

HISTORIES OF THE HUMAN HAND

Huxley and Isherwood's *Jacob's Hands* and Modernist Manual Culture

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Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood's co-written screen treatment *Jacob's Hands*, completed in 1944, has often been overlooked by scholars of either author, but affords the opportunity to explore the place of the human hand within wider debates regarding the senses in the first half of the twentieth century. Never taken up by the studios, it languished amongst Huxley's papers for decades, before being published, with an introduction by David Bradshaw, in 1998. Telling the story of Jacob Ericson, a returning US veteran of the Great War who has gained a mysterious power of healing through the hands, the text at first glance appears at odds with 1940s mores, and after several months of fruitless waiting for approval and payment, Isherwood gave up the project as a failure, recording in his diary that 'either they [the studios] thought it was too goody-goody, or that it was superstitious, or both. Nevertheless, I still think it really had something.'¹ Isherwood's speculations about rejection echo the criticisms that Jacob himself faces, being seen as at once too morally good to survive the market-driven show-business environments of Los Angeles, where his gift comes to be exploited, and as truly 'ha[ving] something' to which one struggles to put a name. Huxley, for his part, thought the treatment's negative representation of conventional medicine, both baffled by and dismissive of Jacob's abilities, might have riled what he calls 'the medical Ku Klux Klan'.² In mulling over their rejections, the authors ascribe to their treatment qualities of

¹ Christopher Isherwood, *Diaries Vol. I 1939–1960*, ed. Katherine Bucknell (London: Methuen, 1996), 600.

² Aldous Huxley, *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, ed. Grover Smith (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), 511.

didacticism, spiritualism, doctor-baiting, and the wider issue that, as Isherwood told Gilbert Adair, 'mystic doings were highly unfashionable in California at that period'.³ These interests are, it is suggested, anathema to contemporary, commercial Hollywood. *Jacob's Hands* is therefore as hands are to the body: peripheral, out on a limb.

Yet placing the text within what we might term modernist manual cultures, or modes of reading and understanding the human hands in the early decades of the twentieth century, reveals that in another sense the focus on Jacob's *hands* puts the treatment right in the thick of several debates, spreading out like fingers from the palm: the damage of the Great War (as, most obviously, with its near namesake, Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* of 1922);⁴ healing practices within medicine-adjacent or pseudo-medical frameworks; regimes of hand-dependent knowledge, including the religious and the spiritual (particularly the Pentecostal, where Black religious leaders of the Azusa Street revival prove crucial in reimagining the sensing body as a contested site, subject to forces); and the haptic aspects of film spectatorship itself, newly understood in this period as creating affective audience experience beyond the realms of the visual. While mixed in its motivations, peculiar in tone, and written in a mode—the screen treatment—which makes a distinctive call upon the reader and their imaginative capacities, this esoteric text can usefully be reincorporated into both authors' bodies of work.⁵ Such a move makes clear Isherwood's long-term investment in spiritual texts and practices, draws out and chimes with the tactile politics of Huxley's much more well-known *Brave New World* (1932), and emphasizes the role of the hands as a kind of flash-point for wider debates about body, sense, and spirit in the modernist years.⁶

Isherwood visited Huxley at home in Llano, in the Mojave Desert of Southern California, in early March 1944, where they established the scaffolding of the treatment, to be developed in the coming months. Isherwood, who had written for the movie industry throughout the Second World War, arrived in Llano having recently completed a new edition of the *Bhagavad Gita*, co-translated with his guru,

³ Gilbert Adair, 'In the Picture: Isherwood in Hollywood', *Sight and Sound* 46 (Winter 1976–7), 25.

⁴ While *Jacob's Room* indicates the Great War, the biblical story of Jacob's ladder proposes a bridge between the realms of heaven and earth, and we should also remember that when Jacob asked God to bless his sons Ephraim and Manasseh, he laid his hands upon them (Genesis 48:14).

⁵ A screen treatment was wearying to write, too, with Huxley noting that 'this telling a story in purely pictorial terms doesn't allow any of the experimentation with words in their relation to things, events and ideas, which is *au fond* my business'; Huxley, *Letters*, 437. I use the terms 'reader' and 'audience' interchangeably here in recognition of the strange status of the screen treatment, and the peculiar state of suspension in which one finds oneself as at once reader of a present text and imagined consumer of a future cinematic production. The specific demands of the treatment form are further discussed at the close of this chapter.

⁶ For an account of Huxley's imbrication of touch and the political in *Brave New World*, see Abbie Garrington, *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 33–47.

the Hindu Swami Prabhavananda.⁷ Isherwood had been introduced to the Swami by Gerald Heard, whom he had known in London in the early 1930s, while Huxley had first arrived in the US with Heard when the latter took up a chair in historical anthropology at Duke University. Heard later settled in California and established Trabuco College, a centre for the study of comparative religion.⁸ A swirl of these spiritual interests, alongside the landscapes of the desert and of Los Angeles, are taken up in *Jacob's Hands*. Adair claims that a fellow resident of the Mojave was known to Huxley and influenced the screen treatment's titular character, grounding the story's more preposterous elements in real-life anecdote, and explaining the credulous tone of the treatment, whatever its would-be Hollywood-appealing humorous moments.⁹ The two authors worked independently to develop their contributions (a process also deployed by Isherwood in his verse drama collaborations with W. H. Auden¹⁰), Huxley finishing his work by April 1944, Isherwood by June of the same year, and the text was sent off to the studios, leading to silence or disinterest from prospective production teams, and thence the archiving of the work.¹¹ Huxley was no stranger to the tangled process of bringing writing to the screen, lamenting that '[b]y the time they are ready to shoot it [a treatment] may have been through twenty pairs of hands. What will be left? One shudders to think.'¹² The synecdochic function of the 'pairs of hands' here emphasizes agency and personhood, while the sully of too much manual engagement leads to a visceral response, as Huxley 'shudders' to contemplate the attenuation of his vision. Despite the fate of *Jacob's Hands*, lost to Hollywood, the treatment aimed to impart a tale of some urgency to its authors, keen to draw attention to the place of the sensory in modern life as both a site of power (healing; spiritual; recouped after the trauma of war) and of resistance, and yet also a potential zone of control by capitalism (or its show-business wing), conventional medicine, and all those keen to exploit and corrupt moral goodness. It is Jacob that is caught amidst these forces as they clash on the terrain of his palms, and we might ultimately read him as at once an outsider (a recluse in desert spaces, distanced from fellow humans by traumatic experience)

⁷ For Isherwood's 1980 account of working with Prabhavananda, see Christopher Isherwood, *My Guru and His Disciple* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

⁸ For an outline of Isherwood's movie work, see Brian Finney, *Christopher Isherwood: A Critical Biography* (London: Faber, 1979). Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy*, published in the US in 1945 and the UK in 1946, draws together extracts from Eastern and Western spiritual texts to create a comparative and relational study, inspired in part by Heard's work. See Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946).

⁹ Adair, 'In the Picture', 25.

¹⁰ See Edward Mendelson, 'The Auden–Isherwood Collaboration', *Twentieth-Century Literature* 22, no. 3 (October 1976), 276–85.

