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Richard Kearney wrote his doctoral dissertation under the direction of Paul Ricœur, successfully defending it in Paris in 1980. Over the four decades that have passed since then, Kearney's contributions to philosophy have been wide-ranging, covering areas as diverse as hermeneutics, ethics, politics, poetics, and the philosophy of religion. Such is the significance of those contributions that he now enjoys an international reputation as an important voice in multiple ongoing debates. Valuable studies have begun to emerge, in recent years, that clearly draw inspiration from one or other of Kearney's groundbreaking insights. *Richard Kearney's Anatheistic Wager* is a case in point. The editors, Chris Doude van Troostwijk and Matthew Clemente, propose that the wager of the book's title "opens the possibility of addressing theological questions in a nondoctrinal way."<sup>1</sup> *Debating Otherness with Richard Kearney: Perspectives from South Africa* is another example. Robert Vosloo, one of the contributors to that volume, argues that Kearney's carnal hermeneutics could be said to advance "the search for an adequate performative hermeneutic for dealing with painful but interwoven memories and histories."<sup>2</sup>

Kearney's stature is confirmed through the publication of *Imagination Now. A Richard Kearney Reader*, the main subject of this review essay. Its editor, Murray E. Littlejohn, describes Kearney's distinctive philosophical voice as "a voice of hope, advocating the imagination as the vehicle of change so needed to address the dark tendencies of our times."<sup>3</sup> Littlejohn hopes that readers new to Kearney's work will find that the selected texts provide a good introduction to a

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Doude van Troostwijk and Matthew Clemente (eds), *Richard Kearney's Anatheistic Wager. Philosophy, Theology, Poetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Daniël P. Veldsman and Yolande Steenkamp (eds), *Debating Otherness with Richard Kearney. Perspectives from South Africa* (Cape Town: AOSIS, 2018), 281.

<sup>3</sup> Murray E. Littlejohn (ed.), *Imagination Now. A Richard Kearney Reader* (London/New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), xiii.

wide-ranging thinker, and that long-standing readers will have a renewed appreciation of the way Kearney's insights "are amplified in their transpositions and multifaceted interplay across different domains."<sup>4</sup> If those hopes are realized, all of Kearney's readers will have the added benefit of a solid base on which to engage with the two works that have appeared in the past few months: *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*,<sup>5</sup> a work that Kearney co-authored with Melissa Fitzpatrick; and *Touch: Recovering our Most Vital Sense*,<sup>6</sup> Kearney's latest monograph. This essay will also discuss those more recent publications.

## Re-imagining Imagination

The title of the opening chapter is "Imagination Now. The Civilization of the Image (1988)." One way to approach it is to see it as an early example of Kearney's re-imagining imagination itself. However, before I comment on the chapter, I want to summarize the answer Kearney gave, during the above-mentioned conversation, when Littlejohn invited him to say what he understood the bond between phenomenology and hermeneutics to be. Kearney had just described himself as "a hermeneut" who has a foot in two camps: deconstruction and phenomenology. He further elaborated that the bond between phenomenology and hermeneutics can be understood in three stages: (1) proto-hermeneutic experience; (2) phenomenological bracketing; and (3) hermeneutical retrieval. Proto-hermeneutic experience is, he says, our natural condition. It does not involve any philosophical reflection, but it does involve interpretation: we always see things in terms of an "as-structure" and "fore-structure."<sup>7</sup> Following Heidegger, he gives the name "pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*)" to the way we grasp things at that first stage. When commenting on phenomenological bracketing, the second stage, Kearney notes that this methodological technique was developed by Edmund Husserl and is more commonly termed *epochē*. He explains that the assumption behind phenomenological bracketing is that we all impose our own prejudices, presuppositions, and projects onto the things we perceive, thereby blocking them from manifesting themselves to us. But phenomenological bracketing enables us to suspend all that we impose on what we see, allowing us to "enter a space where we can have a fresh experience of the pure 'thisness' and 'thereness' of things."<sup>8</sup> Kearney describes the third and final stage as one where hermeneutics is 'grafted' back onto phenomenology, a process that evinces his debt to Ricœur.<sup>9</sup> But why the need to proceed to that stage? As he clarifies, the point of revisiting the "as-structure" of our pre-philosophical understanding is to "recognize from the beginning, [that] all our experience is deeply mediated by our desires, our dreams, our heritages, our legacies—our imaginings!"<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, xxi-xxii.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Kearney and Melissa Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality. From Thought to Action* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Richard Kearney, *Touch: Recovering our Most Vital Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 321.

