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CONTACT/LESS THRESHOLDS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC CITY

Contactless technologies are now a familiar accomplice in our everyday lives, as we increasingly use contactless cards and devices to pay for goods and use transport. Many of us use these technologies with ease, and appreciate their speed and simplicity, merely requiring the confirmatory beep from the Point-of-Sale (POS) machine to know a transaction is complete.

The increasing absence of exchanging material currency, fumbling around for coins or pulling crumpled notes wedged in your wallet is made possible by Near-field-communication technology (NFC) whose roots date back to the 1980's when the logistics sector first adopted the humble barcode to track and trace goods circulating the globe (Thrift 2004: 184). With NFC, the card or contactless device, and the card reader can interact at a maximum distance of 4cm (SumUp 2025). It is this space of the almost touch where the two devices interact, without the requirement of contact. This 4cm is not an absent void but an activated space in which personal data is exchanged between various private stakeholders, forging a digital trace of the consumer's spending behaviours, across the borderless geography of the banking sector. Thus, in this negative space of contact, the 4cm reproduces a networked geography where systems of financial surveillance and performance emerge. This 4cm can be read as space of proximity, circulating the periphery of the body, and stirring the ways we move through urban terrains. It can therefore be interpreted as an architecture - an extension of the body that interacts with the physical infrastructure of contactless payments that now pepper our experience of the postmodern city.

Contactless technologies are part of a genealogy of the demise of physical tokens such as banknotes and coins. Since the emergence of the Visa and MasterCard in 1968 and the birth of the American Express credit card in 1971 (Graeber 2011: 368) the mediation of credit by corporate entities has dramatically reshaped the payments landscape, triggering the emergence of near "cashless society" or more euphemistically referred to as the "bank payments society" (Scott 2018). Privately issued digital money now occupies 90% of the UK's money supply, creating a complex credit industry mediated by payment companies and fintech firms. Creating new collaborations with entities such as Google, these firms accumulate accurate personal banking data of its users. This agglomeration of corporate and financial interest, alongside the rise of machine-learning and predictive analytics to form combined data sets, is contributing to increased financial surveillance (Scott 2018:154).

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, contactless technologies have exponentially grown in their adoption, desirable in their devotion to hygiene as notes and coins are seen to be festering sites of bacterial armageddon. For many, cash is now seen as a nuisance in comparison to sleek digital payments and our increasing lust for online shopping platforms requires evermore digital transactions. For others, cash still remains a vital budgeting tool, circulating around informal economies and for paying the gas meter. Contactless technologies exacerbate class divides alongside those who can afford to engage, and those who can't, and exclude those who are more at risk of digital isolation As many high streets, particularly those far from urban centres and bank branches close across the UK, the movement and accounting of our money relies fastidiously on online banking and digital exchange. Yet our affinity with digital payments is redrawing the map in the way in which money circulates in the economy. Cash on the other hand is largely anonymous, a rebellious relic against the Fintech industry who strive for money to be digitised and therefore accounted for (Scott 2022: 105).

I dissect the term *Contact/less* to deem this phenomenon of contactless payments and adjacent technologies as both a tactic of exerting power through the ways that we pay, and as a way to manage contact - how it reconditions how we touch by managing distance, and redefining what is close. It questions how our bodies intertwine and shape how we pay - whether that's with a smile beamed at our mobile phones, or the vascular map of our palms through infrared scanning. This dual tactic of disciplining the way we perceive and engage with the economy through digitised money exists on multiple layers. Materially in the ways we pay, psychologically in the ways we relate to money and how we make purchases, and sensorially in how the erosion of physical currency is recalibrating the way we enact 'contact'. Beyond the granularity of the 4cm, I see Contact/less as contributing to the multitude of ways our built environment is becoming increasingly automated, and in turn an extractive tool for big tech and financial institutions. Contactless technologies are one small link within the chain of technological interventions into the built environment that presents itself as a natural progression, but is a calculated instrument for greater control, across

financial, environmental and governmental motivations. Beyond its economic pull, I am interested how Contact/less manifests in a spatial management of touch, and how amongst understandings of both architectural and intangible financial infrastructures, Contact/less narrates a more tender understanding of its manifestation within the urban milieu.

