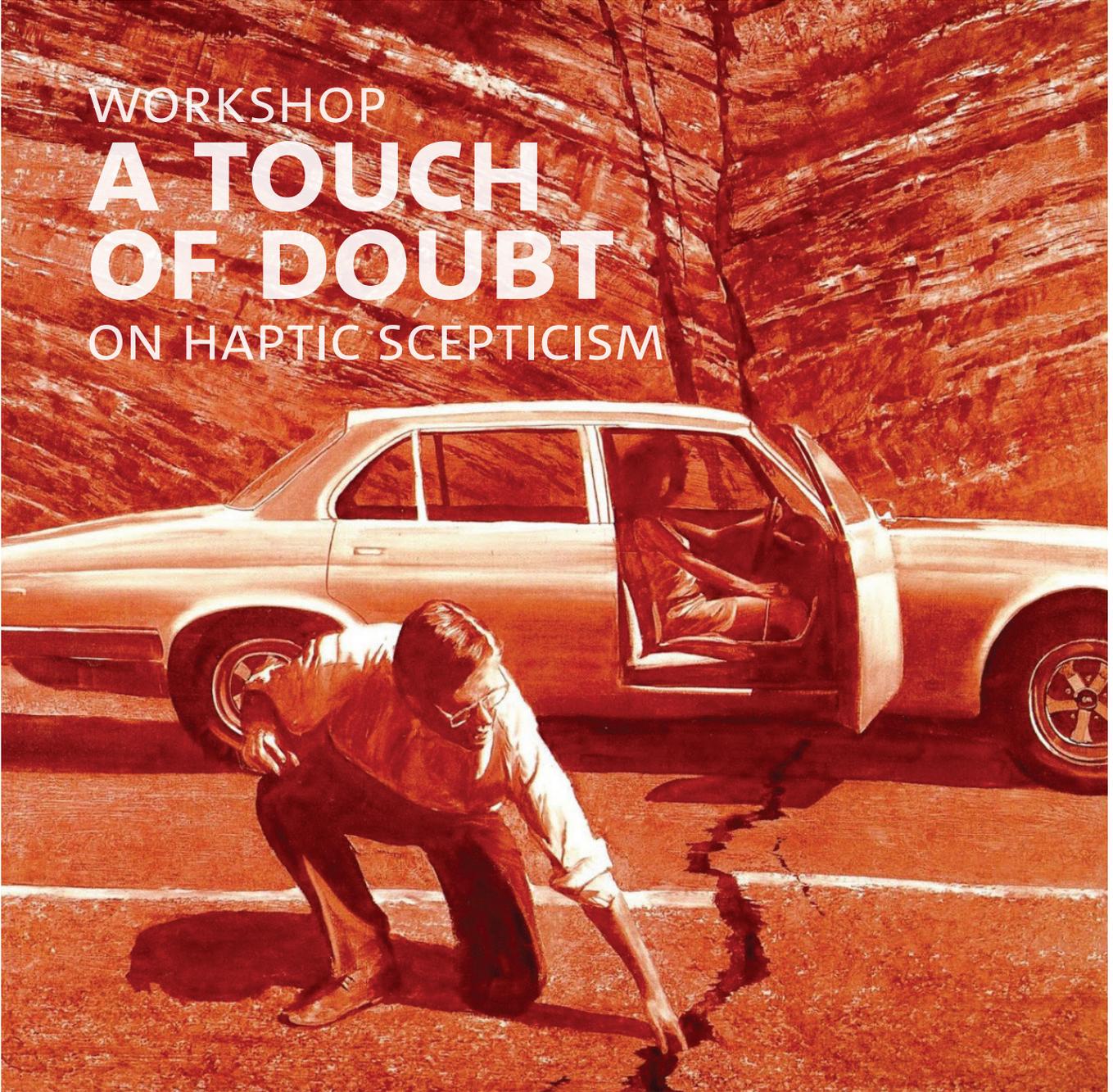


WORKSHOP
**A TOUCH
OF DOUBT**
ON HAPTIC SCEPTICISM



© Mark Tansey, *Doubting Thomas* (1986)

Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies
March 27-28, 2018

Convenor: Rachel Aumiller



© Auguste Rodin, "La Cathédrale," 1908, Musée Rodin, Paris

A Touch of Doubt

Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies
Workshop on Haptic Scepticism

Tuesday, March 27, 2018

10:00-10:30 INTRODUCTION

“Framing the Sceptic as the Compulsive Toucher”