<sup>8</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 320.

<sup>9</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 321.

<sup>10</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 321.

It can be instructive to approach "Imagination Now. The Civilization of the Image (1988)" as an example of a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, which proceeds methodically through the above mentioned three stages. Let me begin by making some observations about the first stage, which as we have just seen is described as a type of experience, which does not involve the use of any philosophical methods, and where we see things in terms of an "as-structure" and "fore-structure." The young Kearney speaks, not only for himself, but also for an entire generation when he remarks: "The contemporary eye is no longer innocent. What we see is almost invariably informed by prefabricated images."<sup>11</sup> Disconcertingly, as he also observes, "[we] no longer appear to know who exactly produces or controls the images that condition our consciousness."<sup>12</sup> It does not matter, then, whether we are gazing at some natural landscape or whether it is a case of our most private thoughts, how we see things is something that has been colonized by the image industry.<sup>13</sup> None of that has been lost on the experimental writers, artists, and filmmakers of Kearney's generation. As Kearney observes, at the level of contemporary artistic culture, "there is a growing awareness that images have now replaced the 'original' realities they were traditionally meant to reflect."<sup>14</sup> Significantly, he does not claim to be able to fully escape that identifiably postmodern pre-understanding.

If the young Kearney had at least some things in common with the vanguard of postmodern culture, his postmodern sensibility was atypical in that he was also troubled by the following "four losses," said to be symptomatic of postmodernism: "the suspension of subjective inwardness, referential depth, historical time, and coherent human expression."<sup>15</sup> Another thing that would have marked him out as different was the way he distanced himself from postmodern culture's mocking tone.<sup>16</sup> Add to that his rejection of postmodern theory, "from Lacan and Lévi-Strauss to Barthes and Derrida,"<sup>17</sup> on the grounds that it posed a threat to the very notion of a creative human imagination, and you have a thinker who was clearly capable of maintaining a critical distance from his own image-dominated culture.

It is not insignificant that Kearney's reflection moves to the stage of phenomenological bracketing at the very moment that he underscores the threat of extinction that the imagination faces in a postmodern world. Here are the lines that mark the transition: "The story of imagination needs to be told. Like all species under threat of extinction, the imagination requires to be recorded in terms of its genealogy: its conceptual genesis and mutations."<sup>18</sup> As already noted, the phenomenological bracketing stage is meant to allow us step into "a space where we can have a fresh experience of the pure 'thisness' and 'thereness' of things."<sup>19</sup> Now on this occasion, the "thing" that Kearney wants to experience afresh is an entire family tree comprising different

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<sup>11</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 14-5.

<sup>18</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 320.

interpretations of the imagination, hence the talk of a genealogy. There are two things to note here. First, as is made clear in his text, the meanings of the imagination that he is about to entertain are the same as those listed in Ricœur's *From Text to Action*, more specifically the study, "Imagination in Discourse and in Action." I shall say more about that later. Second, there is a form of phenomenology—genetic phenomenology—which is perfectly suited to analyzing the way a concept changes over time, the connections among different forms, and so on. Kearney has already stated that he intends to record the conceptual genesis and mutations of the imagination, the only question to be answered now is: Whose model of genetic phenomenology will he adopt: Ricœur's, Heidegger's, or that of the later Husserl? All the indications are that he will follow the Heidegger whose position might be encapsulated by his resonant thought from §7 of *Being and Time*: "Higher than actuality stands possibility."<sup>20</sup>

