

# ○ TOUCHING (ON) DEATH

## ON 'BEING TOWARD' THE OTHER IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

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This article brings thinking on the phenomenology of touch into dialogue with representations of touch in the Gospel of Luke. The ecojustice principle of interconnectedness forms a basis for moving between touch as a phenomenon, representations of touch, and the touch of texts. I focus on a Lukan pattern where touch is a mark of compassionate responsiveness such that in touching the other one touches (on) death. This pattern offers a particular phenomenology of touch which I bring into conversation with contemporary thinking about touch (Derrida and Nancy) to consider the capacity of the Lukan text to touch. How does the Gospel of Luke touch its readers in touching (on) death? In touching (on) death, how does the Gospel of Luke affect bodies and earth, phenomena whose givenness encompasses the material necessity of death? What are the implications for an ex-scriptive reading, which reads from and toward the 'outside' of writing signified by death? The article proposes a kind of reading which, touched by the otherness of death, consents to the body and so to the reality of human mortality.

In *Le Toucher* Jean-Luc Nancy and in his earlier essay 'Le Toucher', Jacques Derrida takes up the theme of touch in relation to the work of his friend Jean-Luc Nancy.<sup>1</sup> He describes Nancy as the greatest thinker of touch since Aristotle (Derrida 1993: 123). For Aristotle (1981: 38–40) touch is the primary sense. Touch as contact is inescapable – the contact of my feet with my socks; of my eyes with photons of light, indeterminate as they may be; the touch of air on skin, molecules surging into nostrils; of sound waves pressing against the drum of an ear – the always being-in-contact of matter with other matter (Nancy 1993: 203).

This article brings such thinking on the phenomenology of touch into dialogue with representations of touch in the Gospel of Luke. In the first section the ecojustice principle of interconnectedness, espoused by the Earth Bible team (Habel 2000: 24), forms a basis for moving between touch as a phenomenon, representations of touch, and the touch of texts. The second section turns to the many representations of touch in the Lukan narrative. I focus on a pattern of touch and compassion which occurs in the Gospel of Luke. Three Lukan narratives (the restoration of the widow's son 7:11–17; the parable of the Good Samaritan 10:25–37; the parable of the Prodigal Son 15:11–32) receive particular attention. In these narratives, touch is a mark of compassionate responsiveness such that in touching the other one touches (on) death. This pattern of representation of touch in the Lukan text offers a particular phenomenology of touch which can be brought into conversation with contemporary thinking about touch (Derrida and Nancy).

One of the key insights of contemporary thinkers of touch concerns the way in which the language of touch refers not only to physical contact – flesh to flesh, flesh to stone, even stone to soil – but also to the way in which we are affected, for example, by texts (cf. Nancy 1993: 198).<sup>2</sup> Texts touch me in a way that is registered as physical (bodily) sensation. Luke also makes this connection, when the hearing of scriptures causes the hearers hearts to ‘burn’ (24:32).

The third section takes up this capacity of texts to touch. Writing and reading are ‘matters of tact’ (Nancy 1993: 198), matters of touching the other. Moreover, ‘[i]t is by touching the other that the body is a body, absolutely separated and shared’ (204). While the body as ‘always already given’ is outside writing and reading, and in this sense cannot be touched (grasped) by writing or reading, we continue to touch (on) ‘the body’ in reading and writing. Inscription becomes for Nancy ex-scription, a writing from and toward its outside. Peggy Kamuf (1993: 106) describes ‘ex-scription’ as writing ‘from a place outside itself and other’. ‘Sense’ or ‘the sense of sense’ is a ‘gesture of writing’ the force of which is ‘to exscribe itself: to go up and touch the concretion of the world where existence makes sense’ (Nancy 1997: 14). Ex-scription describes an opening to the other, a *being-toward*, a space or spaciousness from and within which to write before there is writing.

As part of the givenness of the body, death is an outside toward which writing tends, a material limit of writing, an otherness which is ex-scribed in writing and reading.<sup>3</sup> Employing the phenomenological insight (gleaned from the conversation between Luke, Derrida and Nancy in particular) that in touching the other one touches (on) death, I ask in the third section: in what ways does the Lukan narrative touch (on) death? Further, in touching (on) death, how does the Gospel of Luke affect bodies and earth, phenomena whose givenness encompasses the material necessity of death (cf. Elvey 2003)?

## PHENOMENOLOGIES OF TOUCH AND THE PRINCIPLE OF INTERCONNECTEDNESS

‘Sense *is* touching’ (Nancy 1997: 63, emphasis in original). Of the multivalence of the word ‘sense’, Nancy writes:

the sense of the word *sense* traverses the five senses, the sense of direction, common sense, semantic sense, divinatory sense, sentiment, moral sense, practical sense, aesthetic sense, all the way to that which makes possible all these senses and all these senses of “sense”, their community and their disparity, which is not sense in any of these senses, but in the sense of that which comes to sense (Nancy 1997: 15; emphasis in original) .

This multiplicity extends from the simplest touch or ‘contact between two things’ to the sense of the world, ‘the absolute signifyingness or significance of a world as world’ (Nancy 1997: 15). Further, as Derrida (1993) notes, the language of touch itself – like the language of sense – is multiple. The way we speak of touch as a physical sense flows into the ways we speak of touching and being touched emotionally, intellectually and so on. For example, as a hand can grasp me, so can a voice move me or a narrative touch me. Being touched, gently, violently, or passionately (even tactlessly), by an action, a conversation or a text *is* a physical touching, felt in the viscera of the human body. Moreover, the inescapability of the simplest touch or contact between things,

and the pervasiveness of the phenomenon of touch (from the touch of skin to the touch of texts), arises from and expresses ‘the being-toward of one thing toward the other’ that constitutes the sense of the world (Nancy 1997: 15).

