricist thinkers such as Malebranche followed the Aristotelian paradigm that relegates touch in the sphere of bodily experiences, thus providing a continuity with latter on phenomenology.

Malebranche was the Christian theologian that significantly influenced Bishop Berkeley, which in turn influenced Hume, for whom Kant, as the most important forerunner of Hegel, stated that he awakened him from the “dogmatic slumber” (cf. Luce 2002). Writing about touch as something that goes not from the subject towards the infinite truth of substance, but vice versa, for Malebranche it is God as the absolute source of truth who installs the very tactile ability into the subject as a *conditio sin qua non* touch is even possible (Malebranche 1997: 633-8). The theological “touch of god”, as represented, for instance, in Michelangelo's famous fresco *La Creazione dell'Uomo* painted on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel, therefore functions as a precondition of tactility itself. There is, with Malebranche, an inaugural theological conception of tactility that metaphysically precedes any possible physical touch and thus relocates touch as such outside any

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6. Derrida in his *White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy* will follow this line of argumentation in order to demonstrate that the metaphorical and metaphysical meanings are inseparable, that the metaphor clings to metaphysical conception as a linguistic shadow that philosophy cannot simply clean itself of (cf. Derrida 1974).

possible phenomenological experience. Touch, as we have seen with Plato and Aristotle, was cut into half as metaphysical and physical, but it was, at least theoretically, possible to experience both: be it mediated by the body (sensing) or by the mind (thinking). Here with Malebranche the physical experience is metaphysically pre-conditioned through a theological instance that can be experienced in itself, but its touch would nonetheless still remain one-sided; in short one can be touched by god but, nonetheless, one can never be able to touch the touching god.

Neither the purpose nor the proceeding of this research is theological, but this episode in the history of philosophy about touch is worth mentioning because it was Maurice Merleau-Ponty who re-read Malebranche's conception of touch in order to elaborate a phenomenological conception of sense of sensibility. As Judith Butler clearly demonstrated by linking Merleau-Ponty's and Malebranche's conception of touch, she developed the touch of god as coextensive to the human touch, both understood from a phenomenological perspective (Butler 2005: 181-205). The decisively secular inaugural step is made in the *Phenomenology of Perception* since the Malebrancheian "touch of god" is rendered by Merleau-Ponty simply as "world-touch", as tactility inherent to a secular world:<sup>7</sup> "I am in no way distinguishable from an 'other' consciousness, since we are immediately in touch with the world and since the world is, by definition, unique, being the system in which all truths cohere." (Merleau-Ponty 2002: xiii) Thus, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology understands the subject as a sensible object among other sensible objects of a sensorial world. Afterwards, in *Visible and the Invisible*, a move was made toward the concept of "flesh", designing "what has no name in any philosophy" (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 139, 147), where touch is conceived as a primordial sense, but still subordinate to sight, since it is the invisible element of a primarily visible world. Merleau-Ponty's contribution is crucial for the further development of touch related theories, since he was the first to focus on touch as something that precedes any subject-object distinctions.

In general, and as with other philosophers, the phenomenologist's interest in tactility was relatively marginal compared to the attention given to the other senses, at least up until Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida who started to pose old questions completely anew, first and foremost by focusing solely and exclusively on touch. It is in this sense and in this context that Derrida baptized Nancy as "the first philosopher of touch" while re-reading the whole of his philosophical opus – especially and insistently focusing on *Corpus* (cf. Nancy 1992) – in a now unavoidable book for everyone researching touch: *On touching: Jean-Luc Nancy* (cf. Derrida 2005). Denouncing the whole western tradition of philosophy as "haptocentric" – much in tune with his older denunciation of phonocentrism, i.e. the explicit privilege of viva voce over writing (cf. Derrida 2011) – Derrida deconstructs the privilege given to a humanistic conception of touch, always privileging the human hand as the medium and metaphor of tactility, thus refuting the phenomenological humanism

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7. An interesting further move was to blur the traditional relation between an active subject of touch and its passive object in order to demonstrate that touch always goes both ways and that, while touching, we are always both, the subject and object, at the same time, and consequently that no being can be touched if not touching itself." (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 103-5).

advocated especially by those French thinkers who wanted and still want to distance themselves from the German philosophical tradition in general and Hegel and Heidegger in particular.

As Nancy recurrently insists in his *Corpus*, and especially and explicitly later on in *Noli me tangere*, touch is the point where touching becomes impossible, precisely the “point where touch does not touch, must not touch, if it wants to articulate its touch (its art, its tactility, its fascination): the zero point that divides that upon which touch touches, the line, that divides the sense-touch from the touching-thing and therefore touch from itself [*la ligne qui écarte le toucher du touché et donc la touche d'elle m me*].» (Nancy 2003: 25) Developing Merleau-Ponty's point that touch overcomes the division between subject-object further, Nancy goes even further, therefore, by defining touch not only as the divisional line between the sense of touch and the object of touching, but also as a demarcation line that divides touch itself. In short, touch cannot be touched if it wants to touch upon us – understood in a metaphorical way.