Rachel Aumiller, Universität Hamburg / Germany

10:30-12:30 NOLI ME TANGERE

Chair: Adi Louria Hayon

“Touch Me (Not) and the Question of Sense Certainty”

Mirt Komel, Univerza v Ljubljani / Slovenia

“The Profaning Touch that Challenges Authority”

Libera Pisano, Universität Hamburg / Germany

12:30-14:00 LUNCH BREAK

14:00-16:00 RELIGIOUS BELIEF & THE IMPERATIVE TO TOUCH

Chair: Jacob Levi

“A Magic Touch: The Imperative to Touch in Jewish Magic from the Hebrew Bible to the Middle Ages”

Bill Rebiger, Universität Hamburg / Germany

“When to Touch — And What to Doubt”

Robert Pfaller, Kunstuniversität Linz / Austria

16:00-16:30 COFFEE BREAK

16:30-17:30 HAPTIC CINEMA

A screening and discussion of a film project on touch and language.

Rachel Aumiller, Ana Jovanović, Bara Kolenc, Mirt Komel, Goran Vranešević

Wednesday, March 28, 2018

10:00-12:00 QUESTIONING THE PARADOX OF TOUCH

Chair: José María Sánchez de León

“Touched in the Head: The S(k)epsis of Reason”

Ana Jovanović, Univerza v Ljubljani / Slovenia

“An Atom of Touch”

Goran Vranešević, Univerza v Ljubljani / Slovenia

12:00-13:30 LUNCH BREAK

13:30-15:30 TOUCHING THE OTHER | TOUCHING ONESELF

Chair: Libera Pisano

“The (un)touchable Touch of Pyramus and Thisbe: Doubt and Desire”

Bara Kolenc, Univerza v Ljubljani / Slovenia

“‘Es wird Leib, es empfindet’: Hands and Auto-Affection in Husserl’s Ideen II”

Jacob Levi, Johns Hopkins University / USA

15:30-16:00 COFFEE BREAK

16:00-18:00 BLIND-TOUCH

Chair: Robert Pfaller

“Diderot’s ‘Letter on the Blind’: Metaphysical Sobriety and the Priority of Touch”

José María Sánchez de León, Universität Hamburg / Germany

“The Weak Relations of Touch and Sight through the Passage of Lapsed Time”

Adi Louria Hayon, Tel Aviv University / Israel

18:00-19:00 EMERGING CONCEPTS OF HAPTIC SCEPTICISM

Reception & Closing Discussion

Introduction

A Touch of Doubt

It is said that seeing is believing. Typically this adage is taken to mean that sight is the strongest empirical affirmation of what we believe to be true. And yet as the adage also implies, although sight may affirm one's belief, it does not guarantee certain knowledge. In opposition to sight, touch presents itself as the guarantor of what is real. Touch can serve as a "reality check" that awakens an individual from her slumber. We pinch ourselves to confirm we are not dreaming. We slap a comrade across the cheek to bring him to his senses.

In everyday speech, the skeptic is often associated with the figure of the "doubting Thomas": the disbeliever with the compulsion to touch what others accept on appearance alone. Although the dogmatist may be satisfied with believing what he sees, a skeptic demands to grasp the world to confirm its reality. A "doubting Thomas" isn't satisfied until he has thrust his finger into the very site of his uncertainty. In contrast, the object of Mary Magdalene's desire is kept out of reach in order to increase her faith in the absence of sense certainty. This famous *noli me tangere* scene draws an alliance between belief and sight, on one side, and doubt and touch, on the other.

In contrast to this popular framing of the skeptic as the doubter with the compulsion to touch, the history of philosophical skepticism casts doubt on the reliability of the senses, giving particular attention to touch. We find skeptical accounts of touch within Pyrrho's modes, which describe the inconsistency and idiosyncrasies of our tactile sensations (our pleasure and pain, sense of coolness and warmth). We can also consider Descartes' suspicion of the parchment that he holds within his own hands, which he performs as an exercise in skepticism. Other classical skeptical arguments about touch abound: Perhaps I am dreaming (dreaming even of the sensation of pinching myself awake). Perhaps I am not the active knower (the one who touches); perhaps I am instead, as Montaigne suggests, the one who is touched (by spirits, by illness, by madness).

How did the skeptic gain the reputation as not only the doubter but the toucher? Has she been falsely framed? Or is there some truth to the characterization of the skeptic as the one who gets her hands dirty, by testing every claim that crosses her path?