In this respect, then, the language of touch signifies the multiple modes of our ‘being-toward’ the other, both human and other-than-human. Moreover, the sense of touch mediates the interconnectedness and sociality not only of human community but of a more-than-human earth community which includes the human (McFague 1997: 93–95). Further, as Nancy (1993: 203) notes: ‘[t]here is no intact matter; if there were, there would be nothing.’ Interconnectedness exists, then, as the being-in-touch of one thing with another, with many others. The Earth Bible project employs this trope of interconnectedness as one of six ecojustice principles for reading the Bible ‘from the perspective of Earth’: ‘Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival’ (Habel 2000: 24). David Rhoads (2004) suggests that on the basis of this principle, when we read with earth ‘in mind’ our readings can mediate the voice of a wider earth community.

I want to develop Rhoads’ point in the direction of the way in which texts touch not only their human readers but a wider earth community. In the title of this paper, ‘Touching (on) death’, I have bracketed the word ‘on’. The title signifies a movement between a phenomenology of touch as ‘touching death’ to the ways in which texts, in particular the Lukan text, touch *on* death. What is the basis for such a movement between touch as phenomenon and that which a text touches upon in the course of its unfolding as text?

As Regina Schwartz (1997) and others have shown, through their use (for example as agents of colonisation) biblical texts touch bodies and lands. This touch materially affects bodies and lands. Moreover, while resulting from particular uses of texts, this touch arises out of – but neither defines nor is defined by – the way in which the texts themselves touch *on* bodies and lands. The text touches on bodies and land, for example through the use of ‘women’, ‘bodies’ and ‘land’ as metaphors; through representations of human embodiment, relationships between men and women and between humans and land; and through the ways in which women, bodies and land are interconnected in the internal logic of the text. There is a kind of connectedness at work here between the text’s touching *on* a subject, such as land, and the touch of the text as it affects land through the subsequent uses of the text to authorise particular relationships to land.

But does this connectedness display the mutuality of interconnectedness? If in touching *on* land a text touches land, does land in turn affect the way in which a text itself touches upon land? My sense is that because of the temporal separation between the composition of a text and its reading, there is a disjunction between the material effects of a text (for example, on certain colonised lands and peoples) and the effects in the texts of its underlying material embeddedness (as expressed, for example, as a debt to certain other lands and peoples who made its production and reproduction as a material artefact possible; Elvey 2004: 66). Thus, we can say that land affects text, but this land is usually different from the lands which the text subsequently affects. Nevertheless, the process of reading the text with land, bodies, women, or earth, death or the sense of touch itself (as in this article) ‘in mind’ can move this one-way connection – between the touching *on* of the text and its touch – toward the mutuality of interconnectedness. Thus, to allow the ‘thing’ touched upon to touch the text in reading, replays the interconnectedness mediated by touch.

In what way does this principle of interconnectedness operate in relation to texts that are predominantly anthropocentric – or perhaps theocentric and Christocentric – in a way which privileges the relationship between God and humans? If touch is the primary sensory mode of interconnectedness, then this becomes a question of the way in which our touching and being touched by the human other is already part of the being-in-touch of a whole world of others, human and other-than-human (see McFague 1997: 95). The significance of this underlying question cannot be overestimated. In addressing a first century CE text such as the Gospel of Luke from an ecocritical perspective, there is a necessary difference between the ecological sensibilities of the communities from which such a text emerged and twenty-first century CE readers. I am not concerned here to measure whether or not the Lukan narrative is more or less ecologically-sympathetic than contemporary Western ideologies, narratives, cultures and economics. I am taking as read the often ambiguous kyriarchal and anthropocentric, indeed the colonising, impulses of the narrative (see, for example, Cadwallader 2002; Elvey 2001; Elvey 2002a; Elvey 2002b; Kahl 2002).<sup>4</sup> But I am suggesting that this is not the whole story. In conversation with contemporary critical theory, I find in the Lukan text a focus on the touch of the other that suggests an openness to embodiment which has implications for contemporary ecocritical thinking about bodies and death. I want to propose here that from an ecocritical perspective we can read touch between humans as part of the being-in-touch of the earth community. This is to see narratives in which the characters are predominantly human, not simply as anthropocentric but as part of a wider earth story in which humans are participants, although not the only nor even the most important ones. If the touch mediates the interconnectedness of the earth community, what might a focus on intra-human touch suggest about our being-in-touch with that wider community? So, I turn now to an analysis of some ways in which intra-human touch is represented in the Gospel of Luke.

