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**The Digital Geographies of Tact**

**Abstract:**
This article outlines a research agenda for the spatialities of tact produced by, through and of digital spaces. As a discipline interested in what and who characterises digital space, and in how different relations come to produce space, the article puts forward a proposition for geographers to take tact seriously as an inherently spatial concept useful for theorising the production of space in our digital society. The paper identifies three strands of tact from the literature, 1) tact and social behaviour, 2) tact and touch, 3) tact and judgement, and outlines what they can offer geography in terms of a novel framework for studying digital society. It raises questions of how and why digital spaces and practices produce new trajectories for displays of tact in everyday life, how digital spaces modulate our understanding and experiences of touch, as well as asking whether algorithmic decision making technologies such as Artificial Intelligence have a capacity for tact, and what that means for the geographies these systems shape. The work makes a contribution to the discipline’s long standing interests in spatial tactics and socio-spatial behaviour, in touch and sensory geographies, and more recently to algorithmic decision making.
Keywords
Tact, Tactics, Tactility, Touch, Social Behaviour, Judgement, Space, Digital Media, Artificial Intelligence

Introduction
This article outlines a research agenda for the spatialities of tact produced by, through and of digital spaces. It raises the question of how and why digital spaces produce new trajectories for displays of tact in everyday life as well as asking whether calculated decision making digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) have a capacity for tact, or the capacity to be affected by tact when shaping differing geographies. As a discipline interested in what and who characterises space, and in how different relations come to produce space, I invite digital geographers to take tact seriously as spatial concept and social dimension that is useful for theorising the production of space in our digital society.

Tact is generally defined as the sense of touch or the delicate skill needed to handle all manner of social situations without causing offence. Its etymological root (1650s) comes from the Latin tangere (‘to touch, handle’), and is later, in 19th century France, associated with perception and diplomacy. Tact shares the same etymological root for ‘tactility', the perception of touch, and with ‘tactics’, referring to ‘arrangement’. Though still connected, each has gone on to develop different meanings in language and culture, and to be used differently across disciplines and domains.
Tact has long been studied and taught as part of western philosophy (Derrida, 2005; Kant, 1798; Lingis, 2007; Serres, 2008), pedagogy (Kenklies, 2023; Max van Manen, 1991), psychoanalysis (Lowenstein, 1935; Sledge, 1989; Reik, 1952), military theory (Clausewitz, 1832) and music theory (Engberg-Pedersen, 2018). This has resulted in three overlapping strands of thought: tact as a situated social behaviour, tact as a sense of touch, and tact a sense of judgement. Together they provide a framework for understanding tact as a social, embodied and cognitive phenomena that can been used to theorise spatial behaviours, relations and practices.

Whilst geographers have engaged with the concept, tact remains relatively understudied, or perhaps underemphasised, as an organising principle for the social and material relations that shape spaces and places. The discipline has widely explored the performance of the self, owing much to Goffman’s dramaturgical model of self-presentation (1956), and recognised the socio-spatial performances of tact and touch through the study of sensory and embodied experiences in various settings (Anderson and Smith, 2001; Bondi, 2016; Crang, 1994; Pile, 2010; Rodaway, 1994). More recently this has been developed in work that highlights the importance of spatiality to (post)phenomenological philosophy (Ash and Simpson, 2014). This follows geography’s turn away from the visual (Driver, 2003) and towards the study of the non and more-than representational, haptic engagement, affect, emotions and embodied practice (Bondi, 2005; Dixon and Straughan, 2010).
Digital spaces provide new or augmented spaces where the social practices of tact are reproduced and reconfigured. Recalling the novelty of social spaces produced through video conferencing during the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a reminder of how social displays of tact can be shaken up when such technologies are adopted en masse (see James and Leader, 2023; James et al. 2023). Learning new conversational norms including turn-taking, muting and camera positioning all had a bearing on how we performed acts of tactful or tactless behaviour during lockdown and beyond. Goffman’s (1959) famous concept of ‘tactful inattention’ – averting one’s attention in a social interaction to ‘save face’ and avoid embarrassment of the other – is clearly being shaped in new ways as socio-technical relations continue to unfold (see De Armond, 2018).

