

## POSSIBILITIES OF A HAND: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**ABSTRACT.** Our starting point is a phenomenological analysis of the concepts of hand and possibility in relation to human realization and expression, whereby the problem of hand and its movements can be followed in this framework in its peculiarity and uniqueness. With regard to possibility, we follow a certain shift in Husserl's concept of possibility towards practical possibility, as well as some selected passages in his texts concerning corporeality and constitution. This phenomenological starting point is connected to the question of stimulation (potentiating) of the hand in the creative process; we draw upon insights in texts of a Finnish thinker and architect Juhani Pallasmaa and on examples from fields of art, technology and handicrafts. The goal of the text is the return to the hand and the revival of the sphere of original realization of the man, as opposed to uniformity, excess of impulses, tendency to manipulate or, on the other hand, desensitization, whereby we want to open up a space for stimulation of creativity and deepening of the experience on this basis, whose starting point is, precisely, the phenomenological analysis.

**Keywords:** *body, touch, possibility, creation, craft, Edmund Husserl, Juhani Pallasmaa*

*"When I was growing up, all the women in my house were using needles. I have always had a fascination with the needle, the magic power of the needle. The needle is used to repair the damage. It's a claim to forgiveness."*  
Louise Bourgeois

*"...it is the craft entering into the body..."*  
Simone Weil<sup>1</sup>

In many ways, hand is in a peculiar position with regard to bodily constitution of the man and his development—both evolutionary and ontogenetic. It is a subject-matter of many anthropological, social philosophical, psychological, and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Storr, *Intimate Geometries: The Art and Life of Louise Bourgeois*, The Monacelli Press, 2016, p. 526; Simone Weil, *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks*, Routledge, 1987, p. 101.



generally philosophical investigations.<sup>2</sup> We can mention *Éloge de la main* by Henri Focillon, the tooled hand of Gaston Bachelard or *Thinking Hand* by Juhani Pallasmaa. The attention paid to touch disrupts the idea that we quickly accept the prominent position and function of visuality among the senses.

Precisely the movements of the hand and its gestures disclose the double constitution of the body as lived body (*Leib*) and physical body (*Körper*); the double character or reversibility of experience where the touching hand becomes touched, which is one of the crucial phenomena in which phenomenologists are interested. Even here, however, the approaches develop into various directions, such as, for example, investigation of the psychophysical intertwining (*Leibkörperlichkeit*), the sensual synesthesia, being in the world (and relationship to the outer reality) and, last but not least, intersubjectivity. In the following text we will pursue both concepts—hand and possibility—within the phenomenological analysis which links the human realization to an expression, so that we will observe *the hand* and its movements in their peculiarity and uniqueness. With regard to *the possibility*, our starting point will be the shift in Husserl's conception towards practical possibility and we will follow selected passages in his texts on corporeality and constitution (Hua-Mat VIII, *Ideas II*). This will allow us to put into play the question of stimulation (potentiating) of the hand in the creative process, as found in the texts of the Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa. The central motive will be the return to hand and the revival of the original realization of a man. Can we—*vis-à-vis* the uniformity, excess of impulses or, on the other hand, desensitization, with which we so often hitherto meet—open up a new space for stimulation of creativity on this phenomenological basis?

Let us begin with two contrasting examples originating in vastly different interests in hand and touch, although it is precisely the hand and its sensing which links them in the end.

*1. Robotics.* First contacts of a man with the environment and himself or herself are given by means of touch, placement of the body and movements of the body. An embryo is in constant contact with the environment formed by the womb. Gradual development of the limbs perfects the movement in such a way that the body touches the environment or itself. It is the tactile and proprioceptive area which is the first sensual area developed in a child, and it is the most stimulated

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<sup>2</sup> See two collective monographs: Raymond Tallis, *The Hand. A Philosophical Inquiry into Human Being*, Edinburgh University Press 2003. Zdravko Radman (ed.), *The Hand, an Organ of the Mind: What the Manual Tells the Mental*, MIT Press, 2013, with a foreword by Jesse J. Prinz appropriately called "Hand manifesto."