## A PHENOMENOLOGY OF TOUCH IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Touch can be gentle or violent, abusive or healing. In Greek the verb *hēpsamēn* is a middle verb meaning to touch or take hold of; it can refer to touch as ‘a means of conveying a blessing’, but also as bringing harm or injury (Bauer 1979: 102–103). In Luke *hēpsamēn* is used of Jesus touching: a leper (5:13); a bier (7:14); children (18:15); the ear of the high priest’s slave (22:50). Touch is sometimes accompanied by speech. But we do not hear the response of the one touched to the touch itself.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, there is little sense in any of these cases that the touch is violent, unless it is the violence of transformation (even when transformation is healing or restorative). Other more precise words are used to refer to violent touch: to whip (*mastigoō*, 18:33); to beat (*derō*, 22:63), to strike (*paiō*, 22:64); to discipline or scourge (*paideuō*, 23:16,22).<sup>6</sup>

But *hēpsamēn* is also used of people touching Jesus. The crowd (6:19), the woman who washes and anoints Jesus’ feet (7:39) and the woman with the flow of blood (8:44–47) each touch the Lukan Jesus. In these instances when he is touched, the one touched responds. In response to the desire of the crowds to touch him, Jesus speaks the beatitudes and woes of 6:20–26. In Luke 8, when a bleeding woman who is probably close to death (Weissenrieder 2002) touches him seeking healing, Jesus feels her touch as an outpouring of power from him (8:46). Jesus’ response to the woman’s touch suggests the ambiguity of a touch that is at once mutual and unequal. Even while the act of touching another may be healing or consoling, an act of compassion or

hospitality, is it also an exercise of power. A little earlier in the narrative, challenged by the unspoken question of why he allowed a woman considered to be a sinner to touch him, the Lukan Jesus speaks of a creditor and two debtors, of forgiveness and love (7:40–47), of his receipt of the woman’s touch as an act of loving hospitality which prompts the divine hospitality of forgiveness (7:44–47) (Byrne 2000: 73–76).

Elsewhere in Luke, the theme of divine hospitality forms a pattern in which compassion, divine and human, is mediated by touch. Early in the Gospel of Luke Zechariah proclaims a divine visitation that brings liberation (1:68), an arrival which delivers from violent touch: the hands of enemies, those who hate (1:71, 73). Imaged as the daily visitation of the sun, this visitation heralds the gutfelt (*splanchna*) mercies of the divine (1:78).

Gut-felt (*splanchna*) mercy finds an echo in the verb *splanchnizomai*, to ‘have compassion’ or ‘feel sympathy’, literally ‘to be moved in the guts’.<sup>7</sup> This verb occurs three times in the Lukan narrative (7:13; 10:33; 15:20). The first occurrence is in the story of the restoration of the widow’s son outside the town gate of Nain (7:11–17), the second in the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25–37), the third in the parable of the Prodigal Son (15:11–31). In each case there is a moment that is also a movement of compassion. A situation is described in which someone is in an extremity: a widow whose only son has just died (7:12); a person who has been robbed and beaten and left half-dead by the roadside, whom passers-by see but ignore (10:30–32); a younger son who has squandered his share of the family estate only to return destitute and ashamed (15:11–19). Each time there is seeing: Jesus sees the widow (7:13); a Samaritan sees the half-dead stranger (10:33); the father sees in the distance his son (15:20). Each is physically moved by compassion (7:13; 10:33; 15:20) toward the other (7:14; 10:34; 15:20).

The movement is directed toward touch: Jesus touches the bier (*hēpsato tēs sorou* 7:14); the Samaritan bandages the person’s wounds (*katedēsen ta traumata* 10:34); the father falls on the son’s neck and kisses him (*epepesen epi ton trachēlon autou kai katephilēsen auton* 15:20). A restoration follows this compassionate contact. In 7:16 the crowd recognises this movement of compassion as a divine visitation. When read in conjunction with the Benedictus, where the gutfelt mercies of God signify or accompany a divine visitation, the pattern of compassionate responsiveness I have identified in 7:11–17, 10:30–37, and 15:11–24 can be said to mirror a pattern of divine visitation.<sup>8</sup> Thus the Lukan divine visitation is modelled by a compassion expressed through touch.

Nancy, too, associates compassion with touch. After describing the grief of refugees throughout the world, he writes:

What I am talking about is compassion, but not a compassion as a pity that feels sorry for itself and feeds on itself. Com-compassion is the contagion, the contact of being with one another in this turmoil. Compassion is not altruism, nor is it identification; it is the disturbance of violent relatedness (Nancy 2000: xiii).

In the contemporary world a pattern of violent relatedness is evident not only in the way refugees are treated in Australia and elsewhere but in the way in which non-human others, as individual animals, plants and species, as ecosystems, land, and earth, are treated by dominant human societies and economies as expendable adjuncts to human existence. What kinds of contact might disturb this pattern of violent relatedness?

Within the Lukan narrative the compassion that touches the other, that makes compassionate contact with the other, is predicated on a certain kind of seeing. The seeing which prompts compassion stands in contrast to other kinds of seeing.<sup>9</sup> For example, within the story world of the parable, the seeing of the Samaritan (10:33) stands in contrast to the seeing of the priest (10:31) and the Levite (10:32); for these latter two seeing prompts not compassion but neglect of the other. In 7:36–50 where the Lukan Jesus receives the loving hospitality of the woman’s touch, seeing is also at issue. The seeing of a Pharisee named Simon prompts a misjudgement of the woman and a misinterpretation of her touch (7:39). In Jesus’ question ‘Do you see this woman?’ (7:44), Simon is challenged to see as the Lukan Jesus sees and to recognise the visitation of God in the hospitality both of the woman’s touch and of divine forgiveness (Reid 2002: 110). Elsewhere in Luke, seeing and knowing stand in parallel (19:42); seeing prompts knowing (21:30–31). What is needful is to know the time of the visitation (of God) (19:44). Not knowing this moment of divine hospitality (19:44), not knowing and seeing ‘the things that make for peace’ (19:42), is to be implicated in a pattern of violent relatedness manifest historically in the destruction of Jerusalem (19:43–44). Indeed Jesus’ seeing of the city prompts his compassionate grief (19:41).<sup>10</sup>

In this representation of the gaze, the one *seeing* is touched or better grasped in the guts by compassion for the other. Such a gaze disrupts the violent relatedness which sees the other within the ambit of the same, appropriating the other to the same or denying the claim of the other. Within the Lukan narrative, approved characters such as Jesus, the Good Samaritan and the father of the Prodigal Son, respond to the claim of the other in a pattern of touch: through the contact of sight, the person seeing is moved to compassion – a touch felt in the guts – and this internal touch prompts the person to touch the other (7:13–14, 10:33–34, 15:20; see also 13:12–13).