Social media channels offer further examples of how affordances of technology can shape behaviors of tact. They produce new spaces for multi-modal interaction, giving users the affordances to perform tact, through text, images, sounds, video and emojis. This creates the conditions for richer displays of tactful behaviour, whether they be for good (e.g. engaging in genuine empathy) or for ill (e.g. manipulation through scamming), leading some to claim the art of tact has been either valourised or lost in our digital age (Scott, 2021).

Nevertheless, within this body of work, the broader dimensions of tact beyond a form of social behaviour remain relatively underexplored by a discipline interested in how we and others engage with the world. I urge a broader appreciation of tact and how it can
help us understand how space is produced by, through and of digital media (see Ash et al. 2018). It is necessarily to expand the common notion of tact and begin to think about its broader relations to touch and judgement if we are to consider its implications for thinking about the spaces produced by, through and of the calculative ‘decision-making’ technologies, such as AI, which increasingly shape our society.

Thinking through the lens of tact as a form of touch opens new possibilities for studying digital communications and materialities, and how they shape embodied and emotional experiences. Equally, thinking through tact as a form of judgement, specifically what amounts to a judgement in a digital society, provides new terrain for understanding the processes of the algorithmic technologies which guide many decisions being made today, for example in automated urban processes (Cugurullo et al. 2024).

To bring the different dimensions of tact together into a research agenda the paper is structured under the following headings 1) tact and social behaviour, 2) tact and touch, and 3) tact and judgement. Each of which situates tact and how it might be studied in distinct, albeit not altogether separate, ways by geographers. Ultimately, the aim is to start a discussion on the use of tact in ‘digital geography’; what it is, when it matters, and for whom? In this sense, the work contributes to long standing theories about the production of space and raises new, timely, questions for spaces produced through, by and of the digital.

**Tact and social behaviour**
The first strand of tact – it’s behavioral dimension – can be summed up by David Heyd, who refers to it as ‘a [linguistic and symbolic] mode of behavior which is not constituted by criteria, which has no rules guaranteeing success, and which consists of sensitivity to the contextual and unique dimension of the situation at hand’ (1995: 222). This follows Aristotle’s notion of *phronesis*, which refers to a form of wisdom or intuitive intelligence about how to handle a given situation. There is a spatial dimension here too, for if we follow Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960), tact is specifically about preserving distance, rather than simply recognising the importance of distance in touch, so as not to cause offence or violation of another’s personal sphere. It’s about distance and respect. This has made it one of the key skills for diplomacy at varying scales, from the state to the household.

Nevertheless, David Russell’s (2018) writing on the development of tact in 19th century Britain offers a critique of this form of philosophical essentialism. He argues that tact emerged as a socio-historic practice in response to the changes of an urbanising world, where in a relatively short period of time, long standing hierarchical structures of space and society were upended by the social complexity brought about by rapid industrialization and migration to cities. Tact, or the art of *handling* situations, become increasingly important for people to ‘feel their way’ among this new social scene, and although social conventions remained, tact became a way for people to navigate between them and open new arenas of social possibility. For Russell, tact is less inherently human and more a dynamic mode of communication emerging from new social environments.
Following the social model of tact, Mark James and others (James and Leader, 2023; James et al. 2023) develop their concept of ‘digital tact’ to explain the social and habituated practices that developed during the major shift to online communication that occurred during the COVID-19 lockdowns. They found that we quickly developed new social behaviours of tact as we adopted video conferencing tools en masse. Even after a short time using these tools, they note how tactful and tactless behaviours emerged, such as knowing when to turn the mic or camera on/off, how conversation turn-taking works via this medium, as well as the phenomena of ‘zoom bombing’. This was also something playfully articulated in the Zoom Obscura project (Elden et al., 2022) where artists were charged with developing work that critically engaged with these new social spaces of datafication.