¹¹ David Bradshaw, 'Introduction', in Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood, *Jacob's Hands* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), xiv.

¹² Huxley, *Letters*, 437.

and as a significant and symbolically resonant figure, a talisman of sensory power and peril in the interwar years.

‘Hands That War’

Jacob's Hands is bookended by a ‘Prologue’ and ‘Epilogue’ that take place in the present, i.e. the 1940s, when Jacob is said to be ‘in his fifties’ and living with a male companion in the Mojave.¹³ Thus from the first scenes the prospective cinematic audience is aware that he will ultimately choose self-exile to the desert, although his extraordinary abilities mean he cannot remain removed from the clamour of the modern world for long.¹⁴ The ‘Prologue’ brings Allan and Mary, the owners of a Pomeranian called Topsy, to Jacob’s remote smallholding (‘We certainly had a time finding you!’ [5]) to seek a cure for Topsy’s unspecified illness. They are greeted by the companion, unnamed and disguised by a beekeeper’s veil and gloves, as well as ‘[b]ees...crawling all over him’ (3), at this stage to be taken as an indicator of bucolic peace, now interrupted by Topsy et al. (the bees reappear, and are reread, below). Jacob’s reputation precedes him, since he has healed the automobile accident injuries of a cocker spaniel belonging to Mr Hilton of the National Bank (‘*The Mr Hilton*’, clarifies Mary [5]). Jacob specifies sardonically that ‘I remember the dog’ (5), commencing an allegiance with and affinity for animals, and an indifference to hierarchies of social class, that is reiterated throughout the treatment. Mary, gushing now, reports ‘They say you did a miracle’ (5), an odd phrasing that replaces the more conventional ‘performed’, the latter emphasizing the status of the healer as conduit for powers beyond himself. Accordingly, Jacob later points out that ‘It’s not anything *I* do... It just comes into me, somehow. It’s as if I can feel it, going out through my hands’ (20). To ‘do’ a miracle smacks of the transactional, or the heal-on-demand (while transactions and demands smack of the National Bank). Jacob’s *gift*, thought of as such, is instead explicitly removed from the financial and drawn into the realms of spiritual channelling, as well as remaining incompletely corralled by those channels (as the uncertainty of that ‘somehow’ makes clear). Mary, shifting her terminology, declares that ‘It must be just too wonderful to have the gift of healing’, to which Jacob responds, ‘You think so?’ (6). While ‘too wonderful’ primarily illustrates the excess of Mary’s modern parlance, it also indicates the excessive or

¹³ I take the title of this section from Rebecca West’s newspaper column of the same name. See, for example, ‘Hands That War: The Night Shift’, in Jane Marcus, ed., *The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West, 1911–1917* (London: Virago, 1983), 387–90. West shares Lawrence’s, Huxley’s, and Isherwood’s interest in the specifically *manual* impacts of Great War experience, most conspicuously in her *The Return of the Soldier* (1918).

¹⁴ Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood, *Jacob's Hands*, ed. David Bradshaw (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 5. Henceforth, page numbers are given in parentheses.

burdensome weight of the gift itself, which the audience now expects will lie behind Jacob's retreat from city spaces to the 'foothills of the San Gabriel mountains' (3).

Willed seclusion from urban bustle; an affinity with the beasts; a rejection of the transactional world; a need for peace—all are aspects of Jacob's existence that hint toward his Great War experience, and while that war remains a subtle presence in the text, the authors consistently ascribe Jacob's gift of healing to his experience of trauma. In this, they take up the notion of compensatory powers following the physical and psychological damage of battle, and in doing so emphasize specifically tactile realms of experience, linking them to other writers of the period including, most significantly, D. H. Lawrence. The main body of the treatment commences in 1920, not long after Armistice therefore, when Jacob is working at the Mojave ranch of Professor Carter, an academic philologist who is 'pathologically touchy and cantankerous' (11). 'Touchy' labels his unbalanced temper but also, paradoxically, a marked retreat from sensory experience, since he knocks offered flowers from his daughter Sharon's hands; turns up his coat's collar; requires the door to be shut against an alleged draught; and stuffs his ears with cotton wool so as not to be disturbed by Sharon's singing (17). He is therefore a sensory refusenik (rejecting touch, scent, skin exposure, ambient temperature, and sound), an attitude that anticipates his suspicion and attempted regulation of Jacob's laying on of hands. The latter is introduced as 'moody', 'taciturn', 'withdrawn', and (once again) 'thoroughly at home only with animals', and the text is explicit about the source of these characteristics: 'It seems that his experiences during the war, from which he has returned shell-shocked and wounded, have somehow isolated him from the world of men' (12). We can usefully compare this portrayal with Lawrence's 'The Blind Man' of 1920, in which Great War veteran Maurice Pervin finds a soothing affinity with horses, and is shown to contrast in spirit with visiting lawyer Bertie Reid, just as Jacob contrasts with the learned Carter. Maurice, like Jacob, is at once turned inward and yet attuned to the world in a new way, a gift or compensation ('There is something... I couldn't tell you what it is'¹⁵), in his case after being blinded and facially scarred by what the reader presumes to be an exploding shell.¹⁶ When Jacob is later asked, by bed-bound patient Earl Medwin, 'what was the worst part of [the War]?', he replies, 'the noise, I guess' (62), indicating that he too has been close to the explosions of mechanized warfare. War service might result in the loss of limbs or their sensory capacities, in blinding, or in deafness brought about by excess noise in battle contexts: 'Modern warfare exercises its evil influence more on the hearing organ than on any other special sense', suggested a letter to *The Lancet* in 1917.¹⁷ For Lawrence,

¹⁵ D. H. Lawrence, 'The Blind Man', *English Review* (July 1920), 22–41 (36).

¹⁶ Julian Huxley referred to his brother Aldous's own temporary blindness, a result of punctate keratitis rather than battle, as 'a blessing in disguise' since it allowed him to 'take all knowledge for his province'. Sensory restriction, in this reading as in Lawrence's, is an enlargement of powers. See Julian Huxley, *Aldous Huxley 1894–1963: A Memorial Volume* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), 22.