It is evident, at the hermeneutical retrieval stage of Kearney's inquiry, that he is striving to reach beyond actual forms of imagination to a possible one. As already mentioned, the hermeneutical retrieval stage is where, following the stage of phenomenological bracketing, the researcher returns to the original "as-structure" and "fore-structure" of his own understanding, "'grafting' hermeneutics back onto phenomenology."<sup>21</sup> Towards the close of the chapter, Kearney offers a first glimpse of what he has in mind: "I propose the possibility of a postmodern imagination capable of preserving, through reinterpretation, the functions of narrative identity and creativity—or what we call a poetics of the possible."<sup>22</sup> That he should categorize the new form of imagination as postmodern should not come as a surprise. We already know something about the "as-structure" and "fore-structure" of his understanding of imagination prior to phenomenological bracketing. He shared the view with his postmodern contemporaries that the gaze of an entire generation had been colonized by the image industry. But there are further connections with postmodernism, which he does not mention until later in the chapter, notably his interest in the "postmodern deconstruction of the humanist subject and its pretensions to mastery."<sup>23</sup> Names that he associates with that deconstruction are the later Heidegger, Foucault, and of course Derrida. However, he explains that he is not interested in the deconstruction of the humanist subject for its own sake. It is, rather, the pedagogical potential of that deconstruction that has caught his attention. But who or what needs to be educated? Kearney would have had no hesitation in answering: my proposed postmodern imagination. And why does it need to be educated? Because it turns out that his postmodern imagination is to be an "ethical-poetical" one. But the thought seems to be that for a form of imagination to qualify as ethical-poetical, it cannot involve pretensions to mastery over others, hence the need for his possible imagination to be "schooled in the postmodern truth that the self cannot be 'centred' on itself."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 63.

<sup>21</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 321.

<sup>22</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 18.

<sup>23</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 19.

Kearney maintains that the purpose of a postmodern imagination is to “disclose how things might be.”<sup>25</sup> It is therefore required to do the following: (1) “follow in the wake of imagination”; (2) strive to “open us to the concrete needs of the other in the postmodern here and now”; and (3) endeavor to “explore how we might effectively engage in the transformation of our social existence.”<sup>26</sup> He then goes on to describe what is envisaged as “a practice of imagination,”<sup>27</sup> which “repudiates any cognitive model that dismisses morality, and by extension human rights and needs, as an ideological leftover from bygone days.”<sup>28</sup> With an eye to his postmodern legacy, he specifies that this new practice will be “capable of responding to the postmodern call of the other reaching toward us from the mediatized image.”<sup>29</sup>

I have been able to identify several headings under which “Imagination Now: The Civilization of the Image (1988)” represents an innovative and independent minded continuation of Ricœur’s legacy. They include the following: (1) the identification of four basic meanings of the imagination; and (2) the reference to some form of critique designed to facilitate the ethical functioning of imagination. With reference to (1) above, I have already mentioned Kearney’s textual acknowledgement of Ricœur’s “Imagination in Discourse and in Action” as one of the sources for Kearney’s four main uses of the term “imagination.” What I have yet to comment on is his response to Ricœur’s claim that those basic meanings are marked by a “radical equivocality,” which cannot be clarified at the level of theory.<sup>30</sup> Kearney rejects the claim of *radical* equivocality and looks instead for a middle ground: equivocality combined with “certain common features.” Without explicitly mentioning Ricœur, he notes that the concept of imagination is “equivocal,” open to multiple interpretations, but he insists that that does not mean that the various interpretations have nothing in common. He observes that the “pluralist notion of ‘family resemblance’ enables us to appreciate the equivocal nature of the concept of imagination while also acknowledging certain common features in its different versions and contexts.”<sup>31</sup> Then, drawing on ancient Greek and Medieval philosophy, he declares that “imagination lays claim to a certain analogical relation of unity through resemblance.”<sup>32</sup> His next step is to conduct the above-mentioned analysis of the conceptual genesis of imagination and its mutations. He is particularly interested in the way the concept of the imagination mutates over time, and he wants to show that there is now the *possibility* of a new mutation: the postmodern imagination, something I have already commented upon above.

With reference to (2) above, I have already noted that Kearney spoke about the need for a critique of the imagination, which was to take the form of the postmodern deconstruction of the humanist subject with its pretensions to mastery. Kearney’s proposal for a critique of the

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<sup>25</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 19.

<sup>28</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Ricœur, *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London: Continuum, 2008 [1991]), 166.

<sup>31</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, 8.

imagination clearly differs from the type of critical work that Ricœur had outlined in “Imagination in Discourse and in Action.” Here is Ricœur on the problem with “imaginative practices” and the urgency of subjecting them to critique:

The truth of our condition is that the analogical tie that makes every man my brother is accessible to us only through a certain number of *imaginative practices*, among them *ideology* and *Utopia*. These imaginative practices possess the general characteristics of defining themselves as mutually antagonistic and of being destined, each in its turn, for a specific type of pathology rendering its positive function unrecognizable: this positive function is its contribution to the analogical tie between myself and others like me. It results from this that the productive imagination...can be restored to itself only through a *critique* of the antagonistic and semipathological figure of the social imaginary.<sup>33</sup>