one, too (movements of mouth, face and legs are significant). Matěj Hoffmann<sup>3</sup> works in the field of robot development (iCub humanoid robot) and concerns himself with bodily interactions in the natural and artificial sphere; his starting point is precisely an observation of the movements and reactions of children in early childhood to the touch. He follows the linkages of touching of the body, vision, but also touches in cases of blind children. The formation of the bodily schema is a complex, multilayered system—multimodal dynamic system—where “understanding by building” is crucial, precisely during the perception by touching and the feeling of touches; during the touching the movements gradually develop and perfect themselves, and they support further modalities. Hoffman’s starting point is that *touching oneself* is important for the formation of the body schema and therefore for the robotics, too. This touching, however, cannot be captured by purely causal, mechanistic schemas. If we could understand this phenomenon in its complexity, it would be a technological breakthrough, too. From the other side we could say that if we cannot penetrate the processes operative in the self-touch, we cannot proceed further in the technological domain either.

2. *Haptic sculpture*. Another project appears in contrast to this. Maria Bartuszová was an outstanding sculptor working in eastern Slovakia. The haptic side stands out in her works. Part of her work is dedicated to visually impaired and blind<sup>4</sup> children who could have touched her works and disassemble and assemble them as a kind of haptic puzzle. The visual side recedes to the background even for those who look at Bartuszová’s sculptures and observers feel invited to touch them, to perceive the haptic aspects of the objects such as roundness, softness, smoothness. The white colour of objects frees from the visuality even more and reinforces the feelings of delicacy and softness. During the touching the ovoid object at the same time merges with the hand, it falls into the hand, it adheres to the shape of the palm and the folds of the fingers when grasped. The subtle experiencing of the movements of the body, its being in the country, nature, the access to the chosen materials—this all leads the artist to creation of so-called biomorphic plastic, a plastic of life forms. Bartuszová worked with various materials, but mainly with plaster cast into elastic forms such as, for example, balloons. Or, on the other hand, she pressed parts of the objects or body to the material. Her haptic sculptures are

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<sup>3</sup> Matěj Hoffmann, “The role of self-touch experience in the formation of the self,” in *The Development of the Self*, Workshop at IEEE IC DL-EpiRob, Lisbon, 2017, 1; Cf. Matěj Hoffmann’s personal web, URL: <https://sites.google.com/site/matejhof/home>.

<sup>4</sup> In a similar way as Constantin Brâncuși exhibited a round object (*Sculpture for the Blind*) covered by the cloth so that it is only accessible to the touch.

called organic or gestural.<sup>5</sup> They speak to us in the same way in which Merleau-Ponty enters into a dialogue with a thing, when the viscosity of a honey represents “a particular way the world has of acting on me and my body.”<sup>6</sup> A sculpture’s character does not need to be primarily visual, but both during its creation, as during its reception, the haptic matters may stand forth. The creative process does not necessarily have to be subject to intent and purpose, but it can be left to work of a matter or nature itself—as is the case here.

Where do these examples lead us? Our preliminary observation points to the fact that touch is a peculiar sense which plays an important role in our contact with the world, which happens also through touching, grasping or pointing, which manifests itself both in active and passive way and presents itself as holistic experience including touch background, whole-body skin perception, proprioception, kinesthesia. A hand here becomes a leading clue, a starting point for the anthropologically significant actions in the field of technology and art, too. Another aspect linking both abovementioned projects concerns the experiencing and movement of the hand in children as a significant example, whereby special attention is devoted to blind children.

The development of simultaneity of the movements in children, the grasping and touching and/*contra* seeing, the position of the body, these all put into play their own bodily situation. The expression “putting into play” is not accidental here. It points us to a level of interpretation which leaves free development options—both iterative and creative—to the touch and hand, which does not reduce them only to chain of stimuli and reactions. Thanks to this, we can track anthropological features of the self-realization of the man, the need to affirm, instigate and fulfil the anthropological essence.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Gabriela Garlatyová (ed.), *Maria Bartuszová*, Košice: Archív Marie Bartuszovej, 2021. Lucia Stach Gregorová, “Zažiť niečo skutočné,” in *Jazdec*, 12(40), 2021. Maria Dziewańska (ed.), *Maria Bartuszová: Provisional Forms*, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2015. One can link Bartuszová’s work to disturbing sculptures of Louise Bourgeois (cf. Mária Danielová, *Mysl ruky. Proměny textilního média v kontextu médií umění 20. století*, Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2018, pp. 42f.).

