

Tender Buttons

Nadja Buttendorf, Christin Kaiser, Stephanie Kiwitt,
Luise Marchand, Florian Meisenberg, Julien Prévieux,
Jimmy Robert, Frances Scholz, Pilvi Takala

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In cultural history and philosophy, the sense of touch is closely connected with the perception and grasping of the world, the relationship between subject and object, the boundaries of the body and the distinction between the human and the inhuman. In the handling of tactile displays, through fingerprint recognition, smart surfaces and in the gestural operation of devices through touch, swipe, pinch and zoom, and so on, the human body itself becomes an interface, a button. What effect does this have on our body perception and our idea of inside and outside? How does the increased use of the sense of touch influence our relationship to interpersonal touch?

The works gathered under the title *Tender Buttons* encompass photography, video, collage, installation, and sculpture, and show current ideas, gestures and images of touch.

Nadja Buttendorf, Christin Kaiser and Luise Marchand examine the relationship to objects we come into contact with in everyday life.

Marchand's visual language reflects the optimization and idealization of human-product interaction intimately while Christin Kaiser's work *Zwinge* (2018/2019) and the photo series *Smart Body* (2014) focus on the interrelation between the bodies of humans and those of the objects that surround us. Nadja Buttendorf's video series *Soft Nails* (2016) takes up practices of social media videos and ironically negotiates questions of physicality and gender in digital culture.

Florian Meisenberg, Jimmy Robert and Frances Scholz deal with concepts of virtual touch and the display as a membrane. Jimmy

Robert's collage *Untitled (Escape)* (2016) refers to the relationship between our skin and the apparatuses that we find ourselves in constant exchange with.

Meisenberg's video *Wembley, farewell my Concubine* (2013) points to a shift in sensory perception through the use of digital surfaces. Is it possible to touch across screens? Is the gesture of wanting to touch someone and the associated idea of being touched perhaps sufficient? Frances Scholz's works, which are referring to Mary Temple Grandin's "hug-" or "squeeze machine", also address the relationship between physicality and imagination, between physical and virtual touch.

Stephanie Kiwitt, Julien Prévieux and Pilvi Takala examine the shift in meaning that is experienced in our working and private spheres. For her photographic study, *Aanwervingslokaal* (2018/2019), Kiwitt documents the transition toward the digital hiring of dock workers in the port of Antwerp and suggests the social implications of the shift from physical presence to digital hiring.

The gestural language that emerges from these interactions with machines and technological objects, such as the slide-to-unlock movement to activate smartphones, is shown in Julien Prévieux's video work *What Shall We Do Next? (Sequence #1)* (2007–2011). The artist collected the patented movements as an archive of future gestures. In her video *The Stroker* (2018), Takala poses undercover as a wellness consultant for Personnel Touch, a company allegedly hired by a coworking space to offer touch at the workplace. The reactions of the "touchees" imply an alienation from interpersonal communication.

The artists of the exhibition *Tender Buttons* draw attention to touch as interaction in the context of interpersonal communication, current communication media and computer technology, as well as to virtual forms of touch. Together, the works focus on the interfaces between body and technology, the transitions between subject and object, and ultimately raise the question of the virtuality – i.e. the possibility – of communication.

The exhibition is a continuation of the exhibition project *TOUCH*, which took place at nGbK in Berlin in autumn 2018.

Curated by Nadja Quante and Anna Voswinckel

Kindly supported by:



THANKS

The curators would like to thank the artists of the exhibition, the galleries Stigter Van Doesburg, Amsterdam; WENTRUP, Berlin; Karin and Uwe Hollweg; Bakri Bakhit, Mara Ryser, the installation team: Oliver Krebeck and David Hepp; Martin Wilmes, Undine van Elsberg, Daniel Neubacher, Maxwell Stephens, Barbara Deutschmann, Trio and the team of Künstlerhaus Bremen.