James et al. (2023) suggest that a focus on ‘digital tact’ can reveal how socio-technical practices produce emergent and affective attunements between people and technology. I would add to this that a geographic focus on ‘digital tact’ can both reveal how and why new spatial practices emerge. Following Russell (2018) we can see parallels here with how with how tact developed in 19th century urban spaces, but also with the emergence of other communication technologies. Fischer’s (1994) social history of the US telephone is a case in point. Here we see new norms, values and behaviours, which we must assume included practices of tact, emerge socio-technically as the telephone became embedded in the spaces if social life.
Regarding social media, geographers could apply the same principles of ‘digital tact’ outlined above but we could go further still. This is because social media spaces have the capacity to algorithmically reconfigure the norms of tact. In these multifarious spaces, users engage in tactful and tactless exchanges mediated by platforms that are designed to amplify some content and not others. There is not the same level of control as exists in the video conference space. This is demonstrated in research into how death and mourning are negotiated through social media spaces. Wagner’s (2018) study, for instance, found that norms around what and how to say and not say something via social media, through its many functions such as the ‘like’ button, were in a state of flux as users negotiated with different platforms and users.

Geographers have also approached the behavioural dimension of tact through the notion of ‘spatial tactics’, especially Michel de Certeau’s interpretation of tactics, which he uses to contrast with strategies in an everyday understanding of how power is structured and resisted. His seminal work, *The Practices of Everyday Life* (1984) has become a common point of reference for geographers interested in power and resistance played out in urban contexts, and tactics have been used extensively as a geographical concept for how individuals and groups are resisting the strategies of the people and places subjugating power upon them (Crang, 2002). In particular, geographers and others focusing on urban mobilities including walking, skateboarding (Borden, 2001), parkour (Daskalaki et al., 2008), urban exploration (Garrett, 2014) and more recently the so-called Smart City (Yeo, 2023) have been influenced by de Certeau’s theory, as have those focusing on participatory urban subversions (see Mold,
2014), where tactics are often used to explain spatial practices as political acts of resisting the strategies of urban planners, architects, institutions and governments. This work has been important for shedding light on minor acts of everyday resistance, but it is all too often abstracted from the complexity of everyday urban life. Jennie Middleton’s (2011, 2018) work has been crucial here for giving us a more critical and expanded view of urban pedestrian tactics. Focusing on urban walking she shows that tactics are not necessarily just the act of political resistance de Certeau would have us believe, but also an everyday practice shaped by a complex interplay between social life, culture, environments and technologies, as well as politics. Lamb (2011) too has shown how parkour offers insights into urban geographies that go beyond the political; they foreground the idea that tactics are also embodied and performed to produced feelings of flow between body, architecture and cityscape.

These latter themes are picked up by geographers studying the tactics available to those seeking to avoid the prevailing gaze of digital geo-surveillance. Swanlund et al.’s (2019) review of tactics to resist the strategies of state and commercial digital geo-surveillance offers a broad overview of how data minimization, obfuscation, and manipulation can all be employed by those seeking to live outside of the gaze. Similarly, Lin (2024) first raises the problems of individually targeted geo-surveillance practices and then highlights how technical and regulatory acts of privacy codependence – embracing the notion individual privacy is relationally dependent on the privacy of another - offer a tactical response to them.
There have been other interpretations of spatial tactics aside from de Certeau’s influence. This has been taken up by geographers interested in the performance of the self. Crang’s (1994) ethnographic study of restaurant labour is a notable example. He describes how waiting staff employ tact to satisfy the needs of customer tables with their own workload and the demands of the kitchen. This was recognised as ‘tactical manoeuvring’, or the intentional displays of avoidance, apology and care that were played out spatially around the restaurant as staff tried to maintain the balance and keep everyone on side. When done well, tactical manoeuvres ensure customers and kitchen are kept happy, and create the conditions for good tipping and collegiality. When done badly, customers and kitchen are left feeling underserved. What is interesting here is how the tactical manoeuvring of waiting staff invites us to consider what shapes the motives of tact, whether they be about workplace appeasement or economic gains (i.e. through subtle moves to encourage tipping). This differs from common notions of tact, which denote sensitivity, sympathy or empathy, and place it in the sphere of virtuous social behaviour (see Heyd, 1995), and instead invite the question how, or how much, intention and motive leads to displays of tact.