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, London, New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 62.

<sup>7</sup> Elena Várossová states: “There is not meaning of the human history (...) as something outside the man, above or below him, but it coincides with the need to self-realization of the human species, and incessant affirmation, ‘potentiating’ and totalization of his anthropological essence.” Elena Várossová, “Zmysel dejín a naše dejiny” [The Meaning of History and Our History], in *Filozofia*, 24(1), 1969, p. 6.

## Edmund Husserl and the Hand

The progress of the sensorimotor capabilities proceeds through various changes and is especially dramatic after the birth, for example, when the child sucks the breast milk, and when during the first weeks and months it perceives the world by means of touches of mouth, limbs and coordination of the hand (limbs) and mouth.<sup>8</sup> The crucial experience is the birth itself and the radical whole-body experience of the child and the mother, when the movement of the child through the birth canals reconfigures the subsequent bodily situation of a newborn. This experience affects the further psychosomatic development, too, it supports immunization and stimulates the subsequent development by means of touches of the skin of the child and the body of the mother. If Husserl speaks of the birth as the limit constitutive case (*Limesgestalt, Limesfall*),<sup>9</sup> it is connected with the opening of the sphere of potentialities which the body gets in its disposal. In another and contrasting way, another limit case is non-moving body which is only “thinkable”.<sup>10</sup> This is reflected in the Husserl’s conception of possibility—and, more broadly, in his conception of subjectivity and corporeality—as a delineation of the possible area of human life and its achievements. As J. N. Mohanty points out with regard to modalities, “in the later writings he talked more of ‘open possibilities’ and ‘motivated possibilities’ than of ‘pure possibilities’ as ideal objects.”<sup>11</sup>

In Husserl’s texts in which we can find multiple examples of the thematization of the birth, early childhood, body of the mother, and so on, there are other significant practical examples which put the hand in the limelight.

As a worldly I, I have formed my lived body as a lived body... I train it or myself in special ways—as a carpenter, locksmith, etc., I learn the “hand movements,” that is, my hand refines itself as an organ in certain directions, and so does the whole lived body in different directions of activity.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution (1929 – 1934), Die C-Manuskripte* (Hua-Mat VIII), ed. D. Lohmar, Dordrecht: Springer, 2006, p. 326.

<sup>9</sup> „In ihm vollzieht sich seine Welt, sein Ich, und seine strömende konkrete Gegenwart ist sozusagen der Mutterleib, in dem sich aus ein embryonalen Urkeim durch embryonale Stufen hindurch schließlich die erstkindliche Weltausbildet und zur Geburt kommt“ (Hua-Mat VIII, p. 74). Cf. examples of sucking breast milk (p. 326).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book. Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution* (Hua IV), trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer. Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer, [1952] 1989, p. 289: “An immotile Body, one that only senses, is thinkable as a limit-case, but the question is then whether immotility does not signify the null-point of movement as paralyzed Body—and that is indeed the case.” It is then a null point of motivation (p. 119).

<sup>11</sup> Jitendra Nath Mohanty, *Logic, Truth and the Modalities. From a Phenomenological Perspective*. Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999, pp. 160-161.

The physical and mental strength can again temporarily decline, I can get out of practice and to have to train myself again to get back to the old level. Or I can get sick, hurt my finger, get burned, etc.; my physical lived body (*körperlicher Leib*) must have a normal constitution so that I can “do something” with it, in general and in particular, so that I am not reduced in my already acquired strengths, and not only strengths of the physical organs for external world practice, but also “mental” (*geistiger*) strengths...<sup>12</sup>

Corporeality is thus inscribed into the life of subjectivity in the form of development of spiritual life, too, which manifests itself by development of various types of action, but also by works which are products of its striving, spontaneity or various types of labours, crafts and activities. The body with its organs is then a sedimentation of “I can” in various typical forms of action.<sup>13</sup> Such movements can be—thanks to the self-sensing, too—further improved, refined, modified, and through them the complex motoric of the hand and body is developed. This motoric is subsequently linked to ever more competent and goal-directed striving, acting and practice, which leads to creation of the cultural environment shared with the others.