This essay narrates Contact/less through short vignettes - firstly as a provocation to our sensory notions of touch, then Contact/less in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and finally as a way to read the urban geography of Canary Wharf in London through psychogeographical imaginings of a Contact/less walking practice. Canary Wharf is chosen for its significance as London's major financial district which presents itself as a pseudo-public space, which is in fact a highly securitised privately owned land (Shenker 2017). When reflecting on the intimate links between capitalism, financialisation and architecture, Canary Wharf's fervent redevelopment epitomises the neoliberal dream of individualism, condensed into a hunger for profit-seeking real estate (Stevens 2020). As Contact/less has been mobilised as a spatial tool for the mass digitalisation of the banking sector, Canary Wharf, with its proximity to major banks and fintech firms, can be read as a perfect accomplice in its spatial strategies of separation, efficiency and smoothness, and where we might read Contct/less with a particular lucidity.

The Veil: Conceptions of Touch from Art to Technology

In the reading room of the Wellcome Collection in London there is a particular painting in muted colours by Lucas Franchoys II, dated somewhere between 1600-1699. The description of the painting states:

> ″This work is an allegory representing the sense of touch, one of the five senses. This is illustrated in the painting by the pain experienced by the man removing a plaster from his arm.″. (Wellcome Collection 2025).

It is evident by the unnamed man's wincing face that this is an expression of touch that departs from its gentle associations of love and caress. It states its allegorical function as attempting to visually represent touch. This indicates some moral underpinning must be at play to have determined the representation of touch to be synonymous with the painful ripping off of a plaster and pulling on one′s skin, reckoning with how the existence of pleasure is not without the consequences of physical and spiritual pain. When we conjure up visions of touch, it might feel like the soft grace of affection or bodies embracing and twisting in pleasure. The concept of touch enthralls as it contains many contradictions - veering from love and tenderness into terror. In a world where bodies are subjected to the penetrating violence of racism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism and sexism - one shouldn't assume an understanding of touch merely sits within the definition of the genteel caress.



FIGURE 1
'A man removing a plaster; representing the sense of touch'. Oil Painting by Lucas Franchoys II. Source: Wellcome Collection. Reproduced with permission from Wellcome Collection.

Where touch has no stable definition, it instead converges at sensuality, affection, communication and revulses at violence. In the sensory hierarchy, philosophers have torn the five senses of touch, sight, smell, hearing and taste apart, often privileging sight as the ultimate guide of truth and evidence, whereas touch has often been contested and sidelined for its shaky rationale. Even across Karl Marx's writings, he oscillated between the need for heightened sensory readings of worker's conditions under industrial capitalism, to scientific rationality, favouring sight as the utmost empirical method of sensory inquiry (Howes 2003). Touch is frowned upon for its indeterminacy, ungraspable by language or sentiment. But it is also fertile ground for poetic wanderings and flourishes of feeling, rendering it ever more abstruse. Theorist Michele Serres reads the history of the senses through the capitalist sensorium, which has been ruptured by abstraction. Serres declares:

> "Many philosophies refer to sight, few to hearing; fewer still place their trust in the tactile, or olfactory. Abstraction divides up

> the sentient body, eliminates taste, smell and touch, retains only sight and hearing, intuition and understanding. To abstract means to tear the body to pieces rather than merely to leave it behind". (Serres 2008: 26)

Reconstructing the hierarchy, touch is deemed the 'veil', emulating the skin as sensuous drapery over the body. Serres repositions touch as a sense that extends beyond the epidermal limits of the skin; there is always an excess in touch, yet 'there is no word corresponding to touch to designate the untouchable or intangible, as there is for the invisible which is present in, or absent from what is seen, complementary to it, although abstracted from it, and incarnated in its flesh' (Serres, 2008: 3). For Serres, there is an absent language of untouchability, and in this sense, we may think of Contact/less as a temporary placeholder for such a term, with the 4cm a threshold rendering visible the unstable and shifting conditions of our sensorial engagement with the world.

According to Laura Marks, touch in its isolation cannot be a distance sense, yet in tandem with vision helps us grasp distance (Marks 2000: 132). The senses thus engage collaboratively and touch requires the object and skin to come into contact, however with the addition of sight, visual-tactile perception aids us in forming an idea of the spatial dimensions of an object, and so the strict hierarchy of the senses conceptualised by philosophers becomes undermined when we see these processes working in tandem. When Italian physicist Allessandro Volta invented the electric battery in 1799, he believed that the discovery of electricity could aid our understanding of sensorial perception, and so experimented with hanging electric nodes off our sensory organs such as skin, to form a scientific analysis of our tactile functions, and gave rise to the study of haptics - the engineering of touch (Parisi 2018: 11).