To be sure, the novelty of Derrida/Nancy phenomenological grasp of the question of touch was not insomuch their anti-humanistic, or rather, post-humanistic perspective, but first and foremost a linguistic approach towards touch, the main assumption being that the way we speak about touch in any given language implies the way how we actually handle touch. Linguistics of touch are implicitly and explicitly present in both Nancy and Derrida, as I tried to demonstrate with my own early and somehow naive book on touch, *An Attempt of a Touch* where a rather rudimental link between phenomenology and psychoanalysis conceived through touch was developed (cf. Komel 2008). At present I would like to argue, although this goes well beyond the scope of this article, that contemporary perspectives on touch lack precisely the specifically linguistic aspect of touch, as present in Nancy's and Derrida's philosophical reshaping of phenomenology itself, and as fully developed by Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Without detailed linguistic considerations regarding touch one cannot possibly grasp the tactile quality of language, that is, in the present context, the condition of possibility under which metaphors can touch not only an given subject-matter, but also, and most significantly, the listening or reading subject itself.

## 5 Tactile Language of Touch

If the novelty of linguistic phenomenology was to conceive touch as something determined by language, then the missing other half, provided by Lacanian psychoanalysis, is to understand the tactility of language itself, and that is why it is of utmost importance to look back once again at Hegel's dialectic of touch and Plato's idea of language.

According to Hegel, certain words are inherently philosophical in the sense that they possess a speculative quality on their own, since one and the same word can point at two very different and contradictory meanings (Hegel 2001: 35-8). Hegel's point is discernible in the privileged case of *Begriff*, denoting a very physical movement of grasping on one side, and a movement of conception, naming and meaning on the other. To be sure, the problem of the meaning of words is far from new, but it has, at least as far as we know,

never been addressed from the perspective of touch, as it is present in our understanding of the two-fold meaning of the word *Begriff*: on one hand there is the sensory touch of the physical body, while on the other the metaphysical touch by which we can grasp the meaning of things.

As with most if not all of the philosophical problems it is worth our while to get back to the basics, since Plato's *Cratylus* is concerned with a similar problem concerning names that can be, at least from our perspective, articulated through touch. Socrates engages with Cratylus and Hermogenes where the first argues in favour of "a natural link between words and things" while the latter maintains that words are based on "an arbitrary convention of communal agreement" (Plato 384d). Socrates himself, playing the arbiter in this debate, at the very beginning assumes that there must be a "Namemaker" that precedes and eludes us in our usage of words (389a) and goes on with his explaining of bizarre etymological connections between words based exclusively on sound.<sup>8</sup> At the end of *Cratylus* somehow repeats the point from *Phaedo* in stating that ultimately there "must be possible to learn about the things that are independently of names." (439b-c) Translating this Platonic problem into touch we have three possible outcomes: words touch things through meaning (*Cratylus*); words touch each other through sensory sound (Hermogenes); the meaning of things is touched upon without words or sense, i.e. metaphysically (*Phaedo*).

Saussure, as the founding-father of modern linguistics, started from the axiom that signs – composed of the signifier as word and the signified as mental image – are linear, differential and arbitrary, and thus refer not to any given reality, but rather linearly to each other by phonetic means of sounds and sounding together (Saussure 1959: 65-70). This sensorial moment inside language, the specific way words touch each other in tune with the rules of phonetics, was conceived by Lacan through the concept of *lalangue* in order to demonstrate how language-based meaning arise from phonetic non-meaning, a poetic characteristic of language itself: "Language is without doubt made of *lalangue*. It is an elucubration of knowledge about *lalangue*." (Lacan 1975: 127) Lacan's *lalangue* is therefore way in which "words touch each other", as Dolar puts it in his article *Touching ground*, where he deals with touch in psychoanalysis (cf. Dolar 2008). *Lalangue* functions as tactile precondition of the production of meaning ("words touch each other") that touches not only upon things through language ("words touch things"), but also upon the listening or reading subject, the subject of language ("words touch subjects").

Taking into consideration this psychoanalytical conceptions one can once again translate the Platonic problem into linguistic terms as follows: synonymy, two words meaning the same thing while sounding differently, touch each other on the level of meaning; on the other hand, homonymy, two words sounding (homophones) or being written alike

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8. Very bizarre indeed since more the dialogue proceeds more the connections become inconvincible, as, for instance, is the case with *technē* (art or craft): "If you remove the 't' and insert an 'o' between the 'ch' and the 'n' and the 'ē', doesn't it signify the possession of understanding (*hexis nou*)?" (Plato 414b) If one removes some letters and adds some others one can obviously prove almost anything – for an extensive commentary on the dialogue see: Mladen Dolar's *What's in a name?* (cf. Dolar 2014) but Plato's Socrates is, with his ironic self-reflections disseminated in the dialogue, well aware of the problems with his etymological articulations.