The movements of the hand—which are our primary interest here—thus produce a “topography” of possibility as possibility of our body and bring Husserl’s phenomenology to the reflection of different relations such as possibility–object, as well as possibility–act or possibility–aim. This extends the scope of investigation of the possibility further. These relationships can be identified in specific analyses of types of objects, intentionality, motivation or action. Modal situation is thus structured and complex and seen in perspective of its unique dynamism and genesis. The significant turn in this conception takes place when we turn from the *object* towards the *act*, which concerns the intentionality extending the scope of what practical, act or activity, actually mean. As Nam-In-Lee puts it, “action or activity, *in the original sense of act*, is nothing, if not practice” where “the whole stream of consciousness turns out to be a unity of practical intentionalities.”<sup>14</sup> Moreover, tactile experience is irreplaceable here: “I want to maintain that tactual possibilities, along with the tactual background, are indispensable to a sense of reality and belonging—they connect us to things. The sense of reality presupposed by sight depends on them; without our experience of potential touch, what we see would not appear as ‘there’.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Hua-Mat VIII, p. 156; see also p. 399.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Hua-Mat VIII, Text 79. „Der Leib mit seinen abgegliederten Organen ist eine Sedimentierung von Vermögendes in solchen und solchen typischen Formen Tun-Könnens“ (Hua-Mat VIII, p. 345).

<sup>14</sup> Nam-In Lee, “Practical Intentionality and Transcendental Phenomenology as a Practical Philosophy,” in *Husserl Studies*, 17(1), 2000, pp. 53 and 55 [*my emphasis*].

<sup>15</sup> Matthew Ratcliffe, “Touch and the Sense of Reality,” in Zdravko Radman (ed.), *The Hand, an Organ of the Mind: What the Manual Tells the Mental*, Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 2013, p. 148.

In order to link this with the work of hand, we can continue with Merleau-Ponty's example, that hands are "the centre-point of the 'intentional threads' that link him to the given objects." In other words: "The workbench, the scissors, and the pieces of leather are presented to the subject as poles of action; they define, through their combined value, a particular situation that remains open, that calls for a certain mode of resolution, a certain labour."<sup>16</sup> The objects, tools and materials as part of an intentional arc or body schema lead us to some work as a possibility of an expression in the context of our realization. They open the possibilities to us. In the first-person experience a single action—even in an elementary form of repetition, learning or training—participates holistically in the life situation as an intertwining of the body and the tool. We can mention here the special example of the needle with which Louise Bourgeois worked when she repaired the tapestries and which remains present in her whole sculpting work as a specific phenomenological tool (*la main outillée*) by which she creates the topography of her own life situation.<sup>17</sup>

New networks of the interconnections of body, works and other actions are created in situations in which a man as a lived body in the spontaneity of his or her actions finds himself or herself, whereby it is not causally predetermined, but they can be potentiated by the body schema as an open sphere of possibilities, as a beginning of a certain "play" of the new situation, as self-improvement, self-perfection or revival of the actions, or as a discovery of new possibilities. Of course, the opposite holds true as well, that certain situations can close themselves before us as incomprehensible or deficient, if we—due to various reasons—cannot take full advantage of their potential, or if disorders intervene in the structure of perception (as pointed out by M. Merleau-Ponty). Alienation, physical and psychic injuries, traumas, hygienic risks during pandemic but also fatigue, loss of sense for creativity,

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<sup>16</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes, London, New York: Routledge, 2012, pp. 108-109. "... the subject placed in front of his scissors, his needle, and his familiar tasks has no need to look for his hands or his fingers, for they are not objects to be found in objective space (like bones, muscles, and nerves), but rather powers that are already mobilized by the perception of the scissors or the needle, they are the center-point of the 'intentional threads' that link him to the given objects" (p. 108).

<sup>17</sup> In her book on the transformation of the textile medium in the 20th century, appropriately called "Hand's Mind", M. Danielová—following Gaston Bachelard—phenomenologically analyses the work of L. Bourgeois: "needle à *la main outillée* in her textile objects is not a simple technological mean", but it has a complex meaning of the labour, therapy, craft, medicine and transgression; it is a tool of her "phenomenological wish" to cope with her existence. Cf. Mária Danielová, *Mysl ruky*, pp. 67 and 68.

disgust, excess of impulses, and so on, likewise affect our bodily configuration in the situations or in lived experience, respectively, in fundamental ways.<sup>18</sup>

In the same way the child learns by touching itself—as pointed out by Hoffmann—so do peculiar bodily configurations open themselves to an adult by means of possibilities of a hand. Together with Husserl’s C manuscripts we can refer to passages in *Ideas II*:

Man, in his movements, in his action, in his speaking and writing, etc. is not a mere connection of linking up of one thing, called a soul, with another thing, the Body. The Body is, as Body, filled with the soul through and through. Each movement of the Body is full of soul, the coming and going, the standing and sitting, the walking and dancing, etc. Likewise, so is every human performance, every human production.