Contact is therefore closely bound with technological progression and on reflecting on the rise of contactless payments, creates new performances of monetary exchange, which has always been performed through the gestures of mutual obligation (Gießmann 2018: 1261). Contactless payments and the mobilisation of the non-touch does not generate absence but reconfigures the necessity of contact for monetary exchange between two economic actors. In the management of the 4cm threshold, these gestures are reconfigured by the technological apparatus of Contact/less, troubling the position of the body in the everyday transaction and destabilising our ontological understandings of touch.

> 2m: Covid-19 and the recalculation of acceptable contact

On Wardour Street in London's Soho, are the remnants of a 'maintain a social distance' sign on the pavement, encased in a love heart that is now fractured, peeling from the friction of many feet stepping unsynchronised on the pavement. When we think of the social distancing measures we endured during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, we were all forced to learn a new genre of movement, and an entirely

new way of relating with each other, where our bodies didn't end at the fortress of our skin. Every surface morphed into a swarming petri dish and every audible cough was a sounding alarm. From doorknobs to people—everything was tinged with viral distrust, and yet, as the world withdrew into isolation, we were simultaneously thrust into a state of hyper-awareness of our individual and collective vulnerabilities. When this manifested as an expression of solidarity, it birthed a network of mutual aid projects expanding definitions of making and sustaining kin amongst our neighbours and in our communities. At worst, it disregarded care and protections for disabled folk and front-line workers, fueled anti-Asian racism and xenophobia (Kaplan 2023: 97) and revealed the inadequacies of our overcrowded and skeletal housing stock. Capitalism was under a microscope, but instead of imploding under the pressure, it magnified, emerging clad in shining armor.

Social distancing was asymmetrically experienced and a privilege to those without caring responsibilities and non-front line workers. In the UK, the rhetoric around maintaining a 'safe' distance of 2m re-calibrated our collective movements in public space yet without the human eye having accurate depth perception, this was often arbitrarily upheld. The shifting metric of what was deemed a 'safe' distance from others, from 2m to then 1m, compelled us towards abstraction. In the UK Government's report on the 2m rule, they outlined the inconsistencies between the global response. Singapore, France and Italy recommended 1m, South Korea 1-2m, Germany, Australia and the Netherlands declared 1.5m. In the UK's relaxing of the 2m rule, it stated that where possible it should be maintained but that 'reducing from 2m to 1m would allow more people to return to work and increase business capacity. With a 2m rule in place, it is not financially viable for many businesses to operate' (HM Government 2020). Now reflecting on these measures, there is a dystopianism to the metrics of public health that can be measured and managed by this oscillating and arbitrary distance between bodies, yet overridden by the prioritisation of the spectral 'economy'. The 2m operated much like the 4cm, creating an invisible but salient threshold.

Covid-19 and the resulting paranoia about hygiene and the minimisation of contact, paved a new path for contactless technologies to exponentially grow—as if the pandemic gave it permission to flourish in cities around the world. Many of us over relied on the convenience of Amazon packages, delivering essential goods and providing a conveyor belt of objects to provide essential goods and entertain us, whilst maintaining a critical distance at the doorstep. Yet for Amazon warehouse workers, who are already subjected to a myriad of invasive surveillance tactics that aim to squeeze every drop of productivity out of a humble human worker, 'Distance Assistant' was introduced to manage the 2m rule. In a new layer of the Amazon-panopticon complex, 'Distance Assistant' was an open-source, AI operating system inspired by radar traffic cameras (Global Union 2021: 8). As workers moved around the warehouse, their movements were meticulously tracked. When they passed a television screen, which Amazon eerily termed a 'magic mirror', it revealed if workers were maintaining social

distance rules. As they walked, a green circle around their bodies would appear if they were maintaining 2m or more. If this distance was breached this would turn to red. Deemed more of a public relations strategy than a policy to protect workers' health, Distance Assistant was a technological plaster over a systemic wound—what workers wanted was fair wages, healthy working conditions and sick pay.

Yet, this fastidious management of touch reveals the profitability of adopting these technologies in a moment of global vulnerability, which Naomi Klein refers to as the 'Screen New Deal' (Klein 2020). Klein describes how 'far more high-tech than anything we have seen during previous disasters, the future that is being rushed into being as the bodies still pile up treats our past weeks of physical isolation not as a painful necessity to save lives, but as a living laboratory for a permanent—and highly profitable—no-touch future' (Ibid).

