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TOUCH: AN ENQUIRY

PUY SODEN

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts by Research

January 2014

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Word count: 19,180, of which approximately 5,000 words are comprised of italicised text which functions as illustration, particularly in Chapter three.

Abstract

This thesis forms part of a practice-based enquiry into 'touch' from a painter's perspective. I am investigating touch as a three-way interplay: 1. the act of touch at work in the studio; 2. the sense of touch experienced with and in my body while engaging with my own work and with the paintings of Robert Ryman; and 3. the presence of touch, materially and metaphorically, in the work as a result of my reflective practice in response to an analysis of 1 and 2. I examine the making of two sections of studio work, *Touch Screen* and *Where's the 'Ouch?*; analyse the findings of three days spent with the Ryman installation in the Hallen für Neue Kunst, Schaffhausen, Switzerland; and reflect on the making of a third section of my studio work, *Blanks* in response to the Hallen experience.

Introduction

“Touch has a memory.”¹

“...a quiet flow of touch...”²

“I will show you fear in a handful of dust.”³

This research project is an investigation into what ‘touch’ means to me at this moment as a practitioner working from a painter’s perspective. The practice-based research aim is to examine what is happening in terms of touch while working in the studio on specific pieces of work that are made while thinking, reading, writing and reflecting on touch. More specifically, I am investigating touch as a three-way interplay: 1. the act of touch at work in the studio; 2. the sense of touch experienced with and in my body⁴ while engaging with my own work and with the paintings of Robert Ryman; and 3. the presence of touch, materially and metaphorically, in the work as a result of my reflective practice in response to an analysis of 1 and 2.

The enquiry has been marked out through early experiments⁵ and reading. I employ models by Marks, Paterson and Fisher on haptic visuality and haptic perception⁶. Marks’ theory of haptic visuality, argued in the context of the embodied experience of cinema that engages the viewer tactilely with haptic images,⁷ has enabled my critical writing to define the way the making oscillates between haptic engagement and optic viewing. Fisher’s article on “haptic aesthetics” has discussed the work of several contemporary artists whose work implicates the haptic sense on beholders⁸. These artists are concerned with the haptic impact of their work’s performativity on the viewer, therefore providing background rather than direct comparison, as I am researching own personal experience of touch in practice rather than intentionally making work to produce a tactile effect in others. A reading of Paterson’s research on the senses of touch, focusing on the haptic sense, has led to further understanding of kinaesthetic and proprioceptive functions while moving about the studio and other spaces. However, I am not dealing with the main area of Paterson’s research which investigates haptic technologies, but rather I use a combined definition of haptic perception, taken from all of the above models, in order to understand the touch experienced by the body while making, reflecting and responding. This is not a project of social science, human geography, cognitive neuroscience, or sensory research⁹. Nor is this project a

philosophical analysis of the sense of touch, although in Chapter two I do employ definitions of touch provided by Fulkerson's PhD thesis, which is exactly such an analysis¹⁰. This project is an investigation of the touch interplay that I experience while making work, while viewing the work of Robert Ryman, and while making work in response to that experience. It is a touch that is *very specific* to my own *very specific, personal* experience, but it overlaps with different theories on touch that I use to constantly evaluate the question: what is happening in terms of touch right now?

This thesis identifies a gap in knowledge in the following ways: 1. having reviewed the critical texts on Ryman by art historians and critical theorists, none of these works has been written from a practitioner's perspective; 2. having reviewed the published theses relating to Ryman, none is practice-based and none uses a direct experience of Ryman paintings as part of the methodology for a studio investigation into touch; 3. other painter-researchers whose work relates to touch in some way, such as Beth Harland and Natasha Kidd, are not involved in the same specific areas. My objective is an exploration of touch from multiple perspectives, underpinned by studio-based making from a painter's perspective and a first-hand critique of Ryman, that brings in different voices to form a rounded and real research project.