In the literature on women’s geographies of risk, the use of ‘tact’ and ‘tactics’ has been found to be motivated in both online and in-person spaces. Used to describe the spatial practices of predators and abusers, and the coping practices of women facing harassment, violence and abuse, tactics are intentionally employed to orchestrate encounters, and to avoid people, places and user accounts deemed risky (see Bowstead, 2021; Dragiewicz et al. 2018; Pain, 2001; Valentine, 1989). Others have
identified the tactful performances and tactics that (re)produce racialised relations in everyday life. This is a phenomenon well accounted for in academic research, but equally in film, television and fiction.¹ Speaking of these interactions as ‘contact zones’ Dan Swanton’s (2010) ethnography of a multicultural British town shows how spatial tactics of avoidance were used to ease the anxieties of the white population in the wake of the Islamophobia that swept the country in the wake of the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks. He recounts deliberate moves to avoid known ‘no-go areas’ for white folk and the changes made to daily routines as a response to the sensationalised media narratives of the time. Similarly, Elijah Anderson’s (2022) Black in White Space is full of ethnographic accounts of how Black folk in the USA must engage tactfully in white spaces to avoid incident or evade the racialised gaze. His stories of deliberate moves to appease the anxieties of white folk, and to ensure a trouble free day, highlight the ways tact is at the forefront of racialised interactions. In response to racialised policing, Anderson and others have shown how Black folk, and young Black men in particular, are taught tactful ways to tow the line and conform with the instructions they are given in instances of stop and search. Tactless engagement can, and often does, lead to forceful arrests. Even then, as the case of George Floyd pointedly showed, attempts to act tactfully can produce devastating results.

Those focused on the racialized spaces of digital culture widely acknowledge the importance and potential problems of these spatial tactics, but equally they have found that digital platforms create new arenas for these tactics to play out (Hamilton, 2020).

¹ See, for example, Spike Jones’ ‘Do the right thing’ and Brandon Taylor’s ‘Real Life’.
Brok (2020), for example, recognizes the importance of how tact is employed by African American communities on social media, but also how these channels provide new spaces to resist the generational teachings of racialized tact, and create novel spaces for expression and community building.

Taken together, this often disparate literature situates tact as a dynamic social behaviour stemming from the ‘feeling out’ that defines much of human interaction. The work shows that tact is far more than the virtuous social act it is often known for. Instead it is shown to be complex performance involving empathy and sympathy, but equally intention, motive and resistance, all of which are modulated by different situational contexts. Moreover, the research makes clear that tact is as a skill that is taught, learned and practiced, even though it is situational and escapes universality.

Digital geographers aiming to build on the discipline’s interest in spatial behaviour have as many opportunities to explore this dimension of tact as there are digital spaces for communication. Centering tact provides a novel lens to view social interaction in these spaces, but it also asks different questions of algorithmic technologies like these, such as how they shape the motives, intentions and performances of tact. In addition to the social media spaces that could demand much of our attention, for example in how different platforms or groups use tact, we might also explore these questions of tact in the meta-verse spaces that are newly emerging (see Fraser, 2023), or through archival scholarship into how the digital practices of tact have evolved for communities that have adopted different websites and platforms over time. Building on the discipline’s long-
standing interest in tactics and power asymmetries outlined above offers some research questions on how to approach this. How, for example, are gendered or racialized motives, intentions and performances of tact shaped by, through and of digital spaces of communication? And, how do the affordances of communication platforms create new possibilities for spatial tactics and resistance to dominant power structures?