This framing of the pandemic as a temporal and spatial laboratory to experiment with how technology could seep further in the management and control of everyday life was echoed by many theorists who delved into either apocalyptic or deeply hopeful musings as to whether social distancing would alter human psychology forever. Paul. B. Preciado, recalls the intense assurance of waking up in the pandemic, feeling:

> everything will forever retain the new shape that things had taken. From now on, we would have access to ever more excessive forms of digital consumption, but our bodies, our physical organisms, would be deprived of all contact and of all vitality. The mutation would manifest as a crystallization of organic life, as a digitization of work and consumption and as a dematerialization of desire. (Preciado 2020)

This fascination with these new definitions of collective and rhythmic human behaviour created an expansive definition of the crowd. João Pedro Cachopo refers to the pandemic as the first truly global crowd, influenced by Elias Canettie's understanding of how crowds act as the reversal of the fear of contact, a liberation from the reluctance to touch and be in closeness with others (Cachopo 2022: 74). Although the pandemic forced us to live as a distanced chorus, it did so through being intimately bound by a digital revolution that has disrupted our senses which tether us to the world, with Cachopo claiming 'the pandemic has shaken up the foundations on which the imagination of the distant and the close rests' (Capocho 2022: 57). It is this destabilisation of the close and distant that has allowed Contact/less to swell in the pandemic, expanding its subtle but forceful disciplining on our collective movements.

Tracing the Minotaur(s) of Canary Wharf A Contact/less dérive in post-pandemic London

Canary Wharf in East London's financial centre straddles the Thames, and boasts a flotilla of shiny skyscrapers. It has been designed for office workers and so its rhythms are mandated by the commute, and the weekends descend into a lull, with a scattering of chain restaurants and high-end bars to delight its residents and a muttering of tourists. Canary Wharf was

a strategic site of the British Empire, and fragments of its violent past are still etched in the landscape, with gratitudes to slave-owners carved into stone plaques around the Docklands. Its name remains after the large cargo warehouse on West India Quays storing produce from the Caribbean and in use until the 1960s. It's also an area that has experienced ferocious urban development through Margaret Thatcher's regeneration plan of the Docklands during the 1980s, which became the physical incarnation of her commitment to market expansion. As financial markets were de-regulated, financial services exponentially increased in Britain, and with it an appetite for property development and corporate architecture to host new technological infrastructures, electronic trading floors and complex financial instruments. This was made possible by Thatcher's government passing through parliament the creation of an Urban Development Corporation, a non-governmental organisation and unelected body, enshrined with powers to undemocratically buy, sell and redevelop land in Docklands. Through the use of planning law and compulsory purchasing powers, vast patches of public-sector land could be forcibly bought and merged to create large areas of privatised land with an insatiable speed and efficiency (Minton 2012: 10).

Where the Docklands has previously been a thriving working class community of dockworkers, after the collapse of industrialisation, Thatcher relegated the areas to a marshy wasteland, justified by its poverty-stricken image and a narrative that the wealth generated by the new Canary Wharf development would 'trickle down' into the surrounding communities (Minton 2012: 9). Yet, decades on from this zealous vision, Canary Wharf is instead a "segregated and disconnected patchwork" (Minton 2012: 8) where there is little evidence of any wealth distributed to the very communities these luxury high-rises and gated communities have displaced, instead expanding out and forcing housing prices up exponentially.

On a recent visit to Canary Wharf, I arrived early to a meeting and to pass the time began to walk, in the fashion of a dérive—a wander without a destination. It was the Situationists, a revolutionary collective, who conceived of this rebellious act of walking to counter the monotony of the spaces we inhabit under capitalism, and forge a playful exchange with the city (McDonough 2010: 46). Taking inspiration from how the dérive resists the compulsion to move through the city to get from A to B, a greater attention can be placed on how the body moves through and comes into contact with others. London exemplifies Contact/less as an urban phenomenon, as the forces of gentrification and financialisation have taken a ferocious hold on the city, along with its aesthetic commitment to sleekness, particularly in business districts like Canary Wharf. Tracing Contact/less in urban environments reveals itself through small interventions. These take the form of different touchless technologies that mobilise sensors or invisibilised infrastructures, that claim to reduce the spreading of bacteria and offer speed and efficiency. On this walk around Canary Wharf at crisp, March twilight, I narrate the ways I see Contact/less emerging in everyday interactions.