There are several aspects to the touch of the other within these narratives. Firstly, according to Jewish custom there is a question of ritual uncleanness, which is as I understand it a question of bodily integrity and sometimes also (metaphorically at least) of moral integrity. Scholars are divided on the question of the role first-century CE systems of purity (both in Jewish and Greek contexts) play in Luke and it is likely that this is not a key focus of these and other Lukan narratives.<sup>11</sup> But what is it that is touched? A bier, a litter bearing a corpse; a person who is ‘half-dead’, who might very soon die; a son who has been living dissolutely, working with pigs and eating their food, who has in the father’s words been dead (*nekros* 15:24). What is touched is *the other’s death*.

A further aspect of this touch is its excess. Concerning the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, Brendan Byrne (2000: 129–130) writes:

We modern readers have to understand that this [the action of the father] is totally unconventional behaviour for a dignified man of affairs in the Palestinian cultural world. To leave the house to meet one of lower rank, to run rather than walk sedately, to display emotion extravagantly in public: all this involves a serious loss of face and dignity.

As Sally Purvis (1991) argues, there is a similar excess of touch in the parable of the Good Samaritan, where the Samaritan acts toward the wounded other almost as lover. Rather than

*agapē* moderating *eros*, here the *agapē* of the Samaritan for the other is suffused with *eros* (Elvey 2001). His actions surpass what would be expected even in regard to one's neighbour. They surprise 'not by unfulfillment but by overfulfillment' (Purvis 1991: 30).

To touch with compassion, then, and so to touch the death of the other, is marked by an excess in which the self is never solely singular, but in Nancy's (2000) terms 'singular plural'. As Nancy (1997: 60) indicates, touch is always reciprocal. The contact is always 'between'. Derrida (1993) picks up a phrase from Nancy, *se toucher toi*, to self-touch you, to describe the way in which in touching the other I am already touching myself, but also the way in which I cannot touch myself without touching or being in touch with an other, even if that other is my own skin. 'To touch,' writes Derrida (1993: 136), 'so one believes, amounts therefore to letting oneself be touched by what one touches ...' But as is typical of Derrida there is no linear movement in this notion of self-touching the other:

How is one to gauge the full consequence of this 'toi', of 'toi', yours, when the 'self-touching' offers its reflexivity to *your* effraction without all the same renouncing it, without yielding or ceding in its relation to self? (Derrida 1993: 137).

To touch, to touch oneself in touching the other, is to be open to the in-breaking (*effraction*) of the other. Thought is one mode of the body's touching, being-in-touch with, and being touched by the other who breaks in. Through the phenomena of touch as *se toucher toi* and of thought as touch, we are drawn in the direction of 'consenting to the body' (Derrida 1993: 137, quoting Nancy's *Corpus*). To so consent is to be open precisely to the otherness of the corporeal and hence also to death. For Derrida (1993: 139), in self-touching you, '[y]ou are/is also my death'. Compassion signals an openness to the in-breaking of the other whereby in touching the other I touch myself, but this touch is an exposure to death – to finitude – both the other's and my own. In touching the death of the other I touch my own mortality (cf. Donne 1624).

If in touching the other I feel the touch of my own death, in what ways does the other experience my touch? Within the pattern of compassionate responsiveness outlined above, when Jesus touches the bier, immediately the bearers stand still (7:14). In the parable of the Good Samaritan, we do not hear any response from the other to the touch of the Samaritan (10:34). In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the son responds to the father's embrace with his prepared speech concerning his unworthiness (15:21). There seems to be no pattern here, but when Jesus is touched by a woman in Luke 8, he feels his power expended (8:46). Despite her apparent timidity, the touch initiated by the woman is an act of power which draws forth his power to heal. The power of touch to do harm or to heal, to destroy or to further life, is embedded in the mutuality of a sense that is intrinsically relational. Therefore, in touching, that is in self-touching an other, I risk not only my illusions of an independent subjectivity, but I also risk perpetrating a tactlessness that intrudes violently upon the subjectivity of the other, denying our intersubjectivity and reinforcing the patterns of violent relatedness of which Nancy (2000: xiii) writes.

This ambiguous and risky intersubjectivity of touch resonates in the uncertainty of touch itself, for as Derrida (1993: 143) reminds us: '[t]o touch is [only?] to touch a border.' Any touch is touch at a tangent, at an almost tangent. To touch the other, to touch the other's death and so my own, is also not to touch. In the Lukan narrative three figures, moved by compassion, touch

the other, and in touching the other who is dead, near-death, or socially or morally dead, touch (on) the death of the other. But what is touched is also not death: Jesus touches a bier not a dead body; the Samaritan touches someone near-death but alive; the father embraces a living son. In each case the protagonist both touches and does not touch the death of the other.