**Tact and touch**

Those that have theorised tact as a sense of touch have explored what it means for the body to be a sensor for touch, a mediator for the feelings of touch, and how touch provides an antithetical lens to the development of Western thought, which has largely been guided by sight and sound (Kearney, 2021; Serres, 2008). Engberg-Pedersen puts this simply when saying this is the study of tact as ‘the cognitive faculty invoked to makes sense of our senses’ (2018: 352). Much of this work stems from Jean-Luc Nancy’s philosophy of touch, which developed a vocabulary for thinking about where the limits of touch lie. More recently Derrida’s (2005) reworking of Nancy’s ideas through his 'law of tact' have been influential in arguing that touch, as an embodied, corporeal and cognitive way of knowing, is always-already limited by distance and the impossibility of truly touching and knowing another. Similarly, Alphonso Lingis theorises tact with spatiality in mind, proposing that tact is a form of sensitive touch from a distance:

> 'In ordinary language we refer to tactful behavior—tactful ways of approaching someone or keeping at a distance from him or her, and especially we speak of tactful language. It may seem that the notion of touch in the word tact is only
metaphorical. But there is a speaking that from a distance makes contact with the heartache, fury, mortification, wariness, and secrecy of a body’ (2007: 9).

Together, these philosophers ask us to contend with tact as a sense of touch, but not one that is necessarily felt through direct contact, ie. skin on skin. This places tact in the realm of embodiment, emotion, and cognition.

For geographers, this line of inquiry has encouraged questions of how space modulates our sense of touching or being touched from a distance. Through their work on touch, haptics and sensory experience, geographer’s have shown touch to be an embodied human practice of knowing the world that contributes to a sense of place and the formation of emotional experience (Rodaway, 1994). But they have also engaged with non-essentialist philosophy regarding how worldly beings make sense of their life-world through touch and being touched, and through proximal and distal forms of touch (Dixon and Straughan, 2010). This work has been important for further highlighting the problems of the ocular centrism of geography (Driver, 2003) and the more-than representational ways that touch produces spatial knowledge (Anderson and Harrison, 2011). It also acts a vital point of difference to mind-body dualism that underpins the common idea that tact is a purely consciously cognitive practice, rather than something produced through various embodied actions.

Technologies claiming to offer Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), and Mixed Reality (MR) have been a focus for digital geography and beyond (Osborne and Jones, 2022, 2023), which gives some indication as to where the study of tact as touch could
lead to. Questions regarding what it means, and for whom, to touch from a distance through the spaces that emerge with these technologies should be at the forefront of research. With growing evidence suggesting that VR and MR is finding its home in specialised rather than general areas of practice, geographers might look to how these technologies provide novel affordances to touch and be touched in specific domains, such as healthcare, gaming or the arts.

Spanning from these foci, ‘tactility’ in particular has received attention from geographers and others interested in materialities and touch. Those interested in maps, cartography and more recently, locative and spatial media, are just one group that have focused on this relation (Cole, 2021; Perkins, 2002; Pink and Fors, 2017). Here tactile generally refers to the sense of tangible touch, or the sense of contact with material surfaces, be they digital or analogue. Nevertheless, as this work also shows, to touch (digital) materialities is also to open oneself up to being touched by them, which creates social and emotional attachments to them.