Nadja Buttendorf

***Soft Nails*, 2016**

Videos, duration variable

Nadja Buttendorf maneuvers in the interfaces of digital culture, technological history and pop. In her videos, performances, installations and online interventions she links prosumer ideas of appropriation and individual adaptation of consumer products with techniques of body hacking, which she recodes feminist. She sees Nail-Art as an organic form of body extension without surgical intervention and that ironically breaks the dominant technical narrative of the cyborg.

Buttendorf's video series *Soft Nails* combines the aesthetics of social

media videos with technical tutorials. In the short videos, hands with glued-on soft fingernails demonstrate their flexibility in operating various everyday objects and technical devices. From a cosmetic point of view, soft fingernails are considered a blemish. By changing the material, the video series breaks with the most gender-stereotyped aesthetics of nail art – a play with viewing habits that arouses astonishing discomfort.

b. 1984 in Dresden, lives in Berlin

Christin Kaiser

***Zwinge*, 2018/2019**

Car headrest, steel, cork, dimensions variable

***Smart Body*, 2014**

Color Photogramme, 74 x 100 cm

Christin Kaiser's sculpture *Zwinge* (Clamp) consists of a metal construction that clings to a wall with a car headrest jutting out into the exhibition space. The headrest acts as a reference to the human body – it suggests to the viewer the possibility of leaning against it, but faces the wall to which it is attached. Humans are thus alienated from "their" technology and *Zwinge* (Clamp) is a (meaningless) device that only serves itself.

Kaiser's photograms *Smart Body* are created by a minimal incidence of light on color photographic paper on which laptops have been placed. The standby light on the housing of the device causes a darker exposure. The signal is a technical simulation of a bodily frequency, such as breathing, and has the intention to bring the device closer to the human being.

b. 1984 in Erfurt, lives in Berlin

Stephanie Kiwitt
***Aanwervingslokaal*, 2018/2019**
Booklets, DIN A4

For her new work *Aanwervingslokaal*, Stephanie Kiwitt photographed dockworkers working as day laborers in the old harbor area of Antwerp. Workers register in a specific building as seeking work, present themselves in person to companies of interest, and are selected. Before that, the dockworkers and employers meet in the hall or the nearby cafes, standing around and talking. Since June 2018, the building no longer serves this purpose and hiring now occurs online.

The workers have received tablet computers from the employers' headquarters and can now apply from home with just one touch on the iPad. Stephanie Kiwitt captured the waiting and hiring of the dockworkers, the party in the bar on the last day, the empty building, and the workers' introduction to digital hiring—their gestures and touches—in photographic observations.

b. 1972 in Bonn, lives in Brussels

Luise Marchand
***COPE III*, 2018/2019**
Digital Prints

***Tissuebox*, 2019**
Billposting

In her photo series, Luise Marchand examines the human body in contact with products of everyday technical life. Her visual language reflects the idealization and optimization of human-product interaction.

In the new on-site installation *COPE III*, Marchand's photographs are arranged like bodies in space. They show close-ups of familiar touch between body and object surfaces. The verb "cope" alludes to the social need for physical and mental fortification that wellness products serve.

The outdoor installation *Tissuebox* shows a hand reaching a tissue from a cheerfully designed dispenser box that looks like a gesture of attention and care. The product literally serves us – similar to the smart interfaces of our everyday devices.

b. 1984 in Burg near Magdeburg, lives in Berlin

Florian Meisenberg

***Wembley, farewell my Concubine*, 2013**

Video, 2:49 min

Florian Meisenberg develops his work from the gestures of painting. He focuses on the separating and connecting function of surfaces—be they canvases or computer screens. He addresses the visualization and conquest of mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.

Meisenberg not only considers brush strokes on the surface of the canvas, but also through them, by discussing the permeability of screens. His short film *Wembley, farewell my Concubine*

shows a cat letting itself be stroked through a shop window by the artist's hand. The cat clearly relishes this attention, although the hand never actually touches it, since the pane of glass is in between. Meisenberg thus directs the eye to the reactions, which can be triggered and experienced sensually by virtual gestures and stimuli – like a virtual touch.