Each work, each product, each action expresses an activity and is characterized as work, as act: one sees how the cigar is rolled, one discovers therein the expression of a manipulation and, on the other hand, the “visible” aim. The handwriting, each stroke in it, its “*ductus*,” bears the stamp of the operative spirit. In short, products and works are again psycho-physical unities, they have their physical and their spiritual aspects, they are physical things that are “animated.”<sup>19</sup>

Corporeality thus manifests itself in various ways in its expressive aspect. The tool and, subsequently, the creation, become part of this expression. Precisely the experience of touch as a starting point of interpretation, as pointed out by Matthew Ratcliff, allows us to understand the perception in the context of intertwining of the man’s being in the world, since it allows us to grasp how both man and world are interlinked and constitutively close.<sup>20</sup> The body is here an original organ, or “the original object (*Urobjekt*) with expression and as participating in all expression,”<sup>21</sup> respectively. The movements of the body, the tactile experiences, the work of the hand which we follow here especially closely, express the connection of the man and

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Natalie Depraz, “Phenomenology of the Hand” in Radman (ed.), *The Hand, an Organ of the Mind*, p. 196: “Stroke is not an *affleurement*, but a *façonnement*. Furthermore, contrary to Husserl’s and Merleau-Ponty’s sensitive neutral descriptions of the hands, Levinas’s and Sartre’s are clearly ‘eroticized’ and therefore ‘situated’: it is not an ‘I’ who touches by stroking an ‘other,’ but a ‘man’ who lightly touches or presses on the ‘desired woman,’ as Sartre expressively writes.”

<sup>19</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas II*, pp. 250 and 333.

<sup>20</sup> However, he also warns against overinterpretation of this point of view. Cf. Matthew Ratcliffe, “Touch and Situatedness,” in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 16(3), 2008; Matthew Ratcliffe, “Touch and the Sense of Reality,” p. 134.

<sup>21</sup> Hua-Mat VIII, p. 401.



the world as a peculiar commonality; they express the mutual acting upon, belonging and potentiating, which is opened up precisely thanks to the experience of touch.<sup>22</sup> In other words, it presents the movement of a man in the sphere of possibilities, which is a sphere formed by actions, works and gestures. This can be expressed more concretely in an anthropological perspective which we will follow in the next part of the text: it concerns coping with ourselves, our biological limitations as well as cultural possibilities, culminating in form of a meaningful, existential attitude.

### Juhani Pallasmaa: Hand and Creative Project

If the hand and the tactile experience is a good starting point for the interpretation of the interweaving of the man into the world and into intersubjective relationships, then this starting point is likewise appropriate when we look at the process of creation itself. We want to follow this point of view also in order to find possibilities of the potentiating of the hand, either in form of cultivation or in form of interconnection into lived experience. Concerning modalities of particular behaviour opened by hand and touch we can follow up with Juhani Pallasmaa's conception presented in his works *The Eyes of the Skin* (2012) and *The Thinking Hand* (2009). For us his effort is in line with the starting points of potentiality and corporeality as presented in the previous part of our text, implicitly and explicitly inspired by phenomenology and devoted to the first-person perspective. It is based on restoration of the importance of work of hand in the creative process of architect, artist, craftsman, as well as the attentiveness and appropriation to "hand matters" which we are losing in our practical as well as in theoretical approach because of technical, virtual surplus in our life, mass production, tendency to objectify what is perceived as well as to objectify our own body, to see the matters of human being in third person perspective. Taking up the examples of craft and artistic activity which arise from manual activity, Pallasmaa emphasizes genuine connection between hand, eye and mind. Creative activity is based on training, improvement of skill, condition of the hand, its physiological state (*körperliche Leiblichkeit*), as well as on spontaneity, trying and mental possibilities (*leiblich-seelische*). Examples from the beginning of our text like children's first experiences of touching and perceiving, or blind children with