Tactility has also been linked to haptics, especially as the interest in haptic media studies and digital materialism has grown (Parisi, 2017; Reichert and Richterich, 2015). Straddling digital materialism and material culture in the study of maps, Rossetto (2018) examines the tactility of digital and material mapping surfaces, demonstrating how they are used and understood as cartographic devices, but also as material and aesthetic objects. Rossetto argues that a focus on the tactile qualities of mapping surfaces can reveal the phenomenological and embodied ways that maps become part of our personal and social lives. This adds a refreshing perspective to studies on the surfaces
of maps, which have been studied extensively in terms of what they represent (see the field of critical cartography), but not how they are folded into everyday experience (see Duggan, 2024). Tactility is interesting here because it opens the door to the material dimension of tact, and shows how the concept is not restricted to interactions with other people, but how it can also be applied to understanding our relations with material objects.

Digital geographers interested in material culture and digital materialities may find tact to be a useful analytical lens because it asks new questions about what it means to touch and be touched from a distance, specifically by, of and through digital media. These are questions that can be taken up by those studying the human capacities for touch in a digital society, but also those examining human - non-human capacities in a digitally mediated world. Research in the fields of digital anthropology (Miller et al., 2021) over the past decade offers much inspiration in this respect because it has shown how digital media have the capacity to evoke emotive and affective responses in people and amongst groups. Similarly, the literature from digital ecology studies (Luque-Ayala et al., 2024; Turnbull et al., 2023) has shown how digital media such as sensing technology and community groups like the citizen science movement create new capacities to touch and be touched by non-human worlds.

**Tact and judgment**

The third strand of tact, which has received the least attention from geographers, stems from Kant's (1798) notion of *logical tact*, or judgment, which refers to the situational
decisions we make to bridge the conceptual gap between cognition and action, sensation and meaning, theory and practice. Following Derksen (2017), we might call this *the art of thinking*. In his view, tact ‘consists of maintaining a dynamic equilibrium (between imagining and understanding) by continually adjusting to a situation of which one is oneself a part’ (2017: 9).

This interpretation of tact has been taken up in pedagogical philosophy, where it is used to describe the situational judgements made by teachers to encourage learning and interaction from students (van Manen, 1991), and in psychoanalysis, where it is used to describe that which holds together the collaboration between the analyst and the analysed (Lowenstein, 1935; Sledge, 1989). Theodore Reik’s (1952) ‘third ear’ has long been used as pivotal concept in the field for describing the tact analysts must develop for holding the balance between themselves and their patients. Knowing when to probe, step back, listen and challenge, is said to be key to a successful session and lasting partnership. In both context’s tact has been taken seriously as a skill of judgement practitioners must learn, but also one that is must be adapted for each class or patient.

Central to this strand has been the temporality and performance of tactful judgement. This has been examined in management theories of decision making, where tact is considered the innate sense of intuition one has over when to make a judgement. Kornberger et al. (2019: 255) consider tact central to difficult decision making, as ‘an alternative epistemic model for decision-making in a world in which rational analysis of consequences and institutionalized rules of appropriateness both fail to provide guidance.’ They add that tact is ‘the critical interplay of thought and action in decision-
making under extreme pressure.’ (2019: 240). In military theory, the military strategist and Prussian general, Carl von Clausewitz recognised the tact of judgement to be the genius of the decisions made under the pressures of war, whereby quick action must often be made amongst the weight of competing factors (Clausewitz, 1832; Engberg-Pedersen, 2018). Similarly, in musical theory, tact refers to the inner sense musicians develop of when to hit a note, otherwise known as a sense or intuition of rhythm. Conversely, 'takt', with its etymological root in the Greek 'arrangement' (taxis), refers to an organising principle of musical notation most commonly represented by the Taktstrich, or the vertical bar-line that orders musical scores (Engberg-Pedersen, 2018). Practicing musical tact is therefore a complex and contextual process involving judgements on timing, tone and duration, knowledge of how an instrument plays, how others play, and how to read musical notation.