Gliding up the escalators at Canary Wharf station, you are instantly hit by the abundance of glass cladded onto a forest of towers. Some follow the tradition of standing straight and tall, whilst others convulse with knotted spines. I walk out of the station and cross a bridge with two automated gates that allow cars to pass into an underground carpark. At the crossing are 'touch-free' pedestrian buttons which are now littered around Canary Wharf. There is still a button to press intentionally with your index finger but now there is a Contact/less option where you can wave your hand a few centimeters to activate the waiting function. I try to hover my hand intentionally at 4cm, which feels strange without the confirmation of the smooth rounded button brushing onto the tip of my finger, a sort-of sensory dissatisfaction that contactless technologies can stir, a longing for the confirmation of skin brushing against a surface.

After I cross the bridge I am confronted with an Amazon Fresh store, and some baffled visitors attempting to navigate the front gates. I enter to grab a drink, using my physical credit card to tap in, and paying by tapping out as I exit. I use my phone to scan a QR code on a sign that reads 'scan for deals' that takes you to a web page that is slow to load. The shelves are near-barren at 4:52pm after the rush of lunch-hour.

I walk along the wooden walkway which slithers alongside the waterfront. To my right a couple enjoy a ride on a self-driving boat. In front is a sign that reads 'security patrol dogs may operate in this area', and there are constant reminders to keep dogs on a lead. I notice a group ahead on the wooden pathway arranging battery-powered candles in a crescent moon, and a series of standing letters that read 'M-a-r-r-y M-e'. It doesn't look like a spontaneous proposal, but the re-creation of an intimate scene observed by an audience of tall buildings and strangers, destined for the square frame of an instagram post.

Along the path sits a bronze sculpture of a Minotaur and a Hare, sitting slightly slouched and human-like on a bench, and double the scale of the empty seat next to them. At the bottom is a QR code. I open my phone, holding its gaze until the yellow box floats above directing me to information about artist Sophie Ryder, and the Canary Wharf Group's strategy for creating the largest outside sculpture trail in London (Canary Wharf Group, 2022).

The Minotaur—an ancient Greek mythical chimera, with the body of a man and head of a Bull, was allegedly imprisoned in an underground labyrinth in Crete. The Bull's face is reminiscent of the Raging Bull, also a statue of bronze found in New York's

Wall Street, but that bull is ready to charge and epitomises an American ferocity in the belief in the market. The Canary Wharf Minotaur wraps his arms around the Hare, a nod to the English pastoral, the Minotaur defying his instinctive violence, instead depicted as affectionate and protective.

Further on, I come to a series of boards that sever the road from a construction site and conceal a square of bare land, littered with lonely picnic benches. The boards have been designed by another artist and titled 'Graphic Rewilding', depicting acid flowers in an attempt to scatter vibrant motifs over the concrete from the construction site screeching in the background. As the boards continue, the visuals turn into faux graffiti - a tired emblem of Canary Wharf's lacking cultural capital and cool, along with AI-generated New York Street signs to resemble new roads constructed, only in the imagination of its corporate architects.

The sun is setting and at precisely 5:07pm, automated lights punctuate the wooden pathway with a luminous glow. I walk back towards my initial destination and find two security guards chatting to the group arranging the engagement scene. I overhear them explain how the pathway needs to be kept clear for pedestrians. Understandably yet markedly disappointed, the group begins picking up the lights as if the director has called cut, and the curtains are drawn...

If Contact/less was to strengthen its grip on our urban infrastructure, then I can only speculate that Canary Wharf would be a perfect companion to its expansion. Even on this short walk, I could identify multiple technologies such as QR codes and touchless buttons, both contactless and otherwise, that generate a specific feeling and utility—one of speed, convenience and detachment. Regenerated areas such as Canary Wharf are perceived as 'public' land, but are instead replaced by a matrix of security systems with rules that do not apply to other areas of the city (Minton 2012: 4). Dictative signage and private security guards redefine the rules of acceptable behavior and which shapes the psychological experience of being 'in public' where one's convivial celebrations, such as that of marking an engagement, having to be dispersed to clear the walkway for other pedestrians. The sterility of the Canary Wharf living experience has been constructed to serve those who want to move through a space efficiently, not have to touch the grimy pedestrian crossing and who can glide up to their apartment in a glossy high-rise and order Deliveroo from the local restaurant. Canary Wharf like many other global commercial centres are therefore shrines to efficiency and yearn for perfection, and where Contactless/less is rendered compatible with these desires. René Boer describes this as this wider condition as the 'smooth city'—an effervescent desire to smooth over, and smother the accidental and chaotic parts of the city which give it life (Boer 2023:10). This smoothness is asymmetrically assigned, given

