



# To Make the Hands Impure: Art, Ethical Adventure, the Difficult and the Holy

*Adam Zachary Newton*

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**To Make the Hands Impure: Art, Ethical Adventure, the Difficult and the Holy** Adam Zachary Newton  
How can cradling, handling, or rubbing a text be said, ethically, to have made something happen? What, as readers or interpreters, may come off in our hands in as we maculate or mark the books we read?

For Adam Zachary Newton, reading is an embodied practice wherein "ethics" becomes a matter of tact in the doubled sense of touch and regard. With the image of the book lying in the hands of its readers as insistent refrain, *To Make the Hands Impure* cuts a provocative cross-disciplinary swath through classical Jewish texts, modern Jewish philosophy, film and performance, literature, translation, and the material text.

Newton explores the ethics of reading through a range of texts, from the Talmud and Midrash to Conrad's *Nostromo* and Pascal's *Le Mémorial*, from works by Henry Darger and Martin Scorsese to the National September 11 Memorial and a synagogue in Havana, Cuba. In separate chapters, he conducts masterly treatments of Emmanuel Levinas, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Stanley Cavell by emphasizing their performances as readers a trebled orientation to Talmud, novel, and theater/film. *To Make the Hands Impure* stages the encounter of literary experience and scriptural traditions he difficult and the holy through an ambitious, singular, and innovative approach marked in equal measure by erudition and imaginative daring.



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