So, what does this have to do with digital geography? Geographers studying the impacts of digital technology have focused on the judgements, decisions and outcomes made by algorithmic technologies (Maalsen, 2023). Careful attention has been paid to analysing the processes in which self-organising algorithmic systems come to a decision, and how this differs to other socio-technical forms of judgement made by humans and technologies, and to the wider socio-spatial and ethico-political effects these have on society (see Amoore, 2020; Ash et al., 2018; Cugurullo et al., 2024). Yet to date, this work has not recognised tact as a close relation of judgement in its analysis, which I suggest neglects important dimensions of judgement making practices; namely the temporality and performativity of judgments made.
Geographers may find value in unpacking the question of whether such systems have a capacity for tact in the judgements they make, and what this could mean for the various geographies shaped by them. Work on the philosophy and ethics of judgment in algorithmic systems offers a good place to begin these enquiries, but I suggest much more could be done by geographers studying the temporality and performativity of algorithmic judgements that are made across varying geographical domains.

Following Fazi’s (2021) claim that AI represents an alien form of thinking, acting in proximity to but essentially incommensurable to human thought and practice, presents a challenge to the idea that computational machines have a capacity for tact, which we would be forgiven in thinking is possible given the numerous claims from industry that AI can make a judgment, for example in the domains of healthcare and financial services. Fazi suggests judgement is inherently a (post)human capacity, not something that can be replicated by AI systems. This is because AI judgements are based on the computational and calculated analysis of the complete arena the system operates in. Or as Dwyer (2023) puts it, AI systems only have a capacity to engage with the world and produce an outcome based upon the calculative probability of a ‘structured problem’. Unlike most human judgements, which are forced to acknowledge that not all possibilities can be considered, AI judgements are made in a vacuum.² Simply put, there is no outside to the processes of AI judgment making as there is in (post)human

² I am referring specifically to the closed systems of machine learning here. Whether they be supervised or unsupervised systems, the calculations themselves are done in a vacuum. Whether a calculated outcome is put into use or not is another question of judgement that sits outside of this vacuum.
judgement making. Moreover, Andrejevic (2020) argues that human judgements are made within social systems and using symbolic languages where knowledge gaps always exist – the act of making a good or poor judgment (and I might add a tactful or tactless judgement) is based on one’s ability to acknowledge where these gaps are and how to bridge them. Conversely, he suggests AI judgement making is purely operational (after Paglen, 2014), made in closed post-representational systems where only the capacity for a calculated outcome is possible.

Hence, any notion that AI possess the capacity for tact is incommensurable to the notion that humans have a capacity for tact. They cannot be measured against each other. And yet, in many domains we are still led to believe machines can replicate this capacity to good effect.

The domain of Automated Vehicles (AV), specifically self-driving cars, are of increasing interest to geographers (Yeo and Lin, 2020) and provide a useful case to explore this. This is because they are often said by industry to have the capacity to make effective and timely judgements, but at the same time raise new moral, legal and ethical challenges over what or who we trust to make judgements about driving behaviour and road safety (Epting, 2018; Hansson et al., 2021). Driving behaviours have long been shaped by tact in the judgements made through ‘driver-car’ assemblages (Dant, 2004), but now we face a world where the appearance of tact on the road obscures an epistemological difference in how algorithmic machines and ‘driver-car’ assemblages make decisions.
AV rely on sensor technologies and AI to ‘feel their way’ on the road, amongst other road users and driving conditions. There is an appearance of tact here, because like humans, the machine makes effective situated spatial judgements in order navigate itself in the world. Nonetheless, as Hind (2022) has argued, AV ‘see’ and recognise the world in a fundamentally different way to the human eye. This form of tact is incommensurable with a human driver’s capacity for tactful judgement because it is based upon recognition through calculation and probability, where a computational system attached to the vehicle and connected to the cloud, makes incremental calculated outcomes based on what it always-already considers a complete world, despite the constant collection of sensor data fed back into the system in real-time. We know this because the log data of AV crashes shows that these systems are often found to be calculating the probability of the objects around them, and what risk they pose, right up until the moment it is too late to avoid a collision (ibid).