*1980 in Berlin, lebt in New York

Julien Prévieux

***What Shall We Do next? (Sequence #1)*, 2006–2011**

Video, 3:54 min

Julien Prévieux's videos and installations address rules of social coexistence and how they are determined by technique(s) and language. The artist is interested in human-machine interaction as well as technology's role in relation to systems of knowledge and power, in particular the gestural language that emerges from interacting with machines and technological objects. Gestures such as the "slide-to-unlock" movement used to activate smartphones have been patented by big technology companies. Prévieux collected these patented gestures in the assumption that they

are the movements we must inevitably make in the future. In this sense they are a potential archive of future gestures.

What Shall We Do Next? (Sequence #1) is an animated film that presents Prévieux's archive of gestures patented at the United States Patent and Trademark Office. While the movements of our hands turn into corporate property, technology dictates these movements and other behaviours.

b. 1974 in Grenoble, France, lives in Paris

Jimmy Robert
Untitled (Escape), 2018

Archival inkjet print on Hahnemühle paper, 120 x 90 cm

Jimmy Robert's Collage *Untitled (Escape)* is an enlarged print of a collage that connects different pictorial planes and layers of reality. Robert therein merges the tangible and the virtual worlds into one another. Here, the edges of the display simultaneously form the boundaries of representation: Where does human skin begin and where does it end? To what extent can the screen surface also be seen as a skin? The work addresses the interplay between the bodies and the

apparatuses with which they are in close exchange.

Robert regards paper and photo print as porous materials that breathe like skin. The title "Escape," printed in the picture, refers both to the screen as a place of escape from the tangible world and to the impossibility of leaving the screen.

b. 1975 in Guadeloupe/F, lives in Berlin

Frances Scholz
***Hugging machine aka T.G. Throne*, 2017**

UV Digitalprint on plastic foil, 284 x 109 cm

***Temple G. Throne*, 2013**

Aluminium, oak wood, goatskin, foam, rigging, clamps, 70 x 65 x 110 cm

Frances Scholz' *Temple G. Throne* is a replica of Mary Temple Grandin's "hug-" or "squeeze machine", that Scholz honors by using precious materials in its production. The "hugging machine" has its origins in breeding livestock where it is used to calm cattle. The animal scientist and autistic Temple Grandin used this "touch machine" for the first time in a self-experiment and found out that the pressure she could exert on her body with the machine had a calming and stress-reducing effect on her. The print *Hugging machine aka T.G. Throne* duplicates the object in the

illustration and thus addresses the question of the efficacy of illustration, of reality and imagination and of physical and virtual touch.

Scholz is mostly known for her paintings and videos. Her paintings often feature abstract color forms and play with empty spaces that activate the viewer's memory and image repertoire.

*1962 in Washington D.C., USA, lebt in Köln

Pilvi Takala
***The Stroker*, 2018**
Video, 15:16 min

Pilvi Takala's video work *The Stroker* is based on a two-week intervention by the artist in Second Home, a coworking space in London. In the video, Takala poses as Nina Nieminen, the founder of Personnel Touch and wellness appointee of Second Home. Her company was allegedly engaged to improve the working environment by touching at the workplace. The video shows the reactions of the "touchees", who react very differently - from sympathy to slight irritation to clear rejection and injunctive demands. The body

language of the persons betrays that the deviation from conventional behaviour leads to irritation, strangeness and excessive demands. While some employees react openly to the touch, a negotiation about the appropriateness of the approach of „The Stroker“ develops in the background. In the transparent, liberal space of the Coworking Space, physical boundaries are revealed where there are supposedly no more boundaries.

b. 1981 in Helsinki, lives in Berlin

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME

Saturday, 4 May, 2–5 pm

Barely even Touching

Workshop with Emma Waltraud Howes (EN)

In this workshop participants will practice ‘touching’ beyond our conception of everyday means. Dancer and visual artist Emma Waltraud Howes will introduce us to experience touch through the deliberate direction of our intentions: How can we explore individual kinesthetic intelligence, and communal inner sense, while barely even touching? Through a vigorous and critical analysis of the role that dynamism plays in communication this workshop will explore the malleability of our boundaries and the productivity of friction. Exercises developed by Howes may include: improvisation, Gi Gong meditation, as well as voice and movement techniques.