Towards the close of the essay, Ricœur describes the named imaginative practices—ideology and Utopia—as “two figures of false consciousness,” underscoring the point that it is “only in a critical relation with them” that “[w]e take possession of the creative power of imagination.”<sup>34</sup>

Why, one might ask, did Kearney’s version of imaginative practice not also call for the type of critique that Ricœur had outlined in “Imagination in Discourse and in Action”? If I have interpreted him correctly, Kearney’s “imaginative practice” was never designed to meet the needs of a sociopolitical project. It was designed, rather, to help the postmodern imagination respond to the other *through* the mediatized image, and presumably to always see that other as the bearer of human rights and as someone with basic human needs. The issue was not whether the deconstructed humanist subject could see the analogical tie between itself and others, but whether it could learn *not* to make its interaction with others an occasion for claiming that it had control or superiority over them. And that, I imagine, is why the only critique to be found in Kearney’s reimagining imagination is the sort of deconstruction found in Derrida.

In his introduction to the book, Littlejohn explains that he plans to pursue “a thematic and historical course through the main rivers and a few of the tributaries of Kearney’s thought, tracing key themes as they develop, recur, and interweave organically.”<sup>35</sup> It would be a mistake, then, to approach “Imagination Now. The Civilization of the Image (1988)” as anything more than a first phase in Kearney’s developing project of re-imagining imagination. For a fuller account, it would be important to engage with the four remaining texts, spanning the years 1991-2002, which are grouped with it. As already mentioned, Littlejohn divides *Imagination Now: A Richard Kearney Reader* into four main sections, the last of which offers selected texts under the heading, “Thinking Action: *Ethics, Politics, Peace*.” That selection, like all the selections in the book, is very well judged. The same can be said for the style and content of the short introduction to the section. Here, as elsewhere in the book, the editor strikes a perfect balance between providing the reader with the information they need to situate the piece in a wider context and allowing them the pleasure of

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<sup>33</sup> Ricœur, *From Text to Action*, 177.

<sup>34</sup> Ricœur, *From Text to Action*, 183.

<sup>35</sup> Littlejohn, *Imagination Now*, xxi.

discovering Kearney's work for themselves. Littlejohn's decision to make "Double Hospitality. Between Word and Touch (2019)" the last text in Section IV is fortuitous. It creates a bridge from *Imagination Now. A Richard Kearney Reader* to *Radical Hospitality. From Thought to Action*, the next book that I want to discuss.

### *Radical Hospitality. From Thought to Action*

In *Radical Hospitality. From Thought to Action*, a work co-authored with Melissa Fitzpatrick, Kearney discusses four faces of hospitality: linguistic, narrative, confessional, and carnal. The discussions of linguistic and narrative hospitality offer greater insight into the way Kearney engages with Ricœur, so much of what I have to say about the book will relate to those sections. For her part, Fitzpatrick discusses hospitality and moral psychology, engaging with a range of thinkers including Kant, Levinas, Arendt, and Talbot Brewer. She also draws attention to a range of experimental pedagogies, all of which are said to help us to improve our understanding of virtue and vice, and to discover our own blind spots and strengths in that regard. She makes a connection between those experimental pedagogies and hermeneutics, including Ricœur's, an issue I shall comment on below.

The discussions of hospitality, just mentioned, allow Kearney and Fitzpatrick to address "a timely challenge for contemporary philosophy: the ethical responsibility of opening borders, psychic and physical, to the stranger."<sup>36</sup> They address that challenge in two ways. First, drawing on those philosophical discussions of hospitality, they engage with urgent moral conversations regarding the role of nationality, identity, immigration, justice, and commemoration. Second, they critically apply an ethics of hospitality to the social and political world as it is today, that is, to a "world of border anxiety, boundary disputes, refugee crisis, and, perhaps most pressingly...the looming ecological challenge."<sup>37</sup> They point out that that critical application involves a move from text to action, where the action is "ultimately one of pedagogy and praxis."<sup>38</sup>

"Linguistic Hospitality. The Risk of Translation," the book's opening chapter, shows that Kearney is more indebted to Ricœur than to anyone else for his understanding of hospitality. Ricœur's seminal account of linguistic hospitality is laid out in *On Translation*, where it is claimed that linguistic hospitality "serves as a model for other forms of hospitality that...resemble it: confessions, religions...[and] Eucharistic hospitality."<sup>39</sup> Ricœur observes that it is translators who typically discover the remarkable hospitableness of language. Their goal is to achieve a mediation between host and guest languages, but that goal is ultimately achievable only because language is like an open house, a place where the stranger may dwell. The idea is captured in the following description: "Linguistic hospitality...where the pleasure of dwelling in the other's language is balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home, in one's own welcoming house."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality*, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality*, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Ricœur, *On Translation*, trans. Eileen Brennan (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 23.