## TOUCHING (ON) DEATH IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

In this phenomenology of touch (which describes a particular mode of sociality or interconnectedness between self and other), touched by the sight of the other, I feel the internal grasp of compassion and am prompted to touch the other. So touching the other, I touch (and do not touch) the other's death and am touched (impossibly) in turn by my own mortality, that reality of human embodiment and embeddedness in the earth community before which we tremble (cf. Derrida 1995) and toward which we tend whether we wish it or not. Moreover, the text touches me as reader through a representation of touch as touching (and not touching) death, as putting the one who touches in touch with her or his own mortality – a being-in-touch with human embodiment and embeddedness in the earth community made possible by the other who calls forth compassion. But the text also touches its readers in other ways, through the way it touches not only *on* touch and compassion, but also *on* death. In the Lukan narrative, the representation of death is problematic in at least two ways. Firstly, the narrative construction of its other in relation to the death of Jesus can be taken up in anti-Jewish polemic and violence. Secondly, the notion of resurrection can valorise an otherworldly life beyond death, which devalues earth. With these problems in mind, I turn now to consider some ways in which the Lukan narrative touches on death.

### DEATH AS DIVINE NECESSITY

There are many places in which the Lukan narrative touches on death (for example, 1:79, 2:26; 7:11–17, 22; 8:42, 52–53; 9:7, 27, 60; 15:24,32; 16:22, 30–31; 20:28–29, 31–32, 35–38; 21:16; 22:33; 23:15, 22), but a particular death underwrites the text. The suffering, rejection, death and raising of the Lukan Jesus are characterised as a divine necessity, indicated by the Greek *dei* (9:22; 17:25; 22:37; 24:7, 26).<sup>12</sup> Within the Gospel of Luke, there is a concatenation between themes of divine necessity, purpose, visitation and hospitality. Compassion is a mark or trace of divine visitation. God arrives in the person of a guest to whom hospitality is due. In the narratives I have addressed, compassion is a form of hospitality. Moreover, as Byrne (2000) argues, in the course of the Lukan narrative, in welcoming this divine visitation one receives the hospitality of God.

As Dufourmantelle and Derrida (1997) suggest, however, within the dynamic of hospitality there is a crossing between host and *hostis*, host and enemy. The title of Gowler's book on the characterisation of the Pharisees in Luke and Acts – *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend* (Gowler 1991) – suggests this crossing is at play in the Gospel itself. The ambiguous character of visitation is evident in the Lukan characterisation of Jerusalem. Doubly the site of death, the death of Jesus and the later destruction of the city itself by the Romans in 70CE (21:20–27), Jerusalem becomes the spatial focus of the Lukan divine necessity (18:31–33; see also 13:22, 33; 17:11; 19:11, 28; cf. 9:57). More particularly for Luke, Jerusalem is the site of failure of hospitality toward Jesus.



From the Lukan perspective, whereby every occurrence from the death of individuals to the destruction of cities is governed by the divine purpose, this failure is the reason for the later destruction of the city (19:41–44; cf. 21:20–27). This Lukan interpretation of the fall of Jerusalem as consequent on a refusal of divine hospitality, gives rise to violent relatedness exemplified in the othering of the Pharisees and lawyers (7:30) (Elvey 2002a). But in 10:25, a figure of these others, a lawyer, poses a question, which allows for the telling of the parable of the Good Samaritan and a redefinition of the other. Here the violent relatedness of othering is called into question by compassionate responsiveness. While the text might be thought to touch violently on the other, to touch the other with violence, to touch (on) the death of the other in this way, the text also calls into question such violent contact and offers a pattern of compassionate responsiveness: a gut-felt impetus toward the mortal other. This mortality is already a human necessity, part of the material givenness of the earth being of humankind.

### THE MATERIALITY OF DEATH

As Val Plumwood points out, however, from an ecological perspective representations of death in Western and Christian thought are at best ambiguous:

For both Platonic and Christian systems, the meaning of death is that the meaning of human life is elsewhere, not to be found in the earth or in human life as part of nature, but in a separate realm accessible only to humans (and only to certain chosen of these), the world of the Forms and the world of heaven. The salvation awaiting them beyond and above the world of nature, a fate marked out for humans alone, confirms their difference and separation from the world of nature, and their destiny as one apart from that of other species (Plumwood 1993: 100).

In what ways then are we to understand the human necessity of death in the Gospel of Luke? Within the Lukan narrative, the human necessity of death is multi-faceted. There are frequent references to violent death or the threat of violent death at the hands of others (for example 9:22), by way of accident (for example, 13:4), or through natural disaster such as a storm (for example, 8:24). In Luke's use of the verb *apollumi* there is a correlation between death (6:9; 11:51; 13:33; 19:47), material destruction (5:37), and loss (15:4,6,9,17,24,32; 19:10). These themes of death, destruction and loss come together in the sayings concerning eschatological expectation in 17:22–37. The Lukan narrative distinguishes between death as destruction of the body (12:4) and a metaphorical death or loss of one's self (*psychē*) occasioned by personal action and divine judgment (9:12; 12:5; 13:3,5; 17:33). Underlying this distinction is a first century CE apocalyptic imaginary in which death is not the end of the human story, but where divine judgment figures not only in an end-time scenario but also for individuals in a life after death (16:19–31). Within this imaginary, death is also a metaphor for the imprisonment of sin (1:79; cf. Ps. 107:10; Fitzmyer 1981: 388). For the Lukan Jesus life after death is continuous with, but qualitatively different from, everyday human life (20:27–40). In the assumption of a life after death and in the metaphorical meaning given to death, does the Lukan text then turn our attention from the materiality of death as a proper part of the earth being of humankind? Does it contribute to a

devaluation of embodiment such that death is to be thought of as taking the human away from earth being into an other-than-earthly and disembodied realm?