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<sup>22</sup> "The possibility of these kinds of contact is inextricable from the possibility of meaningful activity, from having any kind of practical project, and thus from any sense of participation in the world. Together they comprise a sense of connectedness and communion that is far richer and more diverse than what might be achieved through abstract perception of force." Matthew Ratcliffe, "Touch and the Sense of Reality," p. 150.

their experiences of small sculptural objects, represent for us exemplary leading clues into the field of perception and action offered by our hands which entangles us in the world and opens for us new situations and corporeal configurations. In other words, it constitutes our approach to the world as well as to our own self.

Moreover, in a creative attitude of artist or in flux of play, not everything is subordinated only to purposive ability, but it often takes a step away in favour of free sketching by hand or trying; hand gives way to material, playing an instrument gives way to rhythm and melody, capturing shapes gives way to the object itself or the depicted landscape. The creative work of the artist or craftsman also includes invention, uncertainty of the result, experiment, lived experience, which make the project an open activity. This open action contains certain paradoxes. The frivolity of the experiments and improvisation are sometimes more effective than thought-through following of and submission to a purpose. In the anthropology of an actor, Helmuth Plessner mentions another aspect belonging to the creative process, referring to Max Liebermann—“Zeichen ist Weglassen.” During the performance of the play the issue is not a submission to the rules or copying but one’s own individual mastery of the role and gesture.<sup>23</sup> Further, Pallasmaa agrees with David Pye, who stresses the craftsmanship with risk in contrast to craftsmanship with certainty, when the result leads and to some extent is beyond the craftsman’s control. “All the works of men which have been most admired since the beginning of our history have been made by the workmanship at risk, the last three or four generations only excepted.”<sup>24</sup> We could also say, that craftsmanship and skill return us to the original experiences, to pre-scientific world of everyday experience from which new, innovative, theoretical (science) and practical realizations of a man developed (for example, construction of ships). We can refer here to Husserl’s *Krisis*, whereby he in these experiences sees a possibility of revival or reactivation of sense; thereby a way out of dead ends or crisis of science.<sup>25</sup> Closely linked to technical skills is a determination to meet new challenges, hope, but also ethics of

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<sup>23</sup> Helmuth Plessner, “Zur Anthropologie des Schauspielers” (GW VII), in *Ausdruck und menschliche Natur*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2016, p. 416.

<sup>24</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, *Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*, New York: Wiley, 2009, p. 72.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hua VI, annex III., where the existential structure is referenced, the corporeality, the presence of things in practical context, where “it is clear that in the life of practical needs certain particularizations of shape stood out and that a technical praxis always [aimed at] the production of particular preferred shapes and the improvement of them (...) Measuring belongs to every culture. (...) We can always presuppose (...) the art of design for buildings, of surveying fields, pathways, etc.” Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Hua VI), trans. D. Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, [1938] 1970, pp. 375f.

the tool with which a craftsman never loses a personal contact. Therefore Pallasmaa draws attention of the architecture students to the necessity to draw by hand (as opposed to working with computer), to the particular experience with various materials (in contrast to distancing of an architect from the production or from the natural materials), and he also mentions the saying of Tapio Wirkkala, that one must have “ ‘eyes at the fingertips’ referring to the subtlety and the precision of the tactile sense of the hand.”<sup>26</sup>

If in phenomenological perspective we have seen an emphasis on the practical possibility and openness of corporeal situation, in the case of Pallasmaa we find in the work of a craftsman/architect a connection to complex of existential possibilities rather than predominance of theory. Together with T. S. Eliot he rather asks: “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, he draws attention, first, to *embodied knowledge*, which is different from conscious activity or conscious attention. Artistic work comes into tension with verbalization, theory, language. It is the embodied knowledge that can solve other contradictory tensions, too: functionality—liberation from function, learning—un-learning, because forgetting is as necessary as remembering at a certain stage of creation. “The moment of looking at the world or at a specific task as if neither had been encountered before, *that* is the creative instant of mind.”<sup>28</sup> By handling some activity or by iteratively repeating activities we also occur in special corporeal situation. By swimming, learning to ski, dancing etc. conscious attention or knowledge step back into the background. If we think about the activity we are performing, we disturb the activity, even with the risk of falling or stopping. In craft activities, such as crochet, hands precede conscious attention, they work faster than eyes and independently. A certain body memory arises when an artist draws or sketches; a memory of the hand or the muscles which manifests itself in expression. Pallasmaa calls this touch drawing (elsewhere he speaks of sensual or embodied thinking) and we can contrast this approach to computer drawing. The issue is not only the mechanicality, but that repeated training of the hand becomes habitual, it makes this action more precise and allows one to confront oneself with his or her possibilities, error,