<sup>40</sup> Ricœur, *On Translation*, 10.

Built into the notion of Ricœurian hospitality is a psychoanalysis-inspired process of working through the pain of loss, which translators must engage in before they can enjoy the pleasure of dwelling in the other's language or receiving the foreign word at home.<sup>41</sup> So, even though Ricœur tends to associate translation with pleasure, as in the above quotation, he is quick to point out that translation can be difficult, especially in the early stages. Indeed, he emphasizes that aspect of his hermeneutics of translation when explaining the difference between his own approach to hospitality and that of Derrida. He says that the difference between the two approaches is the difference between the words "difficult" and "impossible,"<sup>42</sup> something that Kearney picks up on in his book. But Kearney also has his own way of explaining the difference between the two approaches. He maintains that Ricœur "practices conditional hospitality" whereas Derrida "calls for unconditional hospitality where I accept the Other regardless of its origin or identity—human, animal, or divine."<sup>43</sup> Finding the latter desirable but impractical, Kearney adopts Ricœur's version of hospitality. But he is troubled by a tension at the heart of *On Translation*: the "tension between the call for justice (here I stand) on the one hand, and the call for openness and endless translatability (there is always something more) on the other."<sup>44</sup> He has a scruple, he says, about Ricœur's claim that there are no limits to translatability, arguing that "there is no guarantee that having as many translations as possible will, of itself, *necessarily* result in a more ethical attitude (though it is a possibility)."<sup>45</sup> To free his own work of that troubling tension, Kearney goes in search of "a middle way between...hospitality understood as empathic conversation on the one hand, and as endless dissemination of readings, on the other."<sup>46</sup>

The title of the second chapter, "Narrative Hospitality: Three Pedagogical Experiments," resonates with the earlier description of the type of action to which Kearney's thought is said to lead: pedagogy and praxis. The pedagogical experiments that he will discuss are: "the Guestbook Project of exchanging stories, the Twinsome Minds project of double remembrance, and the Irish Famine memorial project of crossed commemoration."<sup>47</sup> Viewed from the perspective of Kearney's most recent work, all three are practical examples of the possibility of an ethics of hospitality. But it could be argued that they also beautifully illustrate the ethical-poetical imaginative practice that he proposed in the late 1980s when he spoke about re-imagining imagination. That aspect of his work has already been discussed above. Strictly speaking, it is the narrative face of hospitality that shows itself in the above-mentioned practical examples of the possibility of an ethics of hospitality. But what is the difference between linguistic hospitality and narrative hospitality? To answer that question, Kearney turns to Ricœur's text, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe."<sup>48</sup> He explains that narrative hospitality is an extension of linguistic hospitality. It is also more concrete. Quoting

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<sup>41</sup> Paul Ricœur, *On Translation*, 4-10.

<sup>42</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*, 22.

<sup>43</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*, 22.

<sup>45</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*, 23.

<sup>47</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*, 24.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Ricœur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe," trans. Eileen Brennan, *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 21, nos. 5-6 (1995): 3-13.

from Ricoeur, he says that narrative hospitality is “taking responsibility in imagination and in sympathy for the story of the other, through the life narratives which concern the other.”<sup>49</sup>