¹⁷ D. Mackenzie, 'Letter to the Editor: War Deafness', *Lancet* 190, no. 4898 (July 1917), 729.

as for Huxley and Isherwood, this recalibration of the human sensorium shifts focus toward the hands and related haptic experiences, not only in the former's 'The Blind Man' but also in his *The Ladybird* of 1923. Strategies in common in the use of manual matters to consider the losses and compensations of war make plausible a claim of Lawrence's substantial influence upon *Jacob's Hands*, in turn bringing that text into a canon of haptically attuned war writings of the period.¹⁸

That claim is supported by the fact that, following early scepticism, Huxley was substantially familiar with and admiring of Lawrence's work, and John 'the Savage' of *Brave New World*, who battles to retain control of his sensory experiences in resistance against a World State determined to engineer them, is frequently read as a Lawrence proxy.¹⁹ Lawrence will have been in his mind when Huxley wrote to his widow, Frieda, about *Jacob's Hands* in April 1944, sounding a note of doubt about its prospects with the phrase 'I hope we shall be able to sell it.'²⁰ But he is also summoned as Huxley and Isherwood work toward linking specifically hand-related powers and experiences with the rigours of the War. Lawrence's *The Ladybird* does much to bring wider stories of war experience, intimate relationships, and economies of power to bear on the hands, and is therefore a further likely source of influence on the screen treatment. In this novella, interned veteran Count Dionys (a captured 'Bohemian' from Dresden) exclaims, 'The continual explosion of guns and shells! It seems to have driven my soul out of me like a bird frightened away at last,' recalling Jacob's own horror of war's sonic assaults, and speculates that he holds the recollection of noise within his hands: 'They [my hands] hurt me. I don't know what it is. I think it is all the gun explosions.'²¹ While such pain might easily be read as nerve damage caused by the vibrations of bombardment, it also implies that, just as Lawrence mingles damage with the granting of new capacities, so he is also interested in sensory crossmodality as a consequence of war's overwhelming of the faculties, with noise 'felt' in the hands. This recalls vivid accounts of sensory attunement in soldier experience, such as that recorded in Wilfred Owen's letter to his mother of 1917: 'I have not seen any dead. I have done worse. In the dank air, I have perceived it, and in the darkness, felt.'²² In an exchange that echoes Maurice's begging

¹⁸ For more on noise and hearing in the Great War, see K. Conroy and V. Malik, 'Hearing Loss in the Trenches: A Hidden Morbidity of World War I', in *Journal of Laryngology and Otology* 1, no. 132 (2018), 952–5.

¹⁹ See Brad Buchanan, 'Oedipus in Dystopia: Freud and Lawrence in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*', *Journal of Modern Literature* 25, no. 3/4 (Summer 2002), 75–89 (86); Peter Firchow, 'Wells and Lawrence in Huxley's *Brave New World*', *Journal of Modern Literature* 5, no. 2 (April 1976), 260–78 (272).

²⁰ Huxley, *Letters*, 502.

²¹ D. H. Lawrence, *The Ladybird*, in *The Fox, The Captain's Doll, The Ladybird*, ed. Paul Poplawski (London: Penguin, 2006), 157–221 (171).

²² Wilfred Owen, 'Letter to Susan Owen, 19 January 1917', *The Collected Letters of Wilfred Owen*, ed. Harold Owen and John Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 429. Underlining in original.

Bertie to ‘Touch my eyes, will you? – Touch my scar’,²³ Dionys begs his charitable visitor and later lover Daphne: ‘let me wrap your hair round my hands, will you? ... That will soothe my hands.’²⁴ There is in this scene a further faint echo of Mary of Bethany, sister of Lazarus, who anoints Christ’s feet with spikenard ‘and wipe[s] his feet with her hair’ (John 12:3), a gesture of care and abasement that salves His skin, simultaneously reiterating, and anticipating the loss of, his earthly incarnation. Biblical sources also appear when Daphne’s husband, Basil, another wounded veteran, instructs her to ‘Touch me not, I am not yet ascended unto the Father’,²⁵ or *noli me tangere*,²⁶ repeating Christ’s words to Mary Magdalene following his crucifixion (John 20:17).²⁷ For Basil, the plea is for the cessation of marital intimacy, while Christ seems to beg Mary not to underscore his fleshly existence by means of tactile contact, before he might truly be considered risen. Thus Lawrence, like Huxley and Isherwood, turns to biblical models for his exploration of the senses when characters, tried in the fire of battle, rise again, perhaps with damage (like Dionys), and/or with enhanced abilities (like Maurice and Jacob).

In *The Ladybird*, Lawrence emphasizes once again the role of the hand as the sensory organ of greatest duress and change in war, when he emblematically represents with a thimble the prohibition against touch. That thimble is an heirloom of Dionys’s family, which he gives to Daphne as a gift. Functioning primarily as a form of digital prophylaxis or armour (*noli me tangere*), it might also be read to indicate her eventual co-option into that family, to hint at future marital seamstress servitude, or to highlight her solicitous domestic care in sewing shirts for Dionys at present. In addition, the thimble holds the status of what Steven Connor has called a ‘fidgetable’, an object with an appeal to and affordance for the hand, a category in which we find other denizens of the sewing room including needles and pins.²⁸ In Lawrence’s story context, the thimble is also associated with ‘pins and needles’ in a further sense, i.e. the skin and nerve tingling of paraesthesia, a possible symptom of shell shock or what is now termed PTSD, or of anxiety. The golden thimble, like Daphne’s golden hair, might calm Dionys’s paraesthetic hands, but the manual prickle also indicates brooked power, which may flow out through the hands, making the returning soldier that channel of forces, as Jacob comes to know. In this way, while the War’s noises and horrors might be seen in Huxley and Isherwood, and in

²³ Lawrence, ‘The Blind Man’, 40.

²⁴ Lawrence, *The Ladybird*, 171.

²⁵ Lawrence, *The Ladybird*, 192.

²⁶ In the Latin, the phrase provides a title for a poem of Lawrence’s. See D. H. Lawrence, *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence Vol. I*, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts (London: Heinemann, 1972), 468.

²⁷ For a more expansive discussion of the Marys of the Bible, embodiment, and the senses, see Abbie Garrington, *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 7–8. See also Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, trans. Chris Turner (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 144.

²⁸ Steven Connor, ‘Introduction: Speaking of Objects’, *Paraphernalia: The Curious Life of Magical Things* (London: Profile Books, 2013), 1–13 (4).

Lawrence, to register in the hands, those hands are also the site of compensatory gifts and routes to rehabilitation (through healing others or forging new intimacies), while continuing to thrum in ill-understood ways.²⁹ Jacob's 'It just comes into me, somehow' and Dionys's 'I don't know what it is' retain an element of mystery within feelings and capacities that might otherwise be easily attributed to war service, leaving room for readings that do not merely link to biblical stories of touch but also allow these characters to accrue genuine spiritual power. It is via this Lawrence-influenced route that Huxley and Isherwood move to associate Jacob with the manual manifestations of the spirit experienced within the Pentecostal movement, further discussed below.

Jacob's hands are most conspicuously represented as instruments of healing, but over the course of the screen treatment their additional operation as locus of trauma becomes clear. Attempting to cure a Carter Ranch calf which has become infected with black quarter, and whose consequently swollen limbs may recall the battlefield, his hands at first tremble, then clench in fists to reassert control, and finally are laid on the calf alongside the reiterated verbal reassurance, or perhaps incantation, 'I won't let you die,' repeated 'again and again' (19). This scene serves as the first revelation to the audience of Jacob's gift, and it is notable that when first his hands begin to quake they are described as 'the hands,' before becoming 'his fists' in the act of clenching, and thereafter remain 'his' as he heals (19). The use of the definite article may attempt to throw emphasis upon 'the' hands as they begin to move across the calf's body. Or, in true screen treatment mode, it might identify 'the hands' as those that are likely to be in close-up in the anticipated film. In the latter reading it is cinematic technique that disaggregates the hands from the body, even as, from an audience perspective, their bringing-close might encourage a greater imaginative bond with Jacob's tactile experiences. However, with Lawrentian intertexts of the Great War in mind, this phrasing also estranges Jacob from his own hands as they tremble with a combination of nervous damage and a mysterious, newly acquired power, echoing the numbness of limb that may attend paraesthesia which similarly renders body parts as those that do not belong.