Register until 30 April at: galerie@kuenstlerhausbremen.de

Workshop will be held in English.

Participation free. Donations welcome.

No previous experience required

Emma Waltraud Howes (b. 1976 in Toronto, Canada, lives in Berlin) works as a translator between movement and form. Her interdisciplinary works are informed by her background in dance, performance theory, and the visual arts, and guided by observations of gestures. Howes focuses on the development of an expanded choreographic practice incorporating public interventions, kinaesthetic and architectural research, and an underlying drawing component in the form of graphic scores for performances.

Solo presentations (selection): *Scores for Daily Living*, ZIL, Moscow (2019), *The Nine Returns to the One*, The Place, London und Centrum, Berlin (2018), *dreiküchenhaus: Labour, Ritual, and Civilization*, Hidden Lines of Space: Our House, Hamburg (2018), *Scores for Daily Living*, Kunstmuseet Nord-Trøndelag, Namsos (2018). Sie performte mit und für: “Ten Days Six Nights”, Joan Jonas, Tate Tanks, London (2018); ‘Dynamis’, Georgia Sagri, Documenta14, Kassel (2017); ‘Liminals’, Jeremy Shaw, Venice Biennale (2017); ‘Symphony for a Missing Room’, Lundohl & Seidl, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin (2016). Bisherige Workshops, u.a.: *Alive ... & then Some*, Ateneu, Porto, und Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin (2018). www.emmawaltraudhowes.com

Tuesday, 14 May, 7 pm

Lecture by Dr.-Ing. Tanja Döring

Tangible Interaction – Materiality and Body in Human-Computer Interaction

In the age of "ubiquitous computing" – the ubiquitous embedding of computer systems in our environment – the physical and the digital are becoming intertwined. In terms of the design of interactions with technical devices, this means that the human body, physical objects and the materiality of the interface are increasingly at the centre of attention, rather than software. The lecture will discuss models and strategies of interface design in the research field of tangible interaction and discusses them on the basis of exemplary works.

Dr.-Ing Tanja Döring researches and teaches human-computer interaction at the Digital Media Lab at the University of Bremen. Her research focuses on tangible interaction and materiality, gesture interaction, mobile interaction and interactive surfaces. She is the spokeswoman of the department "German Tangible Interaction Group" of the Association for Informatics and is involved in program committees as well as in international conferences and magazines. Her dissertation on "A Materials Perspective on Human-Computer Interaction" was awarded the dissertation prize of the department CSCW & Social Computing of the Gesellschaft für Informatik (Association for Computer Science) and the International Institute for Socio-Informatics for outstanding results in the research of applications of computer science in social systems. From 2008 to 2011, Ms. Döring was a research associate at the Chair of Pervasive Computing and User Interface Engineering at the University of Duisburg-Essen. Tanja Döring studied computer science and art history in Hamburg and Valladolid (Spain).

Lecture will be held in German.

Guided Tours

Tuesday, 14 May, 6 pm

Curators' Tour with Anna Voswinckel and Nadja Quante

Wednesday, 5 June, 6 pm

Guided tour through the exhibition with Mara Ryser

Free admission to the exhibition and all events!

Pilvi Takala

The Stroker,
2018

Christin Kaiser

Smart Body V,
Smart Body VI,
2014

Julien Prévieux

What Shall We Do
Next? (Sequence #1),
2007–2011

Luise Marchand

COPE III,
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