Kearney describes the above-mentioned Guestbook Project as an application of narrative hospitality. He explains that it comprises “a Narrative Hospitality project of digitally recorded encounters where two young people [share] their respective stories across a divide and [create] a third story together.”<sup>50</sup> It is meant to serve as a “‘classroom without walls,’ freely accessible to peace leaders, schoolteachers, and community activists in diverse educational contexts.”<sup>51</sup> In essence, the Guestbook Project is a virtual, asynchronous learning platform designed to educate others whenever and however they choose. Kearney co-directs the Guestbook Project with two others: Sheila Gallagher and Melissa Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick’s interest in non-traditional classrooms is also evident in the comments she makes on Helen T. Boursier’s text “The Great Exchange: An Interfaith Praxis of Absolute Hospitality for Immigrants Seeking Asylum.” Fitzpatrick makes those comments in “Hospitality in the Classroom,” the book’s closing chapter. She explains that Boursier works at an immigration detention center on the border of the United States and Mexico with several other volunteers. Their shared aim is to bear witness to the “‘divine strangers’ in our midst.”<sup>52</sup> To achieve that end, they engage in the practice of exchanging stories with refugees as they arrive on American soil. On Fitzpatrick’s account, the volunteers work together to establish a “safe space” where refugees “are granted, above all, a voice.”<sup>53</sup> She likens this safe space to a classroom where the volunteers follow “what could be understood as a pedagogy of hospitality.”<sup>54</sup> But what type of learning does this exchange between volunteers and refugees facilitate? Fitzpatrick observes that, in most cases, the refugees’ migration story *counters* “prevailing narratives of why these people go through great, dangerous lengths to cross the border.”<sup>55</sup>

Fitzpatrick’s reference to the educational value of an exchange of stories between refugee and volunteer recalls a statement she made a little earlier about hermeneutics, including the Ricoeurian version, and Hannah Arendt. She said that each provides “a window of insight into the way in which we understand phenomena and what the implications of those understandings might be.”<sup>56</sup> As she explained, their message is: “Others help us hone our understanding of virtue and vice—exposing vulnerabilities, blind spots, strengths, and surprising insights and connections.”<sup>57</sup> All the indications are that each and every one of the experimental pedagogies discussed in Kearney and Fitzpatrick’s book aims for that kind of understanding. However, as the two co-authors have already clarified, experimental pedagogies are not the only endpoints of their proposed move from text to action. The action in question is to be understood not only as

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<sup>49</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe,” trans. Eileen Brennan, *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 21, nos. 5-6 (1995): 3-13, at 7.

<sup>50</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*, 26.

<sup>51</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*, 26.

<sup>52</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*, 102.

<sup>53</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*, 102.

<sup>54</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*, 102.

<sup>55</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*, 103.

<sup>56</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*, 92.

<sup>57</sup> Kearney and Fitzpatrick, *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*, 92.

pedagogy, but also as praxis. It is interesting that they should talk in terms of pedagogy and praxis rather than pedagogy and practice. Ricœur helps us to understand what might be at stake here in his relatively neglected, but nonetheless important study, *Le juste entre le légal et le bon*.<sup>58</sup> When describing what could be termed, the machinery of justice, Ricœur uses the phrase “judicial practice,” but he switches to talking about “judicial *praxis*” as soon as he begins to describe what that same machinery would look like were it to be governed by a dialectical idea, involving opposing teleological and deontological principles of justice.<sup>59</sup> If Kearney and Fitzpatrick are thinking along similar lines, we can expect to find that the type of practice that interests them is also one that is regulated by principles of justice. It certainly would be worthwhile to compare their use of the term “praxis” with Ricœur’s.

Kearney and Fitzpatrick’s shared focus on action as praxis also invites comparison with *Oneself as Another*, and through that connection with Manfred Riedel’s notion of practical philosophy.<sup>60</sup> Riedel traced the origins of a certain type of practical philosophy back to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. In those works, praxis is wedded to ethics, an arrangement that clearly appeals first to Ricœur and then to Kearney and Fitzpatrick. However, Kearney’s interest in Aristotle extends beyond the works on ethics and politics to include *De Anima*, a treatise on the different souls possessed by living things. Kearney discusses *De Anima* in *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense*, the next and last text that I shall discuss.

### *Touch. Recovering Our Most Vital Sense*

Kearney describes *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense* in the following terms: “It is an essay for any interested reader concerned with the crisis of touch in our time—an age of simulation informed by digital technology and an expanding culture of virtual experience.”<sup>61</sup> As Kearney characterizes “our time,” it is an age where experience is mediated, and increasingly so with every new development in cyber technology. Kearney acknowledges that there are many circumstances where a technologically mediated experience represents a benefit to humanity. But he worries that the price to be paid for those benefits may be our having to forfeit touch, our “most vital and indispensable sense.” And, if the price to be paid is indeed “losing touch with touch itself,” he wants to know whether anything can be done about it. Kearney then comments that, “The crisis of touch that epitomizes our time has, needless to say, been dramatically amplified by the ‘distancing’ culture required by the COVID-19 calamity visited upon the planet in the spring of 2020 as I was completing the manuscript of this book.”<sup>62</sup> To address those very particular circumstances, he adds a postscript to the five chapters that the book was originally meant to comprise, giving it the title. “Coda: Touch and the Coronavirus.”