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<sup>26</sup> As well as the “end of a paintbrush” according to Randall Jarrell; cf. Juhani Pallasmaa, *Thinking Hand*, pp. 54 and 83. Pallasmaa is critical with regard to currently used materials: “Scaleless sheets of glass, enamelled metals and synthetic plastics—tend to present their unyielding surfaces to the eye without conveying their material essence or age.” Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin. Architecture and the Senses*, 3rd Edition, New York: Wiley, 2012, p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, *Thinking Hand*, p. 141.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143. Iterative return to beginning is often present in Husserl’s work, too, since it concerns the phenomenological method itself, and also concern the thinking about the meaning of the phenomenology itself.

deficiencies, uncertainty, which is manifested either on the side of an author and his or her perception (touching of the object, world) and on the side of the work and exploration of the new possibilities of depiction.

The second aspect pointed out by Pallasmaa is the so-called *tacit knowledge*,<sup>29</sup> which represents a silent dialogue, a silent communication taking place in the creative process which leads to a unique configuration of the work of art or artefact. It is a communication with a tradition that has been sedimented, for example, in craft, communication between the work and the audience or product and user (the work is created for and through others, Sartre; the work is part of cooperation, discourse and in some extent, work overlaps the author himself—wisdom of knowledge by Kundera), and then there is communication between the poem/novel and reader, building and dweller. Another level of this relationship is formed by the material and the craftsman as well as a creator and his or her field. To put this more precisely, if we speak of communication in tacit knowledge, this notion of communication still points to processes of grasping, but here we should more appropriately speak of consonance or responsiveness.

The creative process carries within itself the potentialities for the realization of the project, as well as risks of failure. Here is a space for a possible input of critical phenomenology as thinking about the particular experience of subjectivity, its situations of crisis and renewal, or regaining of the sense of creation and life. This is also a space for restoration of material and manual experiences.<sup>30</sup> It is a paradox that the move towards craftsmanship, the return to the manual actions and rudimentary technologies, which we can see in artistic projects of 20<sup>th</sup> century in various regions, allows one to effectively work with alienation and social situation or role. To Maria Bartuszová—whose work was limited by Communist regime in former Czechoslovakia, inconspicuous and until now not fully appreciated, what reflects also the situation of artist–woman–mother — we have linked the work of Louise Bourgeois, whose starting point was poor female labour during restoration of tapestries. Mária Danielová in her

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. detailed description with appropriate examples in Juhani Pallasmaa, *Thinking Hand*, pp. 145–146. We can mention here a cooperation between Gaston Bachelard and Albert Flocon which offers insights into work of engraving as a resistance of matter on the one hand and discovering the basis of world on the other, as “the ideal form of the story without words, the distilled story. And it is because the engraving ‘tells’ nothing that it obliges you, the musing spectator, to do the talking.” Gaston Bachelard, *The Right to Dream*, trans. J. A. Underwood, New York: Orion, 1971, p. 83. Concerning this fruitful cooperation cf. analyses in Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, “Gaston Bachelard and the Hands of Albert Flocon,” in *Revista de Humanidades de Valparaíso*, 4(8), 2016, pp. 205–221.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Delia Popa, Iaan Reynolds, “Critical Phenomenology and Phenomenological Critique,” in *Studia UBB. Philosophia*, 66(1), 2021, pp. 12f.