Perhaps. But in Luke the language surrounding death is also sensually material. A person sees and tastes death (2:26; 9:27). The reader is mortal (9:27; 21:16). Tragic deaths are not themselves the result of divine judgment or punishment (13:1–5). Nevertheless, just as the Lukan God has power to open the womb (1:25; cf. Gen. 29:31, 30:22), this God has authority over death. Within the Lukan narrative, the raising of the dead is one of the signs Jesus offers John's disciples concerning his advent (7:22); it is a sign of divine visitation (7:16). In the tragedy of deaths that occur through patterns of violent relatedness between humans, a divine purpose is also at work (11:49; 13:31–35). This is particularly the case in the death of the Lukan Jesus, which (as already noted) is interpreted as a divine necessity (9:22; 17:25; 22:37; 24:7, 26).

### THE DEATH OF JESUS

Looking at the Lukan passion narrative with an eye to the materiality of Jesus' death (22:1–23:56), I am struck first by the way in which this movement toward death – situated for Luke in the space and time of a Passover meal – is already in debt to another death, the ritual slaughter of the Passover lamb. That this death is embedded within the logic of the text, the logic of a divine necessity, is seen in 22:7: 'He sent Peter and John saying, "It is necessary (*edei*) to sacrifice/ slaughter the Passover lamb.'" Here *thuesthai* from *thuō* refers to the ritual slaughter of *to pascha*, the Passover lamb. The word *pascha* is repeated six times until the slaughter of the lamb, the eating of its meat, and the imminent suffering (22:15) of Jesus form a well known metonymy, such that Jesus becomes the paschal sacrifice: the body given and the blood shed are his (22:19–20).<sup>13</sup> At this point at least, through the motif of divine necessity and the metonymy of human and other-than-human animal bodies, the narrative connects the 'destiny' of the human representative, Jesus, and other species, represented in the lamb (cf. Plumwood 1993: 100).

In the passion narrative proper, however, the body is all but absent. Gregory Sterling (2001) and others argue that the text presents the death of Jesus as a noble death, in the tradition of the deaths of Socrates and of Jewish martyrs. The everyday human necessity of death is overshadowed not only by a divine necessity but also by the apparent 'calmness' with which the innocent man undergoes his execution (cf. Lieu 1997: 195). Nevertheless, within the passion narrative, there are repeated indications of violent touch (22:21; 22:36–38, 53, 54, 63). The violence of the hands is matched by the violence of the tongue (22:63–64) and of words that authorise a violent touch (23:16, 22, 23–25).

The interplay between body and word is intimate and complex. From the multiple intimacies of the meal where the words of the Lukan Jesus bring together body and bread (22:19), cup and blood (22:20), and the touch of betrayal (22:21), the narrative moves to the words of the Lukan Pilate and the crowds that bring violence and death to the body of Jesus (23:13–25). But both in between and after, the words of the text serve to efface the suffering body.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, as the Lukan Jesus is crucified there is no description of the body, of the physical process of execution, no crying out 'I thirst' (23:32–43; cf. John 19:28). As death approaches, however, there is resonance in the earth community: darkness comes over the land; the sun that dawned in Luke 1 with the visitation of divine compassion is eclipsed (23:44–45). Then the body, which has been largely absent in the passion narrative, becomes focal in death. Joseph of Arimathea goes to Pilate to ask for the body (23:52). Like the Lukan Mary at the birth of Jesus, he takes it, wraps it and

lays it (23:53, cf. 2:7). Some women take note of the position of the body in the tomb (23:55). Their return to the empty tomb after the Sabbath prompts the question: ‘Where is the body?’ (24:3, 23).

## THE BODY IN DEATH

In coming to minister to the dead body of Jesus, the women arrive seeking to touch an absence. In the face of the empty tomb, this absence takes on a different character. The absence of the living Jesus becomes the absence of the corpse. But what does their desire to touch this absence signify? Whether we see death as transition to another world, as part of a natural cycle of birth, growth, death, and birth, as return to the land, or as part of embeddedness in place, there is an alterity to death. This otherness is characterised by Derrida in his *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* as the ‘non-response’ of the corpse (Derrida 1999: 6). But there is also a hiatus between the breathing body and the corpse both of which can be touched. The moment of death is other, a space between the breathing body and the corpse, between the heartbeat measured on a screen and a flat-line, between activity in the brain and the absence of such activity.