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<sup>58</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Le juste entre le légal et le bon* in *Lectures 1: Autour du politique*, (Paris, Seuil, 1991).

<sup>59</sup> Ricœur, *Lectures 1: Autour du politique*, p. 192 is where the switch occurs.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1992), 19.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Kearney, *Touch: Our Most Vital Sense*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2021), 2.

<sup>62</sup> Kearney, *Touch: Our Most Vital Sense*, 2.

The proposal presented in *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense* is developed in three phases. The first phase comprises an analysis of our common understanding of touch as it relates to the five senses. The second phase explores well-known formative wisdoms from the perhaps less familiar perspective of phenomenology. Reprising the account of phenomenology that he offered in 2019 when explaining his methodological approach to Littlejohn—something I have already commented upon above—Kearney writes: “Phenomenology recognizes truth as already present in our life-world. But this recognition depends on us coming to our senses: learning to suspend ingrained prejudices and retrieve our primary carnal experience—what our everyday tact, savvy, and flair tell us all the time. If only we dare to know what we already know.”<sup>63</sup> The ingrained prejudices, which Kearney encourages us to suspend, have a history that goes back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE and Platonism, with its associated denigration of the body. The third and final phase of the proposal sees Kearney “explore ways to recover the joys of incarnation in a world where many of us have become distant from ourselves, virtually there while hankering to be here.”<sup>64</sup>

Let me say at the outset that this is a beautifully written, erudite, and thought-provoking book, whose appeal is further enhanced by the inclusion of skilful visual illustrations by the author’s wife, Anne, and daughters, Simone, and Sarah. It is not written simply for the professional philosopher, but in the best traditions of political pedagogy, it reaches out to a wider audience, endeavouring to inform readers, encourage their critical engagement, and offer them hope. But the most important feature of the book, at least from the point of view of this review essay, is the evidence it provides of Kearney’s dissatisfaction with one aspect of Ricoeur’s work: the level of attention that Ricoeur gave to the body. The second chapter, whose title is “Philosophies of Touch: From Aristotle to Phenomenology” is the most important in that regard. There Kearney comments that “A first philosophy of touch was sketched by Aristotle at the outset of Greek thought. He deemed tactility to be the most pervasive and intelligent of the senses. But his claim was largely sidelined for two thousand years”<sup>65</sup> in favour of Platonism. Kearney notes that it was not until contemporary phenomenology made “a revolutionary effort to redeem Aristotle’s inaugural insight,” that Platonism’s optocentric paradigm was challenged and touch restored to its rightful place.<sup>66</sup> A little surprisingly perhaps, Ricoeur plays only a minor role in Kearney’s narrative about phenomenology’s revolutionary efforts to restore tactility to its rightful place among the senses. Whilst that narrative does acknowledge that Ricoeur was one of a group of phenomenologists that contributed “deep contemporary insights into our embodied being,” it also appears to encourage the view that Ricoeur’s contribution was quite limited. When commenting on that contribution, Kearney draws the reader’s attention to what is only a short section of *Oneself as Another*, noting that it offers a “powerful defense of our “terrestrial-corporeal” embodiment (as acting-suffering beings) in relation to science fictions of AI technology.”<sup>67</sup> Kearney has been more openly critical of Ricoeur on other forums, observing that Ricoeur began to neglect the body as soon as his

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<sup>63</sup> Kearney, *Touch: Our Most Vital Sense*, 34.

<sup>64</sup> Kearney, *Touch: Our Most Vital Sense*, 6.

<sup>65</sup> Kearney, *Touch: Our Most Vital Sense*, 33.

<sup>66</sup> Kearney, *Touch: Our Most Vital Sense*, 34.

<sup>67</sup> Kearney, *Touch: Our Most Vital Sense*, 157.

philosophy underwent a linguistic turn.<sup>68</sup> He believes that it is a great pity that Ricoeur, who did such important work in the 1940s and 1950s on the role that the body plays in the act of willing, did not build on what he had achieved in the decades that followed. With that more explicit criticism in mind, I want to suggest that *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense* may well be where Kearney turns to that unfinished part of Ricoeur's work and begins to lead it toward completion.

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<sup>68</sup> Kearney made the point at a seminar hosted by The School of Philosophy, University College Dublin, on the 8<sup>th</sup> April 2021.