Chapters one, two and four begin with the 'artist's voice' in italics, taken from studio journal notes, recordings and reflective writing that have accompanied the making process. In each of these chapters the 'researcher's voice' (in plain text) follows the 'artist's voice', analysing the making and the engagement with the work through the use of theoretical models and comparisons with other practitioners' work. In Chapter three, the italicised, boxed text is the 'artist's voice' transcribed from the many Dictaphone recordings made during my three days with the Ryman works in the Hallen für Neue Kunst, Schaffhausen, Switzerland (referred to as the Hallen). Writing in the different modes of 'artist's voice' and 'researcher's voice' was essential for bringing strands of practice and theory together into a 'holistic' relationship and a 'real' research project to fruition. The 'artist's voice,' documenting studio and Hallen happenings directly by capturing the experience through note-taking and Dictaphone recordings, enabled testing and reflecting in the moment of the practice. The 'researcher's voice', analysing through the use of theoretical models the findings documented in the 'artist's voice', continued to test and push ideas with a degree of objectivity and distance. Collating the notes from the Hallen experience, and in particular, listening to myself while transcribing the many Dictaphone recordings, was crucial for distilling the experience in the Hallen and identifying key areas for practical investigation. The weaving in between different modes of reflection echoes the oscillation that I discover between the haptic and the optic while making, and I find that a constant stepping in and out, from being very much 'in' the work to finding a 'remove', is key to developing a practice-based research process.

The footnotes contain critical analysis and therefore should be read as part of the thesis rather than as optional add-ons. The use of footnotes allowed me to ‘step back’ and compose the information on the page, providing further ‘remove’ from the ‘artist’s voice’ and adding another dimension to the ‘researcher’s voice.’

In Chapter one, *Touch Screen*, I refer to Merleau-Ponty’s ‘chiasm’ and the possibility of overlapping and encroachment between touching and being touched. Merleau-Ponty is referred to not because I intend a critique of ‘Cartesian ocularcentrism’¹¹; rather, the ‘chiasm’ is useful to describe the stuttering continuity of the artwork *Touch Screen* that occurs as the making process oscillates between haptic and optic engagement. This disjointed screen of paint on overlapping slippery cells, which addresses my connection with the many layers of touch, arguably places *Touch Screen* in between the two definitions of surface that Gilbert-Rolfe attributes to the plastic in relation to painting. Through my reflective writing about *Touch Screen*, I have come to realise that I have a secondary research problem: the question of the support. Work made prior to this project has addressed making paintings without a support¹², but the question of the support returns, as the urge to investigate touch through using paint as an applied liquid matter is strong. The use of photographic paper in *Touch Screen*, and clay in *Blanks*, stems from this secondary problem of the support.

Having made *Touch Screen* I decided to visit the Hallen in order to spend a considerable amount of time with the largest permanent public display of Ryman paintings. This experience was to form a methodology and structure for my investigation into touch as a practitioner, in that my response to the tactility of Ryman’s works was transferred to the studio practice and work was made having extracted the essence of the touch-related data gathered in the Hallen. I was awarded funding by the Windle Charitable Trust¹³ to pay for the field trip.

Prior to the Hallen visit, I carried out a literature review of Ryman. Only relevant sections of the review are included in this thesis, since this project is not an art historical account of Ryman’s life and work. Ryman’s statement about how he began painting, which is often quoted to emphasise his factual reduction to matter from the very start, led to the making of *Where’s the ‘Ouch?’*: “I thought I would try and see what would happen...”¹⁴ This evoked the strong memory of my own early immersion with a material as a child: dipping my fingers over and over into a bowl of wax melting in hot water to build up layers until the fingers were wriggled free and the casts were returned to the bowl for further dipping and building. *Where’s the ‘Ouch?’* is made up of many wax finger casts, full of touch, and the corresponding writing in Chapter two enables a thinking-through of the way touch has become substance. I refer to Fulkerson’s definitions of the sense of touch, which

differentiate bodily-directed touch from externally-directed touch, to help identify specific instances of touch during the making¹⁵.

Chapter three extracts the essence of the subjective Dictaphone recordings and the written notes made while in front of the Ryman paintings in the Hallen. While critics have noted the tactile, irreproducible, phenomenological qualities of Ryman's paintings in academic terms, there is no published recording of personal experience over a considerable amount of time (in my case, three days) that has then been responded to via art practice. Art historians have studied Ryman's work for critical texts and essays, commenting on the importance of first-hand experience, but none has fully documented this experience.

On returning to the studio, the main, lasting memory of the Hallen is that of the 'feet' phenomenon. I was very aware of the feel under my socked feet of the fascinating, polished concrete floor that was patchy with the many colours of skin and scarred by the building's past as a textile factory (I removed my shoes very early on due to a desire to feel the floor, to pad rather than clomp around, and because most of the time was spent standing and walking around the large space). My feet grew large, flat and cold. I was grounded. This memory of feet sinking into ground is combined with the analysis of the summary of the subjective data during the making of *Blanks*. Ground is introduced to the practice in the form of clay to make many small supports from my body (pressing onto the thigh and the foot), during which thinking about touch through making takes place. These supports are then used to explore different ways of applying touch via paint, from dipping into a tub to wiping paint from the mouth.