The War, its noise, and its terrible effects have one further influence upon Jacob: his choice of locations for dwelling, ultimately leading toward retreat from both the potential exacerbation of his trauma and the exploitation of his peculiar manual gift. The reader is told he was born into a Kansas farming family, and Sharon describes him as having moved, therefore, 'From the prairie to the desert,' while her own aspirations for singing stardom have her recommend 'Frisco [San Francisco] or Los Angeles' instead (14). Like the Lawrence of New Mexico, Jacob favours the lateral extension of a flat, uninterrupted landscape, albeit with 'foothills' in one

²⁹ For an account of rehabilitation through manual craft practices, see Ana Carden-Coyne, 'Butterfly Touch: Rehabilitation, Nature and the Haptic Arts in the First World War', *Critical Military Studies* 6, no. 2 (2020), 176–203.

direction (and his creators might be seen to do so too, since Llano, the place of writing, can be translated as 'plain', via the Spanish *la llanura*).³⁰ During the War he has been on furlough in New York and Paris, neither of which he likes. The latter is described as a 'noisy, stinking city' (15). After the unmanageable volume of the battlefield, and the disorientation of its shells, urban spaces appear to exacerbate trauma, while flatness reassures with its long purview seeming to permit unaroused emotions in the provision of soothing vistas.³¹ After Jacob reluctantly follows Sharon to Los Angeles, she eventually concedes that 'You ought to go right back to the desert', because '[Los Angeles] is no place for you' (39). Later, she asks again, 'Why don't you go back to where you belong?' (51). In the city, Jacob's capacities, born in trauma, are exploited while being thought of by some audiences (particularly the medical) as a con; in retreat, in flat landscapes, his gift is unbesmirched by market forces or by showmanship, and he is seen to be, in two senses, 'on the level'. Throughout the treatment, Huxley and Isherwood allow the reader to wonder about the authenticity of Jacob's gift; his choice to remove himself from opportunities for money, fame, and multiple human connections finally asserts his moral goodness and underscores the veracity of his powers. Attributing new and untapped capacities to the human hands might open the treatment to accusations of those unfashionably 'mystic doings', and yet, rather than a retreat to earlier, more overtly spiritual times, such attribution links not only to the recent experience of the Great War but also to the very latest thinking in pseudo-medical realms: the 'science' of hand-reading.

Hand-Reading

Invested in the psychological dimensions of Jacob's war trauma and resultant powers, *Jacob's Hands* is also interested in the scientific and pseudoscientific frameworks through which these might be known. In the un-flat fleshpots of Los Angeles and its neighbouring Beverly Hills, Jacob is eventually persuaded to take on the case of the aforementioned Earl, a young man diagnosed with mitral stenosis (a narrowing of a valve of the heart) but also suspected of malingering in response to a suffocating level of attention from his mother. Further, Earl is troubled by a recurring hallucination, waking dream, or symptom of sleep paralysis, in which a shadowed figure stands behind the light curtains at his window ('Something waiting, hovering on the threshold of the visible world' [104]). While that figure operates primarily as an intimation of mortality, it also represents the mysteries of illness itself, 'sensing'

³⁰ 'New Mexico was the greatest experience from the outside world that I have ever had,' writes Lawrence. Cited in Peter L. Irvine and Anne Kiley, 'D. H. Lawrence and Frieda Lawrence: Letters to Dorothy Brett', *D. H. Lawrence Review* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1976), 1–116 (4).

³¹ Forthcoming work from Noreen Masud will consider flatness in connection to affects and emotions in early to mid-twentieth-century modernist writing. Our conversations have influenced my reading here.

beyond the visual, and a peripheral space beyond the exactitude of conventional medicine, bringing Earl's and Jacob's experiences into parallel. Dr Krebs, attending, 'insinuates that he has seen a good deal of these so-called "faith cures"', but considers them merely 'a psychological shot in the arm' that causes a patient to rally temporarily, the energy of apparent access to a new cure waning over time (73). Two elements of the treatment will have prepared the audience to approach Krebs with scepticism, whatever his qualifications: the scenes of Jacob's successful healings to which we have been witness; and the presentation of Dr Ignatius Waldo, an obvious quack ('"Ethical" and "scientific" are [his] favorite words. They keep recurring as a sort of leitmotiv in his conversation' [36], thereby undermining faith in him through the emptiness of his language and the insistent reiteration of his credentials and approach). It is just such questions raised of the medical establishment that Huxley saw as the cause of the treatment's rejection by the studios, imagined to be subject to a physicians' lobby, and the authors' commitment to questioning conventional medicine may therefore seem like a wilful act of self-sabotage.

Yet Huxley had reason to understand the mysterious significance of the human hands against the grain of standard scientific principles, not only via his engagement with Lawrence's work but also due to a friendship with the sexologist and 'chirologist' or hand-reader Charlotte 'Lotte' Wolff. A Jewish émigré from West Prussia with conventional medical training in addition to studies in literature and philosophy, Wolff's itinerant life (at first chosen, then enforced by Nazi control of Berlin) eventually led her to England in 1935, where she soon settled until her death, acquiring a British passport. For a time she lived with the Huxleys in their London flat, where she both paid her way and expanded her chirological studies by examining the hands of the modernist great and good, including Virginia Woolf (who recorded that she 'spent 2 hours over their [the Huxleys'] Dutch writing table under the black lamp being analysed'³²), André Breton, George Bernard Shaw, Lady Ottoline Morrell, T. S. Eliot, and Julian Huxley (who also supplied access to the 'hands' of the monkeys at London Zoo³³)—'no-one escaped', recalled Sybille Bedford.³⁴ Chirolgy, as explained in Wolff's *Studies in Hand-Reading* of 1936, which presents her analyses of the foregoing figures as well as anonymous participants, makes some claims, as with palmistry, to the divination of the future, but in addition aims to provide insights into both past experience and present temperament and capacities. Wolff was associated with the Surrealists at this time, as the presence of Breton on the list above might indicate. Breton and his collaborators understood hand-reading not as anti-scientific, but as a kind of 'outsider' practice peripheral to scientific realms, and that might ultimately become institutionalized;

³² Virginia Woolf, '11 December 1935', *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 2*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (London: Penguin, 1988), 59.

³³ Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley Vol. 1* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), 314.

³⁴ Bedford, *Aldous Huxley Vol. 1*, 285.