precedence in the commercial centres over working class neighbourhoods, and its effects experienced by populations are also highly situated and culturally prescribed. Within these smooth centres, are sets of rules that are unwritten, which mould behavior to conform and consume according to the language of the built environment. By re-enacting the behaviours of others, and through my own wanderings, I see how these Contact/less choreographies reveal itself in individuated movements and demonstrated through its matrix of security systems. As Boer rightly states, it's important not to lean into the privileged romanticisation of poverty and decay but in the Contact/less fantasy of distanced efficiency, a yearning for a contact that is messy and unpredictable can be read as a remedy to the smooth and slick fantasy (Boer 2023: 17). In the context of Canary Wharf, which exemplifies the extremes of hyper-capitalist development of the built environment, smoothness is a way to insulate and distance itself as a space of exceptionalism.

Yet as Canary Wharf became popularised in the 1990s as the preferred site for banks and financial institutions due to its technological infrastructure and opportunities to expand, there is an irony in that in recent years, many institutions including HSBC have relocated back to The City, London's historic financial centre (Kollewe 2023). Since 2019 and the Covid-19 pandemic, global trends in office working have radically altered, with remote working and increasing interest rates determined as key factors in lower office occupancy, and rapidly decreasing commercial real estate prices (Garikparthi et al. 2024). In this new era of digitally-mediated working cultures, contact in the workplace, which was once a marker of collaboration and entrepreneurism is being threatened, which results in commercial centres like Canary Wharf to never quite achieve the sense of bustling, creative energy that is promised in real-estate brochures. We might therefore question the idea of the smooth centre, or the Contact/less fantasy to be one which never truly enraptures, even the global corporate elite.

Conclusion

As defined, Contact/less does not just operate at the border of the skin, but creates a space of extension, a periphery invisible yet always present. Contact/less translates this micro-space of the 4cm of exchange as a critical space which alters the classical hierarchy of the senses, where touch isn't just relegated, it is rendered invisible in the transaction. This reimagines the seemingly mundane gesture of a contactless transaction, as a politics of touch and proximity that is being constantly prescribed by our experiences of the built environment. The ontological dilemma of touch at a distance is not unique to the condition of Contact/less but it does provide a micro-space of analysis in Near-Field Communication, a lens in which to analyse the shifting choreographies of the complex networks of exchange in our cities. Contact/less is thus a condition that both translates the distancing of touch that has been shaped by the capitalist sensorium, and the impulse of capital to intimately circulate the body as contactless technologies continue to grow in its adoption.

After lockdown, there was some sense that the mold

of social distancing might remain tethered to our interactions, but like elastic, we have largely sprung back into position. Yet, one thing that has remained is our growing reliance on contactless technologies as a mediator between flesh and screen. In a world still bearing the scars of a pandemic that forced a distinct type of being and moving through the world, a more aggressive form of the Contact/less condition has emerged in cities across the globe. Drawing links between how Distance Assistant Technology disciplines and suppresses front-line Amazon warehouse workers, its sibling appears in my explorations of Canary Wharf in the form of an Amazon Fresh store, an ultra-surveillanced shopping experience for consumers which removes the physical dance between retail worker, the customer and the physical act of payment. This is merely one example of how in gentrified business districts such as Canary Wharf, Contact/less experiments through the embedding of technological aids are increasingly normalised in our urban environments. As Klein reminds us in her warnings against the 'Screen New Deal', there is therefore a conjunction with the way that big tech and finance has capitalised on contactless technologies (Klein 2020). Contact/less narrates a pattern of technology destabilising the way we move and feel through neighborhoods which favor smoothness, control and practices of self-surveillance (Boer 2023). It is here where Contact/less becomes a narrator to the very forces that seek to distance us, through dulling the experiences of friction and contact as we move, pay and feel around the world.

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Figure References

Figure 1: Franchoys II, L. (n.d.). A man removing a plaster; representing the sense of touch [Oil Painting]. Wellcome Collection. Reproduced with permission from Wellcome Collection.