In Luke the otherness of death is uncannily captured in the appearance narrative of 24:36–43, where the body is foregrounded. Jesus appears to the eleven and their companions gathered in Jerusalem (24:33–36). They respond to the apparition with fear believing it to be a spirit (ghost), *pneuma* (24:37). This is the first time the term *pneuma* occurs since Jesus’ death, where he gives up his spirit (*pneuma*), signifying his whole person, into the hands of the divine and takes his final breath (*exepneusen*) (23:46) (Green 1997: 826, n. 57).<sup>15</sup> Now appearing post death he offers an invitation: ‘Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost (*pneuma*) does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have’ (24:39). The invitation draws attention to the body, to hands and feet, flesh and bones. There is a turn: the eleven and their companions are joyful but still disbelieving (24:41a). Jesus asks for something to eat, is offered fish and eats (24:41b–43; cf. 8:55). The focus on the materiality of the body, hands and feet, flesh and bones is intensified by the physicality of eating which marks human dependence on and continuity with the wider earth community. As van Tilborg and Counet (2000: 96) note, in this section there is an answer to the question raised in the two preceding narrative sections: Where is the body? (24:3, 23)

The question ‘where is the body?’ which arises after the death of the Lukan Jesus is not only a question about the absent body of Jesus. Nor is it a question solely concerning the capacity to touch the other, to touch and touch on the death of the other. It *is* these questions. It is also, however, a question of the other, of death *as* other, of the alterity of death, and more particularly of the alterity of the other (cf. Derrida 1995: 82). It is moreover a question of the otherness of ‘consenting to the body’ (Derrida 1993: 137, quoting Nancy’s *Corpus*).

For Luke the body (*sōma*) is subject to death (12:4). But the body is more than human anxieties about survival (12:22–23). What is this something more? In 11:33–36 the Lukan Jesus speaks of the eye as the lamp of the body. The eye and the body are related metonymically so that the whole or healthy eye signifies the whole or healthy body. Read in conjunction with the pattern of compassionate responsiveness I have outlined above, the Lukan narrative suggests that bodily wholeness or health, metaphorically at least, is interdependent with a kind of seeing that prompts the compassion that touches on death, the other’s and one’s own. This understanding of embodied wholeness, then, returns (as more than metaphor?) in the Lukan account of the last

supper: ‘Then he (Jesus) took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you”’ (22:19). Unlike some twenty-first century discourses around health, this is not a bodily wholeness that protects one from or postpones one’s death. For Luke, in ways that remain problematic from a contemporary ecological perspective, the body subject to death also transcends death.<sup>16</sup> Yet, it is not the raising of Jesus’ *psychē* nor the return of his *pneuma* that Luke emphasises in the appearance narratives but the physicality of a risen body that can be seen and touched, that eats and speaks.

This emphasis on the body is matched by a (re)turn of focus toward earth. In the ascension narrative at the beginning of Acts, the apostles stand gazing up toward heaven (the skies). They are challenged by two men in white robes: ‘why are you looking up toward heaven?’ (Acts 1:10–11).<sup>17</sup> When the apostles are directed to return their gaze earthward (Acts 1:11),<sup>18</sup> it seems that for Luke, even within the ecologically-problematic imaginary of life after death and despite an anthropocentric focus on earth as primarily a human domain, heaven is turned toward earth, *psychē* and *pneuma* are interconnected with *sōma*.

## CONCLUSION

Coming from outside the text, two deaths are central to the Lukan narrative: the death of Jesus and the death/destruction of Jerusalem. Writing from and toward these deaths, Luke gives an account of divine visitation, expressed as necessity, hospitality, forgiveness and compassion. While this account has its own violent legacies, it also presents a phenomenology of touch in which the touch of the other through sight provokes a compassionate contact which puts the protagonist in touch (impossibly) with her or his own death. In turn, this pattern of touching (death) suggests an ex-scriptive reading of the text as it touches *on* death. The ex-scription of death, the alterity of which inheres in its everydayness, makes space in Luke for a kind of seeing that is toward the body. Not only does this seeing call forth compassion, but it also recognises the material dependence even of risen bodies, whatever they might be.