Wolff, in this reading, is simply ahead of her time.³⁵ It fell to Huxley to offer a bolstering preface to *Studies in Hand-Reading* and, as with the fictional Krebs's anticipatory denial of the actual efficacy of faith healing, Huxley leads with the likely objections to Wolff's methods and claims. In fact, the concerns of that preface seem to have been ported over to the screen treatment of the following decade. The assumption of Huxley and Isherwood's reliance on specifically Eastern spiritual traditions, encouraged by their publishing endeavours around the time of writing (see note 8), is made more nuanced by a consideration of Wolff's work, as much as of Lawrence's; manual cultures at the time of the treatment's creation included the intriguing possibility of 'reading' the hand.³⁶

Huxley's strategy in the 'Preface', then, is to foreground the uncertainties of chiromagical practice, in turn emphasizing the limitations of conventional scientific understanding:

Here are two sets of given facts. First, a pair of hands, with their peculiar shape, colour, consistency and markings; and, second, the character, medical history and general biography of the person to whom the hands belong. Why should there be any connexion between the two sets of facts? And what, if such a connexion exists, is the mechanism by which one of them exerts an influence on the other? Why, for example, should an accident, an organic defect, a painful emotional experience leave symbolic traces upon the hands? And by what means are the traces left?³⁷

Having probed the unclear nature of such a 'connexion' with these rhetorical questions, he goes on to claim that scepticism regarding this new field of study echoes the shape of other areas of incomplete knowledge in the medical arena, since 'in reality, the mind-body correlation is just as inexplicable, just as irrational, as the hand-life relation. It must be accepted as a brute fact of experience.'³⁸ Experience is what Wolff is able to provide, having made the most of *social* connections to access the hands of numerous subjects of study, human and primate. Eliot, for one, was sceptical regarding Wolff's analytic practice, believing that reputational information about her subjects was being incorporated in her readings. Writing to his older brother Henry, he declares: 'I was not much impressed by Mrs Wolff's diagnosis: even if she knew nothing of me, still she has some very strong prejudices

³⁵ M. E. Warlick, 'Palmistry as Portraiture: Dr Charlotte Wolff and the Surrealists', in Tessel M. Bauduin, Victoria Ferentinou, and Daniel Zamani, eds, *Surrealism, Occultism and Politics: In Search of the Marvellous* (London: Routledge, 2018), 57–72 (61).

³⁶ In the 1930s, the Surrealists were influenced by Émile-Jules Grillo de Givry's *Le Musée des Sorciers, Mages et Alchimistes* (1929), an illustrated history of the occult that included a chapter on 'Chiromancy' or hand analysis, and included images associated with earlier phases of palmistry. It is plausible that Wolff knew the book and discussed it with Huxley.

³⁷ Aldous Huxley, 'Preface', in Charlotte Wolff, *Studies in Hand-Reading*, trans. O. M. Cook (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936), vii–xiv (vii).

³⁸ Huxley, 'Preface', xiii.

I should say.³⁹ Yet Huxley obliquely indicates the failures of conventional medicine in declining to fully investigate the claims of the chirologist, a position implied to be one of strategic ignorance, when he writes that ‘the sort of people who might be expected to answer the question [of how the hand–life correlation is effected] don’t believe that the correlation really exists.’⁴⁰ The true neglect here is a lack of scientific curiosity, and just such a charge is put to all those doctors who respond to Jacob’s gift. Wolff’s *The Human Hand* (1942) carries a note from the publisher which takes a different tack to Huxley’s preface to the earlier work, not accusing medics of neglect but, rather, insisting upon Wolff’s place amongst their number, as against the crackpot and the quack: ‘A clear distinction should be drawn at the outset between the activities of the author of this book, a professional psychologist and physician who interprets hands with a scientific aim, and the activities of people who read hands and dabble in psychology.’⁴¹ The paratextual apparatus of Wolff’s output might be a case of ‘protesting too much’, akin to Dr Waldo’s repeated invocation of the terms ‘ethical’ and ‘scientific’, but Huxley’s complicity in disseminating Wolff’s work indicates that, far from seeing her as a Waldo figure, he felt that chiromancy might be a path to understanding human lives and trajectories—a credulous response that has also shaped the presentation of Jacob’s tale. Wolff returned Huxley’s esteem, as indicated in her reading of his hand, which calls the rectitude of his digits ‘a symbol of creative work which aims at intellectual, artistic and ethical perfection, and has no practical purpose.’⁴² Spinning Jacob through spiritual, religious, medical, financial, and show-business environments permits Huxley and Isherwood to view his hands through many epistemological frameworks, while foregrounding this question of the ethical deployment of an uncomfortably inexplicable gift. Wolff’s influence upon the screen treatment, subtle though it is, serves to emphasize the hands as the location where an assessment of character might best be formed. It also suggests that, in manual matters, conventional science might currently run behind the ‘discoveries’ of the chirologist. Jacob’s hands cannot truly be read, since the source of their power is unknown (what, after all, ‘comes into [them]?’), but the text suggests that by their fruits shall ye know them.

³⁹ T. S. Eliot, ‘Letter to Henry W. Eliot, 4 February 1938,’ *Letters of T. S. Eliot Vol. VIII: 1936–1938*, ed. Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (London: Faber, 2019), 787–8 (788). Eliot does not reject chiromancy completely, however, as he promises to send his brother’s palm prints to the allegedly superior Noel Jaquin, palmist and hand-reader, for an opinion. Eliot’s Faber had published Jaquin’s *The Hand of Man* in 1933.

⁴⁰ Huxley, ‘Preface,’ xiii.

⁴¹ Anonymous, ‘Publisher’s Note,’ in Charlotte Wolff, *The Human Hand* (London: Methuen, 1942), xi–xii (xi).

⁴² Wolff, *Studies in Hand-Reading*, 75–6.

Spiritual Touch

The treatment's engagement with science and pseudoscience is supplemented by a further framework by which bodily experience might be interpreted: that of the Pentecostal Church. When Sharon eventually runs away from the family ranch to pursue her dreams of a singing career in Los Angeles, and Jacob follows, the treatment's second act meets him using his manual healing abilities within the environs of the 'Church of the Primitive Pentecostal Brotherhood'. At first, this seems merely a place where a man with a gift that could plausibly be read as a form of faith healing might feel most at home. Yet Huxley and Isherwood's depiction of the specifically Pentecostal Church of the early 1920s is selected with care, as that faith had particular resonances at the time of writing. The authors draw on a recent Los Angeles-based faith revival to explore the parallels between Jacob's scenes of healing and Pentecostalism's embodiment of the Holy Spirit in instances of speaking in tongues, which might be brought about by a laying on of hands. They also use representation of the Black-led Church to emphasize Jacob's affinity with Black friends and acquaintances, distinguishing him from the wider racist attitudes of the period, sketched in brief in the text. In turn, the portrayal of Black figures on-screen is proposed by the treatment in order to make a particular form of sensory appeal to the prospective audience—in this, the authors are influenced by racialized film theory of their own contemporary moment, which reads Black actors on-screen as markedly haptic. En route to mining this alleged sensory power of the Black body, Huxley and Isherwood also glancingly acknowledge the little-discussed importance of the early twentieth-century Pentecostal Church as, first, a cultural coordinate for writing that takes the contested ground of the body as its subject, and second, a radical space of interracial solidarity, emphasized by physical proximity in the act of worship, in the rapidly industrializing, immigrant-staffed cities of the United States.