In summary, the methods I have used during this practice-based investigation include:

- making (using materials in the studio such as photographic paper, various house paints, wax, clay, aluminium powder, alginate and plaster, fasteners and fixings such as paintbrushes, nails, staples, wire, rods and polyfiller) and the reflective writing of that making;
- material thinking¹⁶ in the context of touch (folding, wrapping, bending, stapling, swiping, wiping, smearing, spreading, smothering, sticking, dipping, moulding, pressing, printing, pushing, pulling, brushing, dusting, rolling, placing, adding, applying);
- filming (I made some films of *Touch Screen* early on, which optically recorded its making and my haptic reading of it, interspersed with clips of my handling and interacting with the cast of my face while thinking through Merleau-Ponty texts such

as *The Visible and the Invisible* – I have chosen not to show the film here as it was used as a mode of reflecting and recording; however, a DVD is available on request);

- reflective writing in both the ‘artist’s voice’ and the ‘researcher’s voice’, in studio journal notes during practice followed by analysis employing theoretical models;
- photographing as a means of documenting and achieving a ‘remove’;
- gathering data in terms of my touch-related feelings experienced while with the Ryman paintings in the Hallen to then make work in response once back in the studio;
- using annexes to display the Hallen findings and repeating that sensibility in the hanging of *Blanks*.

I have included a methodology diagram at the end of this introduction.

Records of a symposium I participated in (*Paint Club*) and a symposium I organised and led myself (*Touch* symposium) are included as appendices. In the Key to the appendices I include brief summaries of another event I attended (*What is the future of painting?* symposium at the Phoenix Brighton) and an article on public engagement (*Looking for the skip, love?*) that has been published in the latest edition of the University of Huddersfield’s Review of Art, Design and Architecture Research, *radar*¹⁷. This article features reviews of the Hallen experience and the Touch symposium, exploring the inside–outside dichotomy inherent in public versus private debates in the contemporary art sphere. Not only were the events listed important for researcher development in terms of learning how to run a symposium, but also for meeting other practitioners. At *Paint Club* I met Harland, whose research has contributed to my understanding of haptic visuality, and Kidd, whose work with painting machines that eliminate direct artist touch has helped mark out the field within which I attempt to position my own practice. At *What is the future of painting?* I met Ben Street, art writer and historian, who introduced me to Marco Chiandetti’s work. Chiandetti’s sculptures by the body for the body provide the opposite perimeter to Kidd’s in the marking out of the currency field.

¹ Keats, J., 'What can I do to drive away' in Stillinger, J. ed., *John Keats, Complete Poems* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1982), 374, line 4.

² Lawrence, D. H., "There is plenty of pawing and laying hold, but no real touch. In pictures especially, the people may be in contact, embracing or laying hands on one another. But there is no soft flow of touch. The touch does not come from the middle of the human being. It is merely a contact of surfaces and a juxtaposition of objects...Here, in this faded Etruscan painting, there is a quiet flow of touch..." Here Lawrence states that the "great masters are boring" in comparison with Etruscan painting that "really has the sense of touch", quoted in Chaudari, A., *D. H. Lawrence and 'difference'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 185.

³ Eliot, T. S., '1. The Burial of the Dead', 'The Waste Land', in Eliot, T. S., *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), 135, line 30.

⁴ When I refer to 'the body' or 'my body', I refer to the/my whole sensing, physical structure and material substance. I am aware of the weight of the term, and the potential for a post-feminist reading of my research findings (*écriture féminine*), but do not intend here to discuss touch as an area of body politics. I do, however, employ useful skin-screen comparisons by Connor, S. in his chapter 'Mortification' in Ahmed, S. and Stacey, J., eds. *Thinking Through the Skin. Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 36-51: "...The gloss is an ideal skin, flesh transfigured, but the ideality of that skin (its intangibility) is what seems to guarantee its quality of tenderness, that word that signifies both the quality of something touched and the manner of our touching. This image has been touched and can touch us back.... but we know that its touchability is of a higher order than the ordinary touchability of skin, the grasping touch which advertising also encourages...these skins nevertheless acquaint us with a kind higher touching, an immaculate, intactile, imperishable touch of the eye. Whenever we look at a poster or a projection on an impersonal surface, we are looking at such an idealised, generalised human skin." The "thinking through the skin" presented by Ahmed and Stacey's is an important function of haptic engagement and their feminist text provides a model for understanding the inter-subjectivity involved while applying paint close up, across a skin (see Chapter 1, *Touch Screen*).