analysis legitimately brings in this context the work of Constatin Brâncuși, too, who switches not only materials (plaster or clay is substituted by wooden beams) but also tools (spatula and sculptural stand are substituted for an axe); he thus switches his position as an academic sculptor for the action which reminds one more of a woodcarver.<sup>31</sup> This transformation affects the studio, too, which becomes a workshop (or a playroom as it is by Bartuszová). The tension and contradiction between craft and art production which arises in the history is here turned over into new form of cooperation and support in such a sense that where art distances itself from the reality in unconvincing experiments it is the craftsmanship that can mean a return to authenticity of the material, tool and experience itself.<sup>32</sup> Such a process is thus an effort at “reparation” with regard to both the object and the tool, which is no longer only reduced to a form of a mean but becomes a hand with the tool. This is linked to the effort to cope with one’s own existential feelings, danger and one’s own being. Concerning the phenomenology of the hand, Natalie Depraz speaks of its therapeutic possibility, the deepening of feeling and attention during “handing” interaction, of self-cultivation of the “intrasubjective phenomenology of the hand” which is directed towards care of the self and care of the others.<sup>33</sup> This is reflected in cases of works and creations produced by the handiwork, either in art, architecture or crafts, when they can affect the quality of life, the depth of experience, or transfer the existential knowing and values.

## Conclusion

We have opened the question of relevance of phenomenology as a question of approach to the body in special case of hand and touch, and as such it casts light on open situation as existential, practical, creative, playful one. Hand matters and hand activities entangle us into the world and into relations with things, tools and other people in original way. They also become a leading clue for the anthropologically significant actions in field of technology and art arising in the cultural history.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Mária Danielová, *Mysl ruky*, p. 69: Danielová quotes Moholy-Nagy from his text from *Material to Architecture*: “He, an educated academic sculptor—as a primitive, a Negro woodcarver.” (Quoted in Czech in Danielová’s *Mysl ruky*).

<sup>32</sup> Mária Danielová, *Mysl ruky*, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Natalie Depraz, “Phenomenology of the Hand,” pp. 197-200. Cf. Juhani Pallasmaa, *Thinking Hand*, p. 104: “Pleasurable objects and buildings mediate an experience of the processes by which the object or structure was made; in a way, they invite the viewer/user to touch the hand of the maker.”

This does not mean, however, that it cannot appear in inappropriate or limited forms. Hands may be—and often are—subject to a tendency to manipulate or destroy. The tendency of alienation can lead to objectification and instrumentalization which miss the lived potential of experience in the favour of impersonal or alienated one, subordinated to labour, economic relations and articulated in technical or artificial body-image.<sup>34</sup> But on the basis of experience and lived body connected to hand work we can see its potentiality not as originally derived from the outer (socially construed) or causal-physiological phenomena. We mentioned thus examples of sculptors and architects vis-à-vis their existential and creative situation struggling with them and creating own artistic attitude on the base of lived experience of hand creation. This we find not only as phenomenologically close, even significant.

In other words, the dominance of visuality, technology, dismissing of body in the creative process is here seen not as social critique but—through Pallasmaa’s texts—in a deeper sense in the overall existential situation of a man and his life attitude anchored in the tactile experience. The return to the crafts and handiworks can help us to revive and strengthen this sensual situatedness. It thus concerns the relation to one’s own corporeality and possibilities of hand which is analyzed in phenomenological perspective. Based on that, we can draw two intertwined conclusions. There is an significant mutual relationship which takes place in the experience: by my situatedness in the world and by my corporeal situation, through creative activity I attune myself to the world and sense the world, and the world provides this creative effort with a significance, an “aura”.<sup>35</sup> At the same time art, craft activities open an important creative realm for human development—Pallasmaa also speaks about the preservation, protection—of a true and independent experience.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> N. Depraz warns us not to “neglect the importance of aesthetic and ethical contemplation, either of Nature or of persons.” Natalie Depraz, “Phenomenology of the Hand,” p. 188.

<sup>35</sup> This is elaborated in several contexts, including tactile experience and work of hand, in Pallasmaa’s texts: *The Eyes of the Skin*, pp. 13 and 69. Cf. *Thinking Hand*, p. 104. R. Karul, in several texts, develops the notion of aesthetic experience as its continuation in ordinary life, in common perception. “The aesthetic act does not necessarily end with the creation of a work; it ends, in general, with a new perception.” (Róbert Karul, “Baldine Saint Gironsová – znovuobjavenie estetického aktu” [Baldine Saint Girons – La redécouverte de l’acte esthétique], in *Ostium* 8(3), 2012), URL: <https://bit.ly/3w2khvo>.

<sup>36</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, *Thinking Hand*, p. 148.

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