The treatment connects Pentecostalism and Black bodies from the first of the church scenes. That church is presided over by a Black minister, Reverend Wood, whose 'earnest eloquence is at once touching in its sincerity; absurd because of his queer locutions and quaintly applied texts' (31). While his 'touching' words reach the congregation, who are moved to interjections and statements of praise, it is clear that the authors here attempt to specify a future actor's performance that will emphasize the alleged eccentricities and interpretative strategies (in which sacred texts are 'quaintly applied') of Pentecostal worship. The term 'queer' has appeared once before, when Professor Carter responds furiously to Jacob's healing of Sharon's disability (which has her walk with a limp, intermittently implied to be a psychosomatic hobbling), decides upon firing him from employment at the ranch, and states in his absence that 'He is queer and undesirable and not to be trusted with girls' (27). Most conspicuously, the Professor rails against his own waning control over his daughter, as well as naming Jacob as (socially) 'undesirable' at the moment

when his (sexual) desirability first arises as a problem to be tackled. Yet, in addition, the attempt to sexualize the spiritual practice of laying on of hands and to establish Jacob's queer peripherality pre-empts his later association with the Pentecostal Church, outlining the contours of potential public objections to such a church and its conceptualization of and engagement with the body.⁴³ Other aspects of Jacob's life, including his biblical contemplations and his mooted sainthood, link him more straightforwardly to a worship environment. In the 'Epilogue' he murmurs, 'Take up thy bed and walk' (recalling John 5:8–16), going on to ask, 'how many can tell when it's right to say it? How many can tell where the sick man's going, when he gets up...? How many know what the sickness meant?' (119). The questions raise the issue of being in a fit spiritual state to both justify and enable the healing, much in mind in Pentecostal practice. Further, Jacob replaces the 'who should we kill?' question that has marked the Great War with an interwar 'who should we cure?'. Earl, who eventually becomes Jacob's rival for Sharon's affections, says of him, 'Maybe he's a kind of saint or something', an argument that seeks to undermine his capacity for the frivolity that Sharon craves, even as it reasserts his special status. When Topsy the dog's bickering owners close the 'Epilogue' as lovers once again, as Hollywood demands, Mary says of Jacob: 'there's something about that guy. Something wonderful. Just being with him – it did something to me' (121). Saint Jacob, with the power to '[do] something', and a whickering sense of the moral rightness of the performance of miracles, seems absolutely at home in this church (called 'Brother' by Rev. Wood [32], both 'in Christ' and 'of the congregation', but also perhaps connoting fealty across racial lines), foregrounding by his presence there both his own queer and controversial capacities, and those of Pentecostalism's miraculous summonings of the Holy Spirit. Huxley and Isherwood therefore play their part in identifying the laying on of hands (or laying over, in Jacob's case, since contact is not confirmed) as central to Pentecostal notions of the body as a site of revelation—a reading that pre-empts today's scholarship regarding the faith.

Jacob's insistence that '[i]t's not anything *I* do It just comes into me, somehow' (20) should therefore be reread in a Pentecostal context. 'I' or the healer may not 'do' the healing but, it is implied by the italic-denoted emphasis on the first person pronoun, some other force or entity is at work. As Andrew Singleton explains, 'in the Pentecostal movement, the body becomes the conduit through which an encounter of an otherworldly kind is experienced and manifested'.⁴⁴ This might

⁴³ The *Los Angeles Herald* reported on Azusa Street in the following terms: 'There were all ages, sexes, colors, nationalities and previous conditions of servitude.... It was evident that nine out of every ten persons present were there for the purpose of new thrills. This was a new kind of show in which admission was free.' Cited in Cecil M. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, TN: Robert Nelson, 2006), 1.

⁴⁴ Andrew Singleton, 'The Rise and Fall of the Pentecostals: The Role and Significance of the Body in Pentecostal Spirituality', *Religion and the Body* 23 (2011), 381–99 (388).

occur when, in response to a laying on of hands from a minister, a congregation member comes to speak in tongues, one of a possible set of 'charisms', which should be understood as 'a corporeal manifestation of, and therefore affirmation of, the reality of the all-encompassing presence of God's spirit'.⁴⁵ Thus Jacob's hands can be seen as a form of spiritual real estate, where forces from beyond the material world find their path into quotidian existence. In David Lyon's formulation, which neatly underscores the role assigned to Jacob by his creators, the Pentecostal body becomes the 'setting for the drama'.⁴⁶ The dramatic aspects of a congregation member affected by the Holy Spirit were one source of fascination in journalistic accounts of Pentecostalism at this time.⁴⁷ Further, reading Pentecostalism in the context of *Jacob's Hands*' other engagements with manual cultures makes clear that, beyond prurient press interest, that faith sits comfortably amidst contemporary debates regarding the relationship between body and mind. For Lawrence, it was once again at the site of the hands that such a relationship might best be contemplated. His essay 'Why the Novel Matters' of 1925 finds him pondering the power of the beasts at the ends of his arms: 'Why should I look at my hand, as it so cleverly writes these words, and decide that it is a mere nothing compared to the mind that directs it? ... My hand is alive, it flickers with a life of its own.'⁴⁸ Jacob's experiences chime with Lawrence's, although as conduit or channel for external forces his hands have, rather than their 'own' life, the status of a site for the appearance of unknown powers. In deciding that such explorations should best take place on the cinema screen, Huxley and Isherwood agree with another author of 1925, the artist Fernand Léger, whose *Functions of Painting* contains the claim that '[b]efore I saw it in the cinema, I did not know what a hand was!'⁴⁹

For the authors, then, Pentecostalism also provides the chance to think about the role of the hand in instances of spectacle on-screen. Even imagining Rev. Wood's peculiarly affecting locutions seems to have shifted the authors' own manner of expression, as the screen treatment slips into a kind of free indirect discourse in depictions of the church scenes. One phrase, associated with the Reverend himself in the throes of crowd control as the congregation vies for Jacob's healing attentions, reiterates the performance qualities of the enterprise when he issues the instruction

⁴⁵ Stephen Shapiro and Philip Barnard, *Pentecostal Modernism: Lovecraft, Los Angeles and World-Systems Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 51.

⁴⁶ David Lyon, 'Wheels within Wheels: Globalization and Contemporary Religion', in Mark Hutchinson and Olga Kalu, eds, *A Global Faith: Essays on Evangelicalism and Globalization* (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1998), 47–68.

⁴⁷ 'When public journalism reported on Pentecostals, it was not only to mock, but also to stir up moral panic over its racial mixtures, often suggesting that whites, especially female whites, were degraded through association with Blacks.' Shapiro and Barnard, *Pentecostal Modernism*, 87.

⁴⁸ D. H. Lawrence, 'Why the Novel Matters', in Bruce Steele, ed., *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 193–8 (193).