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To pursue these questions, Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies will collaborate with Mirt Komel's research team, working on the nationally funded project "Language of Touch: linguistic perspectives in haptic studies," based out of the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. We begin our collaboration with a two-day workshop that focuses on the history of philosophy and religion to explore at least three distinct formulations of the relationship between touch and doubt. While we first consider touch as a form of empirical demonstration that diminishes doubt, we will also consider skeptics of touch, who stress the uncertainty of our grasp upon the world. A third formulation of touch and doubt may be considered within classical skepticism and its influence on modern thought, embodied by Hegel's "self-fulfilling skepticism" of Spirit. This variety of skepticism embraces the philosopher's repeated failure to grasp the world—both empirically and ideally—as "the path of doubt," which drives perpetual enquiry.

PARTICIPANTS

Rachel Aumiller is a research associate at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies – Jewish Scepticism at the University of Hamburg. She received her PhD in philosophy from Villanova University (2016). Her dissertation *The Laughing Matter of Spirit: A Young Hegelian Comedy* offers a brief history of how history became a laughing matter (i.e. the Hegelian-Marxist framing of history as unfolding in tragic and comic stages). She was a 2015-16 Fulbright scholar to Slovenia where she specialized in the Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis. Her current research explores the relationship between ancient skepticism and comedy and the emergence of a certain form of religious subjectivity at the end of Greek art-religion

Adi Louria Hayon is an assistant professor in the Art History Department at Tel Aviv University. She completed her PhD at University of Toronto (2013). Her research focuses on the connections between art and philosophy in the modern and contemporary eras. She published in *Leonardo Music Journal*, *Religion and the Arts*, and *Afterimage*. She is currently writing a book dedicated to *Performative Scepticism and the Audiovisual in the Art of Bruce Nauman* (forthcoming, De Gruyter). In 2016 – 2017 Adi was a research fellow at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies – Jewish Scepticism, at Universität Hamburg.

Ana Jovanović is a research fellow at the Center of Cultural and Religious Studies at the University of Ljubljana, working in a collaborative research project devoted to the study of the relation between language and theory of touch. She studied at the Department of Philosophy at the Faculty of Arts (University of Ljubljana), where she defended both her master thesis, *Exploration of the Psychotic Dimension of Hegel's Philosophy*, and doctoral dissertation, *Cunning Education: A Philosophical Foundation of the Possibility of Teaching*. Her main research interests lie in the areas of philosophy of language and mind, especially in reference to conditional reasoning and counterfactual thinking theory.

Bara Kolenc is a research associate at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences. In 2014 she earned Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Ljubljana, under the supervision of Mladen Dolar. The title of her thesis was *The Philosophical Problem of Repetition and the Real in 20th-century Theatre*. In the same year, her book *Repetition and Enactment: Kierkegaard, Psychoanalysis, Theatre* was published by the Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis. She regularly publishes articles in *Problemi*, *Filozofski vestnik*, *Maska Journal* and elsewhere, presents on international conferences and lectures as a guest lecturer at the University of Ljubljana and elsewhere. Principal areas of her research are structuralism, ontology, theoretical psychoanalysis, modern French philosophy, German idealism, Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy and art theory. In her work, she is focusing especially on the concept of repetition, elaborating on its formal structures as well as on its ontological, epistemological and economical aspects. She is a founding member and a member of the board of the *Aufhebung – International Hegelian Association*. She is a member of the editorial and organisational committee of the international conference *Repetition/s: Performance and Philosophy* in Ljubljana that took place in September 2016, as well as a member of the editorial and organisational committee of the international conference *Concept/s: Hegel's Aesthetics* took place in January 2018 in Ljubljana. She also works as an artist in the field of theatre and performing arts. She presented her last piece *Metamorphoses 3: Retorika at 53*. Theatertreffen in Berlin (with co-author Atej Tutta), where she received the award Theatertreffen Stückemarkt Commission of Work 2016.

Mirt Komeč holds a PhD in Philosophy (2010) and is an assistant professor at the University of Ljubljana, teaching at the Department of Cultural Studies of the Faculty of Social Studies (currently being the head of the Department). He is also a researcher at the Center for the Research of Culture and Religion of the Institute of Social Studies, where he is currently leading a team of 8 researchers on a project on haptic studies in connection to structural linguistics and psychoanalysis. He is a long-time member of the editorial board of the *Journal for the Critique of Science*, guest-researcher at the Peace Institute, co-founder of *Aufhebung – International Hegelian Association*. In addition to regularly publishing in internationally renowned journals (*Problemi, Theory and Praxis, Filozofski vestnik, European Journal of Cultural Studies*), he is also author of four scientific monographs: *An Attempt of a Touch* (2008), *Discourse and Violence* (2010); *Socratic Touches* (2015), *Twin Peaks and postmodernism* (2013).