This is not to say that the outcome of AV judgements will not reduce road accidents, but believing that machines have the capacity for tact based on appearance alone leads us into dangerous territory. Following Amoore (2020), we are led to believe AI is an opening for new epistemological ground, when in fact it is a foreclosing of possible alternatives that keep us in a decision making logic based on calculating outcomes of ‘structured problems’ rather than a decision making logic based on the dynamic social world that we live in. This has implications for geographers interested in how spaces shape and are shaped by AI technology because it asks that we consider how this
decision making logic is enacted onto people and places in meaningful ways, and also who is responsible for applying these systems and why they have been chosen.

One of the reasons why AV manufacturers cannot achieve 100% safety and why assigning responsibility by policy makers is difficult is because the world will live in can never be fully knowable or approached as a set of ‘structured problems’ to be solved. It is forever dynamic in ways that cannot be operationalized by algorithmic systems. Geography has a long recognized the instability of epistemology, and more recently the epistemological logics of algorithmic systems. This puts geographers in a good position to study and influence legislation on assigning responsibility to AV systems, which to date, tend to be designed with the assumption that knowledge of driving worlds is stable, if only enough data could be collected.

Beyond AV there are many other domains of AI decision making that geographers could examine using tact as a guiding framework to make sense of the processes and outcomes of the judgements said to be made by automated systems. As AI continues to shape how decisions are made and administered in domains such as healthcare, welfare and education, studying the temporality and performativity of judgements (tact) made by these systems, and the impacts they have, will be crucial for guiding public and policy responses to them.

**Conclusion**
Given Doreen Massey’s (2005) claim that spaces emerge from a constellation of social and material relations, geographers should recognise tact as guiding force in how these relations are produced by, through and of digital spaces. Similarly, if we follow Henri Lefebvre’s (1974) popular triadic conceptualisation of space, tact shapes how spaces are conceived, perceived and lived, in the sense that tact informs how spaces are designed, how spaces are represented and how spaces are embodied. Following the disciplines interest in the production of space, and increasingly digital spaces and practices, I have argued that a focus on tact will shed new light on how different digital geographies come into being.

As the diverse body of work in this paper shows, tact has been interpreted as a concept for understanding human practices and social behaviour in many interrelated ways, which I’ve synthesized here as 1) situated social behaviour, 2) senses of touch, and 3) a form of judgement. The paper’s aim was to provide a framework that provokes thought about tact as a spatial concept and to outline a research agenda for the digital geographies of tact. I hope that it provides an opening to explore in more detail and with greater scope how geographers might use the concept. To date, the discipline has mostly focused on tact from a socio-spatial behavioral perspective. This work has been significant and necessary for providing the basis of my proposition, but as I’ve shown there is far more we could do to pick apart the spatial dimensions of tact by studying its relations to touch and judgement.
The most fruitful areas I see are two-fold. Firstly, I see great potential in studying tact not as some form of natural or innate ability of humans to make effective and empathetic decisions in the moment – putting aside common associations with sensitivity – but instead with tact as a dynamic behaviour, practice and approach to people, things and objects that emerges in socio-spatial contexts; something than can be learned but never mastered due to the dynamic nature of our socio-material world, and something can be done with intention, motive and sensitivity. Digital society creates many opportunities to study tact in this way, ranging from the screen spaces of social media to the digitally augmented spaces of VR and digitally mediated material spaces of everyday life. Geographers are in an ideal position to do this owing to the long standing interest in studying spatial tactics and touch, where they have developed expansive methodologies for doing so.

Secondly, I see an opportunity for geographers to study tact as a dimension of judgment. The example of how AV judgements fundamentally differ from (post)human judgement puts forward a challenge for geographers seeking to understand the impact these technologies have on the production of different spaces and geographies. With a growing interest in how algorithmic technologies are being used to make judgements over many human and non-human domains, tact provides a useful frame for analysing the impacts of this.

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