⁴⁹ Fernand Léger, 'The Machine Aesthetic: Geometric Order and Truth', in Edward F. Fry, ed., *Functions of Painting*, trans. Alexandra Anderson (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), 62–6 (65).

to 'Remember that this is God's house, not the circus' (32). The phrase reprimands unbecoming behaviour, reattributes healing power to the Holy Spirit, making Jacob a mere fortunate channel, and pushes against any assumption on the part of the crowd that this is merely a diverting but frivolous show. Yet with the future cinematic audience of *Jacob's Hands* in mind, it might be said that Rev. Wood issues this reminder precisely because the church scenes will have a circus quality, and in so doing anticipate the shabby theatrics of Jacob's later locations, the 'Main Street Art Theater' (with its 'nonstop performance of vaudeville and burlesque' [35]) and the 'Psycho-Magnetic Medical Centre' (involving more theatrics than the theatre). Finally, 'not the circus' obliquely implies an ethnographic gaze as well as a touristic impulse, recalling Lawrence's essay 'The Hopi Snake Dance', which depicts large numbers of tourists watching a 'native' ceremony precisely as if it is a 'circus performance'.⁵⁰ In parallel to the scene of Jacob's healing of the calf, Huxley and Isherwood play with a vividly imagined cinematic presentation that has all the appeal of a show, and attempt to reiterate the authentically miraculous nature of the work of the hands which is being depicted. Rev. Wood is not shown as undertaking the laying on of hands, although his 'touching' sermon hints in the direction of a notably affective mode of address. However, such a practice would be part of worship at his church, making Jacob's particular manner of healing familiar in form or process, if not in results (the latter neither explicitly invokes nor attributes healing to the Holy Spirit, and no charisms attend his efforts). Jacob, Wolff, and the Pentecostals now stack up as a series of hand-dependent healers and summoners due for topical consideration by any audience of 1944.

The appearance of Pentecostal worship practices in the pages of *Jacob's Hands* may simply indicate the wider significance of the faith in American culture of the 1940s.⁵¹ However, the authors can also be read as responding in particular to the Azusa Street revival which took place in Los Angeles on 9 April 1906, instigated by Black minister William J. Seymour. Attention to this specific development of the faith both flags up the role of the hand in Pentecostal practice and suggests that Huxley and Isherwood were ahead of their peers in recognizing the significance of the revival, and its potential for depiction on screen. In fact, Stephen Shapiro and Philip Barnard have referred to this revival as a 'second major Californian "earthquake"', preceding San Francisco's Great Earthquake of 18 April 1906 by a

⁵⁰ D. H. Lawrence, 'The Hopi Snake Dance', in *Mornings in Mexico* (London: Secker, 1927), 136–69 (138).

⁵¹ For the Azusa Street revivalists, the Book of Acts had particular significance, dealing as it does with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost or Whitsun, and more widely the work of the Apostles after the death and ascension of Christ: 'When the day of Pentecost had come they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting' (Acts 2:2). The wind against which Professor Carter turns his collar (noted above) might therefore be read not only as the first intimation that family relationships will shift with the commencement of Jacob's healing acts but also as the first inkling of a Pentecostal presence in the text.

matter of days. Further, the latter quake was read as ‘evidence of the onset of dispensational signs concerning end times and Christ’s imminent return,’ seeming to cement the church’s bona fides.⁵² The place of worship in which Jacob is healing echoes the modest premises at 312 Azusa Street which, having been in the past a First African Episcopal Church, had fallen into disrepair after a period in which it was ‘rented by various enterprises, including, recently, a horse stable.’⁵³ Huxley and Isherwood’s description hints at such shabbiness, but also emphasizes the race and ethnicity of the worshippers present: ‘The church is a small bare hall with a raised platform at one end and rows of benches for the congregation. The place is crowded. There are Ne[****]s, Mexicans, Chinese, and a sprinkling of Caucasians; all poor, simple, devout people’ (32). Azusa Street was located in a then Black-dominated business district of the city, and its congregation predominantly made up of the Black, white, and Mexican faithful. While newspaper reportage focused on the upper room, where men and women lay down together to receive laying on of hands, and experienced a variety of charisms, it was Azusa’s racial ecumenicalism that marked it as a new departure. For Shapiro and Barnard, Azusa was catalysed by ‘the intersection of the particular conditions of [industrial] modernism with a social ecology of post-emancipation racial equality,’ to such an extent that instances of speaking in tongues may be mapped to ‘locales that combined new industrial development with immigrant-driven population growth.’⁵⁴ As early as 1910, Los Angeles had one of the largest Black populations in the US, and the largest west of Houston, as a result of the importation of labour to service companies such as Pacific Electric.⁵⁵ Seymour’s vision was therefore one of racial equality as much as access to spiritual realms, and the Azusa Street revival and its prominent Black ministers suggested that the two were intertwined, just as Huxley and Isherwood would go on to do.

The authors stage Jacob’s commitment to Black friends not only in the church but also amongst the service staff of the Medwin family’s Beverly Hills estate, one of whom (the chauffeur George Hamilton) is eventually revealed to be the companion at the Mojave smallholding whom we have met in the ‘Epilogue.’ In doing so, they shift the interracial solidarity of Pentecostal spiritual practice into other domains and connect the religious ‘quake’ to a flattening of social hierarchies, which finds its echo in the geographies of the plain to which Jacob has been shown to be drawn: ‘George...has always wanted to get away from the big city, into an atmosphere

⁵² Shapiro and Barnard, *Pentecostal Modernism*, 84. The date of Azusa Street’s beginnings has been debated. I rely upon Shapiro and Barnard here.

⁵³ Shapiro and Barnard, *Pentecostal Modernism*, 81.

⁵⁴ Shapiro and Barnard, *Pentecostal Modernism*, 63–4. For more on the class coordinates of the Pentecostal revivals of the early twentieth century, see Vivian E. Deno, ‘Holy Ghost Nation: Race, Gender, and Working-Class Pentecostalism, 1906–1912,’ PhD Thesis, University of California, Irvine, 2002.

⁵⁵ Quintard Taylor, ‘Urban Black Labor in the West, 1849–1949: Reconceptualizing the Image of a Region,’ in Joe W. Trotter with Earl Lewis and Tera W. Hunter, eds, *African American Urban Experience: From the Colonial Period to the Present* (London: Palgrave, 2004), 99–120 (105).

where racial and class distinctions don't count. Jacob describes the beauties of the Mojave' (89). Therefore, although there are pragmatic aspects to Huxley and Isherwood selecting Los Angeles as a location, given the facilities available in what was in the 1940s a major movie industry hub, it cannot be a coincidence that it is also the site of California's second major seismic shift of the early part of the twentieth century, reframing the body as a space where spiritual forces manifested, and were witnessed and interpreted rather than fully known or measured. In the screen treatment, Jacob finds his place at the Pentecostal Church not only as a man of 'queer' powers accessed through laying on of hands but also as a 'brother' in faith and participant in an interracial community of equals. Where newspaper and cinema audiences might be encouraged to see a 'circus', Jacob sees a second Great Earthquake, this time of social relations, resulting in a space of worship where his moral rectitude and sense of justice can be appeased.