Jacob Levi is a PhD candidate in the Department of Comparative Thought and Literature of Johns Hopkins University. He is currently on fellowship as a visiting researcher at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, where he previously earned his Master's degree in philosophy in 2013. His work focuses on 20th century European philosophical thought and literature, specifically topics in phenomenology, philosophies of language, contemporary Jewish thought, and related questions in modernist literature. His doctoral dissertation, supervised by Hent de Vries, is provisionally entitled *Language at the Limit and the Adventure of the Book: Wittgenstein, Derrida, Jabès*. Jacob has translated texts by Marc Crépon, Catherine Chaliel, Alain Badiou, and Jean-Luc Nancy, and he has presented his work at the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, the Society for Jewish Philosophy, the American Comparative Literature Association, the University of Paris – Nanterre, and elsewhere.

José María Sánchez de León received his PhD from the University of Heidelberg with a dissertation on Hegel's *Science of Logic*. He was a Martin Buber fellow at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and is currently a fellow at the MCAS. His current research focuses on Spinoza, in particular on his epistemology, his conception of infinity and his relationship to skepticism. He is also interested in Spinoza's ties with Medieval thought (e.g. Crescas) as well as in the reception of Spinoza in German Idealism.

Robert Pfaller is a philosopher who teaches at the University of Art and Industrial Design in Linz, Austria. He is a founding member of the Viennese psychoanalytic research group "stuzzicadenti". He received "Best Book Published in 2014" award by the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABAPsa) for his book *The Pleasure Principle in Culture: Illusions without Owners* (Verso, 2014). In 2007 he received the "The Missing Link" award by Psychoanalytisches Seminar Zurich, Switzerland. Some of his other books include *Erwachsenensprache. Über ihr Verschwinden aus Politik und Kultur, Frankfurt/M.: Fischer* (2017), *Interpassivity. The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment*, Edinburgh University Press (2017), *Wofür es sich zu leben lohnt. Elemente materialistischer Philosophie*. Frankfurt/M.: Fischer (2011), and *Umazano Sveto in Cisti Um*. Ljubljana: Analecta, 2009

Libera Pisano is currently a research associate at the University of Hamburg in the frame of RelReS Project and Research Fellow at the Department of Political and Social Science at the University of Calabria. She was a junior fellow (Post-doc) at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies, with a project on linguistic scepticism among German-Jewish thinkers. She was a visiting research fellow at the University of Haifa, at the Humboldt Universität of Berlin and at the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi filosofici. She earned her PhD in theoretical philosophy at Sapienza Università di Roma in 2014, with a dissertation entitled *Lo spirito manifesto. Percorsi linguistici nella filosofia hegeliana* (ETS 2016). She published several essays concerning the role of language in Hegel's writings, Moses Mendelssohn, Gustav Landauer, Jewish contemporary philosophy, G.B. Vico's thought, anarchic tradition, utopia and gender studies. She is member of the editorial board of various philosophical journals, such as *Azimuth. Philosophical coordinates*, *Lo Sguardo* and *Filosofia Italiana*. Since February 2016 she has been co-director of the international philosophical book series *Umweg* (Inschibboleth Edizioni) together with Prof. Roberto Esposito, Prof. Ch. Wulf and Dr. F. Buongiorno.

Bill Rebiger is a research associate at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies. He studied Jewish studies and philosophy at the Free University Berlin and at the Hebrew University Jerusalem (PhD Free University Berlin, 2004). He has written several studies and books on rabbinic and Heikhalot literature, late antique and medieval Jewish magic, and Jewish-Christian relations. His current research focuses on the sceptical strategies of the early opponents of the Kabbalah by studying, translating, and discussing relevant texts. He undertakes a systematic study of the different claims of the early kabbalists and the arguments against them in order to discuss the diverging sceptical, anti-sceptical, and non-sceptical modes of polemics and dispute.

Goran Vranešević is a research associate at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences and a Researcher at the European Behavioral Studies Institute. He is also one of the founding members of *Aufhebung – International Hegelian Association*. He has written and presented on numerous topics, ranging from aesthetics, cultural theory, to more classical commentaries on ontological concepts. His main philosophical area of research is the concept of speculation, but his broader field of interest includes German idealism, political philosophy and structural linguistics.