⁵ Work in the initial stages of this project included experiments with stretched supports (white lycra, white shower curtain, black roofing rubber on square, wooden stretchers of varying dimensions), grease (Vaseline, oil, oil paint residue) and aluminium powder, whereby I handled and stapled the supports with greased hands and then revealed the traces of my handling with aluminium powder. The inevitable reference to forensics and the literal use of handling meant that I moved on quickly, simultaneously realising that I needed touch to be present in the support as well as the working of the paint/the mark-making. Initial reading spanned a wide selection of theory relating to touch, including Classen, C., ed. *Worlds of Sense – exploring the senses in history and across cultures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) and Classen, C. *The Book of Touch* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), before leaving cultural issues and focusing on theories that deal with the haptic sense (see footnote 6).

⁶ Marks, L. *The Skin of the Film. Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, North Carolina and London: Duke University Press, 2000), Marks, L. *Touch – Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), Fisher, J. 'Relational Sense: Towards a Haptic Aesthetics,' *Parachute 87* (1997), Paterson, M. *The Senses of Touch – Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007).

⁷ Marks, L. *The Skin of the Film. Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, North Carolina and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 22.

⁸ Fisher, J. 'Relational Sense: Towards a Haptic Aesthetics,' *Parachute 87* (1997).

⁹ For example, see texts such as Gibson, J. J. (1968) *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., or more recently, the research of Paterson, M: <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/scienceheritage/MarkPaterson.html>, or CenSes, hosted by the Institute of Philosophy, School of Advanced Study, University of Glasgow: <http://philosophy.sas.ac.uk/centres/censes>. Accessed January 31, 2014.

¹⁰ Fulkerson, M., 'The Sense of Touch' (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010).

¹¹ Jay, M., *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994), 101, 314, 319.

¹² For example, see *Grey Paintings 18–21* (2010) at www.puysoden.com. Accessed January 31, 2014.

¹³ <http://www.windlecharitabletrust.org.uk/>. Accessed January 31, 2014.

¹⁴ Ryman's statement (1986) about the beginning of his practice is quoted frequently. For example, in Hudson, S. P., *Robert Ryman – Used Paint* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009), 9–10.