For the authors, the Church therefore provides one framework for understanding Jacob's gift and enables an exploration of particular forms of embodiment, drawing parallels between Jacob's healing/channelling and manifestations of the Holy Spirit via the witnessed charisms of Pentecostal worship. Yet in formulating that parallel, they tangle with the notion of a particular tactile appeal (peculiarly 'touching', as Rev. Wood is said to be) that was at this time attributed to Black figures on screen. Jacob's affinity with Black friends, inflected by his 'saintly' and war-honed sense of brotherhood, and built through communal worship and (in the Medwin home) shared spaces of labour, is also subtly ascribed to his own embodied and haptic mode of being. At this time, Black actors were subject to racialized readings in which they were said not only to reach the sensorium of the cinema audience in an especially affective way but also to flag up the haptic capacities of the cinematic form itself. That a Black body might be distinctive in its ability to be *felt* by an audience was discussed at some length in the August 1929 edition of the film magazine *Close Up*, put together by the Pool Group, including H. D., Kenneth Macpherson, and Bryher. On the theme of 'The N[****] in Film', it drew together the work of major African American commentators from the world of film and beyond, alongside white writers with interests in the issue of race in cinema. Geraldyn Dismond (Gerri Major), in a piece tackling 'The N[****] Actor and the American Movies', laments the range of roles given to Black players, restricted to 'fools and servants' whatever their talents—traditions that remain in place in *Jacob's Hands*, Rev. Wood excepted.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Harry A. Potamkin refers to the casting of Black actors as a 'photogenic opportunity', in which the 'plastic' qualities of Black bodies, their alleged capacity to be rendered more fully in three dimensions on the flat plane of the cinematic screen, brings affective advantages that permit an audience to feel with the eyes: 'He should be black so that the sweat may glisten the more and

⁵⁶ Geraldyn Dismond, 'The N[****] Actor and the American Movies', *Close Up* 5 (August 1929), 90–7 (96).

the skin be apprehended more keenly.⁵⁷ To apprehend is both to know and to grasp, and thus Black actors on screen are perceived to have ‘reach’, to appeal to the sensorium of the viewer in a distinctive way.⁵⁸

Primed to attend to tactile matters by the central premise of healing through the hands, the prospective audience of *Jacob's Hands* itself might therefore read Rev. Wood and his ‘queer’ and ‘touching’ sermons, or George and his second, mobile and vibrant skin of bees, as an appeal to their own bodily response beyond the visual. Such a reading recalls the multisensory overwhelm of Huxley's Feelies in *Brave New World*. There, it is ‘a gigantic N[****]’ who is depicted as the central star of *Three Weeks in a Helicopter*,⁵⁹ conveyed via a cinematic contraption involving galvanic knobs to be clutched by audience members, transmitting the titillating sensations of whatever is shown on screen, to a point of ‘almost intolerable... pleasure.’⁶⁰ Thus while Jacob's allegiance to his Black brothers is sociopolitical and justice-oriented in origin, made manifest through the egalitarianism of the Pentecostal Church, Huxley and Isherwood promote a further affinity by linking this hands-based healer to Black bodies thought in this period to be provocatively haptic in appeal. Further, both Jacob himself and his Black acquaintances are written in such a way as to contribute to, and to emphasize, cinema's own attempts at a ‘laying on of hands’—the effort to engage holistically with the bodies of its audience. While this exploration reaches its ludicrous end point in the fictional logic of Huxley's Feelies, cinema's haptic aspects were recognized in the era, particularly by those with an interest in the phenomenology of film spectatorship. Walter Benjamin calls modernist cinema itself ‘primarily tactile, being based on changes of place and focus which periodically assail the spectator’, a reading that indicates the embodied nature of film spectatorship, from the earliest decades of the form's establishment.⁶¹ Dorothy Richardson, writing of life in ‘The Front Rows’ in 1928, describes not so much being assailed, as a mode of engagement that involves the tactile creep of eye across screen: ‘Of the whole as something to hold in the eye he [the spectator] can have no more idea than has the proverbial fly on the statue over which he crawls.’⁶² But it is Virginia Woolf

⁵⁷ Harry A. Potamkin, ‘The Aframerican Cinema’, *Close Up* 5 (August 1929), 107–17 (109). My thanks to Bryony Armstrong and Polly Hember for drawing my attention to this article. For an extended discussion of Black skin and visual culture in the early twentieth century, see Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁵⁸ Erica Fretwell has recently drawn attention to the work of pseudoscientist Lorenz Oken, who reworks the Aristotelian hierarchy of the senses so that the ‘white eye-man’ predominates over the ‘Black skin-man’. Lorenz Oken, *Elements of Physiophilosophy* (London: Ray Society, 1847), 653. Cited in Fretwell, *Sensory Experiments: Psychophysics, Race, and the Aesthetics of Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 32–3.

⁵⁹ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Flamingo, 1994), 151.

⁶⁰ Huxley, *Brave New World*, 52.

⁶¹ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 211–44 (231).

⁶² Dorothy Richardson, ‘Continuous Performance (series)’, in James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus, eds, *Close Up 1927–1933: Cinema and Modernism* (London: Cassell, 1998), 150–209 (172).

who makes the most explicit connection between the visual spectacle of the cinema and a haptic form of engagement, writing in 'The Cinema' (1926): 'The eye licks it [the film scenario] all up instantaneously, and the brain, agreeably titillated, settles down to watch.'⁶³ If cinema at the time of Huxley and Isherwood's writing was flexing these capacities to convey to its audience tactile experience, and breaching the limits of the two-dimensional screen to prompt lick-touch haptic responses, the mode in which the authors were working—the screen treatment—can be understood to make allied attempts. Such a treatment, as distinct from the screenplay, storyboard, or script, records scenes and vital props, sketches characters and their affects or orientations, offers dialogue of particular importance, and occasionally slips into more conventional fictional narrative, some of it (as noted above) in free indirect discourse. Therefore this mode of writing, while it seems to rebut conventional close reading practices (perhaps explaining the text's relative neglect in the scholarship), performs a kind of conjuring of its own. The challenge for the authors is to not merely describe the depicted events but convey how it might *feel* to witness them, once projected onto a cinema screen. The reader's task, in turn, is to summon the sensations of the mooted viewing, all the more powerful because of the haptic concerns of the film proposed.

Read with attention to the place of the hands amidst psychological, pseudo-medical, and spiritual frameworks, *Jacob's Hands* is far from a squib or a failure, for all its faults, inelegant shifts between interests, and grudging capitulations to some of Hollywood's most commercially driven expectations. Indeed, it should be re-evaluated as an important attempt to tackle the histories of the human hand: a mid-century rendering of the Great War that turns to manual matters to think through damage and blessing, as do others, Lawrence included; a spiritual exploration, sketching the limits of medical knowledge, and engaging with chirolgy's claims for the hand as itself a readable text; an attempt to track Pentecostalism's body cultures and seismic shifts in racial ecumenicalism; and a hand-focused screen treatment that imagines a haptic cinema, with Black figures to the fore. While Huxley and Isherwood's Heard- and Swami Prabhavananda-influenced interests in Eastern spiritual texts undoubtedly shape their thinking, consideration of the influence of Lawrence, Wolff, Azusa Street, and haptic cinematics makes further sense of the treatment and its engagement with modernist manual cultures. In turn, the strands of influence coming to bear on Huxley and Isherwood as they prepared the screen treatment emerge more clearly, all of them converging on the real estate of the palm. Jacob's healing hands can be identified retrospectively as pointing, like a manuscript's marginal manicule, toward vital debates within sensory studies in the early twentieth century.

⁶³ Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema', in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), 166–71 (166).

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