(homographs) while meaning different things, touch each other in terms of their sensory quality, be it visual or acoustic. The missing link between synonymy and homonymy is therefore touch that could, in the last instance, be isolated from any given representation on the level of sounds or spelling.

At the level of homophones and homographs we therefore deal with visual/acoustic representations of touch, but if we want to develop a haptic metaphor of touch we would need to go beyond the current state of affairs in linguistics, psychoanalysis, and phenomenology.

## 6 A Haptic Subject

What both paradigms – the Derridean linguistic turn in phenomenology and Lacanian linguistic psychoanalysis – have in common is therefore a certain conception of touch that allows us to establish an intrinsic link between touch and language that can allow us to answer the initial question about the tactile quality of metaphors and the way language touches upon us.

Let's, first, make a very general recapitulation.

In phenomenology there is, up until Nancy and Derrida, an absence of any linguistic aspect of touch, while its metaphysical aspect is relocated in the sphere of tactility preceding any given physical touch. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, especially in its Ljubljana's School variant, there is nothing but linguistic touch that is nevertheless overlapping its boundaries from the inside out: inside, by ways in which words touch each other (*lalangue*); outside, by ways in which words touch upon things and persons (*langage*). The main difference between the two conceptions lies in the definition of "subject": despite their developed conception of touch and its specific link with language, for Nancy/Derrida the subject is still something grounded in the phenomenological tradition of Husserl/Heidegger that needs to be deconstructed (transcendental ego/Dasein), while for Lacan/Dolar the subject is first and foremost defined in a completely different way, namely as the Freudian subject of unconscious "structured as language".

Leaving aside, or rather, repressing the difference between Husserl and Heidegger that would require much meticulous elaboration into a footnote, one could say that the Lacanian subject of unconsciousness differs from both by not being the rational kernel of anyone consciousness, but rather its elusive irrational leftover.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the unconscious is, already for Freud, the natural residuum in the cultural consciousness or the cultural residuum in the natural body, but Lacan pushed the concept further by defining the unconscious "structured as language", so that the split inside the subject itself is defined as

9. The question of difference between the two conceptions is far too complex to be addressed here properly, but at least some very general remarks are needed: the "transcendental ego" is, for Husserl, the result of the phenomenological reduction of all given sensorial experiences to an instance of "pure cogito" that is self-transparent and self-evident, much alike the "pure psychological ego" (cf. Husserl 1960); the Dasein of Heidegger is first and foremost that thinking being that can pose "the question of being" and relate to it in a specific manner that differs from any usual relation of being, that is, existentially (cf. Heidegger 1962).

determined through language, i.e. through the fact that the subject is a “talking being” (cf. Lacan 1998: 17-28). This, and not the “irrationality” of the subject, is the main reason why the Lacanian concept of subject is far more fit for our purposes of answering the question: how it is possible that language touches upon us?

The previously demonstrated tactile quality of language can help us answer only half the question: metaphors touch upon us because there is a certain sensory residuum at work in all of them (as we have seen in the case of Hegel’s *Begriff*), a quality discernable in any given *lalangue* (as defined by Lacan as the poetic quality of language itself). The subject of unconscious, defined as “structured as language”, provides us with the other half: the subject is the subject of language and that is why language can touch the subject through its inherently tactile quality.

Thus, the subject we are interested in can be developed further and defined as “haptic subject”, so that the sensory capacity of the body finds its equivalent – not as something opposed or separate, but rather intrinsically interwoven – on the level of *psyche*: only such a subject could allow us to think not only the tactile quality of language in general and metaphors in particular, but also the specific way they touch upon “us” – as tactile subjects.

## 7 Conclusion

As we have seen, if the Derridean linguistic phenomenology provides us with an understanding of touch as something determined by language, and if Lacanian linguistic psychoanalysis allows us to think the tactility of language itself, then our conception of the subject as a “haptic subject” allow us to think how it is possible that language, especially the metaphorical one, touches upon us.

Considering that metaphors can touch upon us unlike any other language-based expression we can conceive of, they can be therefore regarded as the privileged linguistic form where we can palpably grasp – taken not metaphorically but literally – the haptic quality of language itself. This tactility of language can be best expressed precisely by employing a metaphor: this or that speech, be it political or academic, this or that writing, be it literary or philosophical, can “touch” us in a way no physical touching can ever reach us. And consequently, in the sea of metaphors one can use in order to demonstrate the tactile quality of language, it seems that no other metaphor could be best employed but this one that is related to touch – “the metaphor touches us” – since the metaphoric touch is not, as we have argued in this article, a metaphor at all.

In short, if metaphors can touch its listeners or readers, then it is because they are not metaphors at all, but rather the haptic, almost projectile projections of language, itself possessing a certain tactile quality that cannot be, however, grasped any other way but by employing a metaphor – the metaphor of touch.

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## Author's data

Mirt Komel  
 Assistant Professor  
 Faculty of Social Sciences  
 Kardeljeva ploščad 5, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia  
 e-mail: mirt.komel@fdv.uni-lj.si