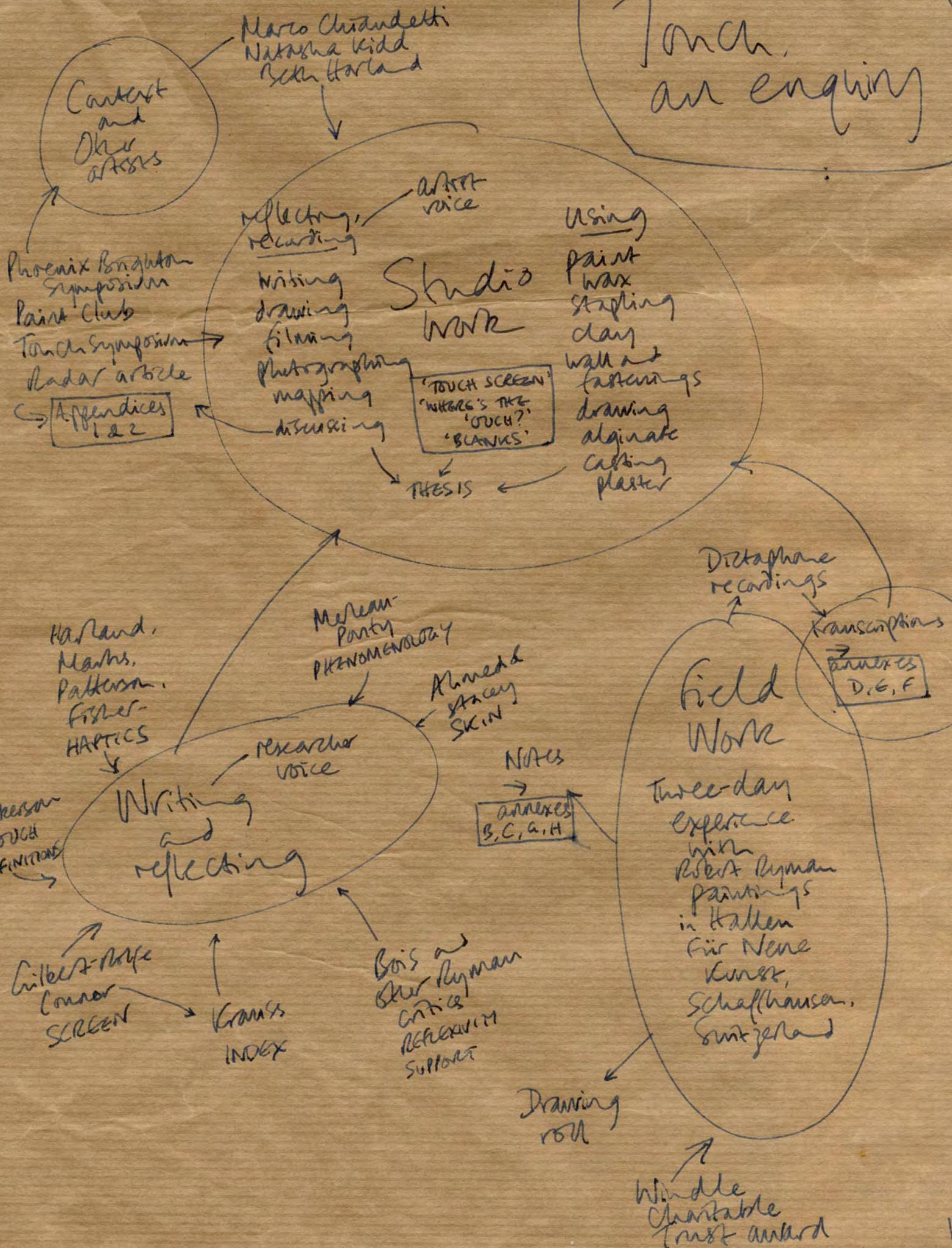
¹⁵ Fulkerson, M., 'The Sense of Touch' (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010), 59.

¹⁶ Carter, P.'s "material thinking" was discussed in the Touch symposium I organised and led in Didsbury, on June 28, 2014.