While questions remain concerning elements of the Lukan narrative which eschew the body, and about a certain ambiguity regarding the maternal body in particular, a kind of reading which itself consents to the body and to the reality of human mortality has wider implications.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the ex-scription of death, of the reality of human mortality as earth beings, in our philosophical, economic and cultural thinking can make space for a kind of seeing that invokes relations to the other, which are toward the body and toward the earth, disturbing the violent relatedness of species extinctions and ecological destruction.<sup>20</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- 1 As Kevin Hart (2001: 173) points out, Derrida here acknowledges the way in which such touch ‘will inevitably contain moments of violence’ and so to write in order to ‘touch’ his friend, as he would wish, ‘requires considerable tact’. Roslyn Diprose (2003: 46–47) outlines the contours of this necessary ‘tact’ with insight and sensitivity to the other’s difference.
- 2 For Jean-Louis Chrétien the phenomenon of touch also pertains to divine-human relations. The pattern of call and response between the divine and the human is mediated by a touch in which ‘the flesh listens’ (Chrétien 2004: 130).
- 3 As Derrida (1995) would have it, death is an indeterminable gift, which is for Levinas (1998) the locus of responsibility toward the other.
- 4 I borrow from Schüssler Fiorenza (1992: 8) the term ‘kyriarchal’ to refer to the ‘interlocking structures of domination’ such as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, (one could add speciesism), based on ‘elite male, relations of ruling’. On Luke’s ambiguous treatment of women, for example, see Seim (1994), Reid (1996) and Levine (2002: 1–2).
- 5 There is one instance in which a kind of touch, of the words of the Lukan Jesus, is felt as ‘our hearts burning’ (*he kardía hēmōn kaiomenē*) by the two on the road to Emmaus (24:32). Here the verb *kaiō* means to burn or burn up. Another word not used here but closely related to touch means to ignite, namely *haptō*, from which the middle *hēpsamēn* comes. The emphasis on the heart, moreover, is worth pursuing in conversation with the question of touch and the heart that Derrida (1993; Derrida 2000) takes up.
- 6 There are many other examples of touch in Luke, such as reference to the laying on of hands both for healing (4:40; 13:13) and violently (20:19; 22:53).
- 7 The stem of the Greek verb *splanchnizomai*, to ‘have compassion’ or ‘feel sympathy for’ is related to the noun *splanchnon*, meaning ‘inward parts’ or ‘entrails’, sometimes also ‘womb’, and refers figuratively to the seat of the emotions (Bauer 1979 pp. 762–763). The connection between compassion (*rakhamim*) and womb (*rakham*) is even more pronounced in Hebrew (see Staubli and Schroer 2001: 71 ff).
- 8 Concerning this pattern of compassionate responsiveness, see further Elvey (2001; Elvey 2002a).
- 9 In a similar way from an ecotheological perspective, Sallie McFague (1997: 67–117) distinguishes between the arrogant and the loving eye. For McFague ‘the ecological model of the self’ which gives rise to the ‘loving or attentive eye’ is grounded in touch as the primary sense (91–117). In this model attentiveness to the other – both human and other-than-human – has characteristics of ‘intimacy and distance, with affection and respect for difference’ (116).
- 10 In the context, too, of the destruction of the Temple, there is in 3 Enoch 48A a wonderful apocalyptic image of the relationship between touch and the divine visitation of compassionate grief: the weeping hand of God (3 Enoch 48A:4). But here the tears which fall from the divine hand bring destruction upon earth before a merciful Messianic advent (3 Enoch 48A:4–10). (Charlesworth 1983: 300–302; see also Staubli and Schroer 2001: 179–180).
- 11 For discussion of the issue of purity in the first-century CE world of the Gospel of Luke, see Neyrey (1996), Malina (2001), and Weissenrieder (2002).
- 12 On the force of the divine *dei* in the Gospel of Luke, see Cosgrove (1984).
- 13 But there is a change, too, in that instead of the body of the animal, what is shared are cups and bread. There is also the question of whether the Lukan Jesus joins in eating and drinking (22:15) (Ringe 1995: 261). Jesus *will* eat in the appearance narrative of 24:36–43, but even there the emphasis on the physicality of the body in verse 43 will be overtaken by a focus on the word (24:44–47) as the

narrative moves in verse 44 towards his being taken up into heaven (24:50–53). As Keith Dyer (2002: 50) points out in relation to the first-century CE context of the Gospel of Mark, it must be noted, however, that heaven is probably understood to be interconnected with earth in a way that becomes less so in later world views. But as the narrative of Luke 22 continues, in the hand of the betrayer (22:21) and the necessity of swords (22:36–38) there are intimations of a violent touch. The cup returns as a symbol of divine purpose (22:42). In what is probably an addition to the text, the body and an interrelationship with earth are once more foregrounded when in agony Jesus' sweat falls as blood on the earth (22:44).

14 The movement from body to word that has already occurred in 8:21 and more particularly in 11:27–28 in relation to the maternal body warrants further consideration in the context of the appearance narratives. There is one moment in the passion narrative, however, when the bodies of women are foregrounded as markers of the suffering to come (23:27–31) and this deserves further attention in relation to the maternal and death.

15 In this context, the connection between death and the divine touch (signified by the hands of the Father into which the dying Jesus commends his spirit) deserves further consideration.

16 From an ecotheological perspective Rosemary Radford Ruether (1992: 53) writes of the problematic 'cultural avoidance of death'. What kinds of human relationships with more than human nature might be imagined if we understood our bodies in death as compost for life?

17 In two other episodes, namely the transfiguration (9:28–36) and the empty tomb (24:1–12) narratives, the appearance of two men is announced in the same words: *idou andres duo* (9:30; 24:4; Acts 1:10). There is perhaps also an echo of the appearance to the shepherds (2:8–15), where the shepherds find the living body of a newborn child (2:16). In the transfiguration account where the two men are identified as Moses and Elijah, the *eidōs*, the form or outward appearance of Jesus' face becomes other (*heteron*), his clothes become 'dazzling white' (9:29). But this moment of otherness and *doxa* (9:31–32) occurs on a mountain, an earthly space. It is a moment of shared words about the *exodos* to be accomplished through Jesus' passion and death in Jerusalem (9:31). As I have suggested above, in the Lukan passion and death the body of Jesus seems to be backgrounded. But after death the body comes to the fore. In the empty tomb account two men in dazzling robes ask the women: 'Why do you look for the living (*ton zōnta*) among (or with) the dead (*meta tōn nekron*)?' (24:5). The women look for the dead body of Jesus (24:1–3) and half a chapter later the eleven and their companions encounter the body of the risen Jesus (24:36–43).

18 I am indebted to Melbourne priest Michael Casey of St Ambrose's church in Brunswick for this insight concerning the ascension narrative.

19 As does a reading which attends to the reality of human natality (cf. Jantzen 1999).

20 Revised version of a paper given at the Bible and Critical Theory Seminar, Adelaide, 28 June 2003 and Australian Catholic Biblical Association, Sydney, 5 July 2003. I am grateful to Brendan Byrne and Elaine Wainwright and two anonymous readers for their helpful comments on drafts of this paper. This paper represents preliminary work which will be enhanced in future work by an exploration of touch, death, and the maternal in conversation with the work of Irigaray, especially her essay 'The Fecundity of the Caress' (Irigaray 1993: 185–217), and by consideration of the relationship between touch, the gift and the good developed by Ross (1998). I have indicated in footnotes some points for further consideration.

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