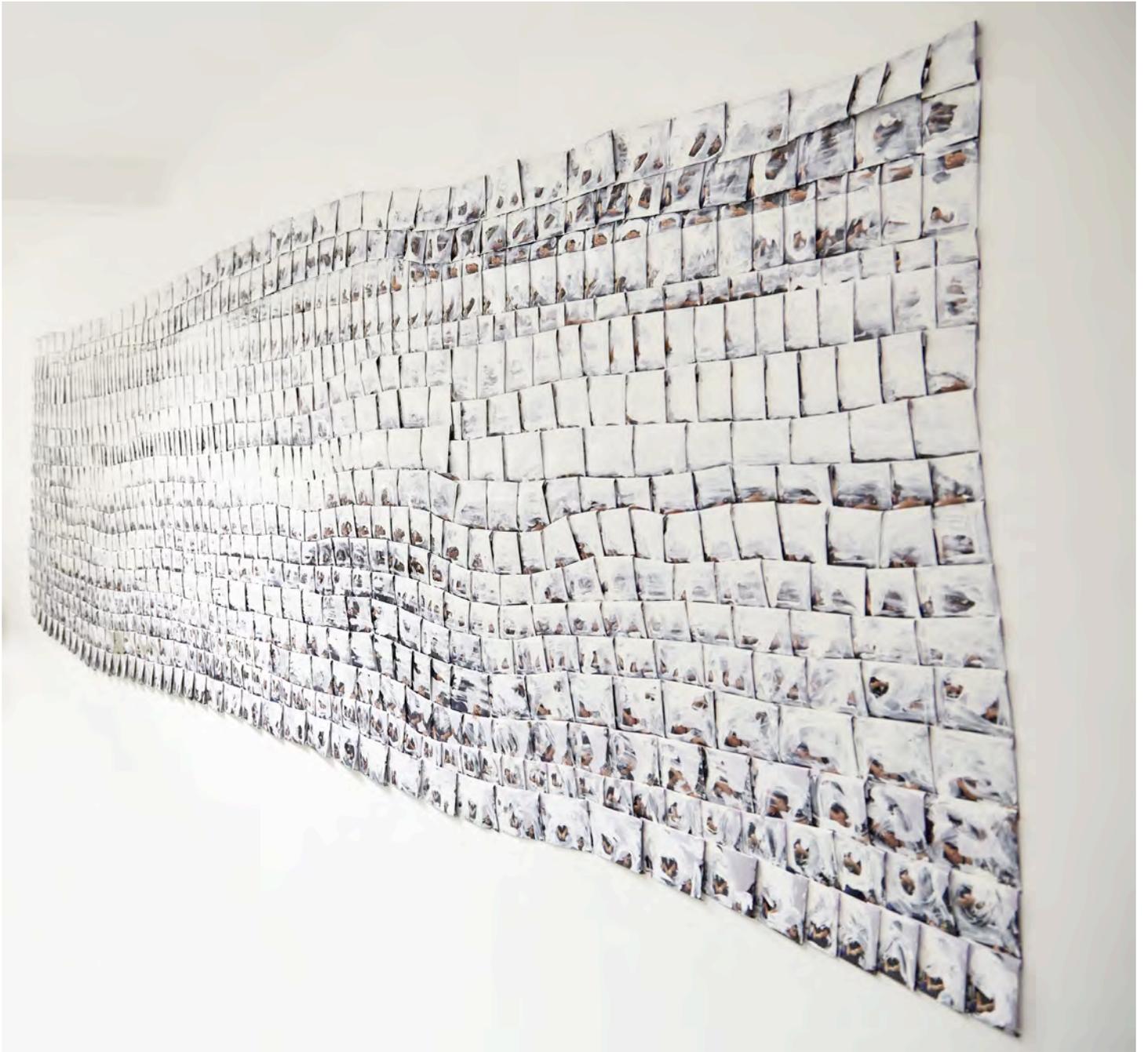
¹⁷ “*radar*, the Review of Art, Design and Architecture Research, is the new annual reaching-research nexus publication by the School of Art, Design and Architecture (ADA)...The inaugural issue showcased selected profiles of early career and established researchers in the school and their interdisciplinary research interests.”
http://www.hud.ac.uk/tali/teaching%20and%20learning%20publications/tl_matters/archive_11/archive_11_feb/. Accessed January 29, 2014.

Practice-based Methodology

Touch, an enquiry











TOUCH SCREEN, 2013

Studio wall, film, photographic paper, staples, undercoat for wood and metal

120 × 414 cm

At the back, towards the inside and expanding outwards, is a film ('Making a Point') of a talk I gave about the surface of painting. Over one thousand three hundred stills have been taken in chronological order from that film and printed onto photographic paper. Most of these have been folded into parcels focusing on the poignant parts (areas depicting touch within the film in some form) and stapled to a wall, overlapping. Paint has then been applied to this joined-up yet disjointed screen of touch.

There are no gaps exposing wall, but there is no real continuity either. There is the continuity found in feathers, or scales, or skin cells, but not the smooth, slippery, glossy, lamella-like¹ continuousness of one single screen. This touch screen has a jagged surface and gaps that go back to the bone: the film. There is the pinning down of something fluid: an almost violent touch of a machine (the hand and the staple gun) that has nailed the butterfly wings of something moving (a film) to a wall for display and/or experimentation. This is an exhibit of touch, and the touch continues: my right hand aches from the muscle memory of the repetitive strain caused by using the staple gun when I stand in front of Touch Screen.

Yet there is a return to fluidity through the application of paint. The paint is isolating the poignant points of touch. The unpainted parts are untouched, but they contain the index of a moment of touching, either fleeting or considered. There is a need to cover the shiny surface of the photographic paper with paint, and to avoid certain parts of the image. The movement of the paint-loaded forefinger and middle finger of the right hand is fast and light. The paint has been chosen for its lotion-on-skin-like quality. A spreading of cream around a sensitive area. There is a tenderness in the two fingers' attention, a fluid surface stroke from the tips, after the violent, penetrative punch of the stapler from the whole body leaning in; a painty light touch is the cure.

I am conscious of the movement of the body around the work while making and viewing it. Side-on, Touch Screen is a sliver of fish skin, or a piece of bird wing. Returning to the

front, the piece expands, and at once flattens out across the wall and deepens as hints at the index become recognizable. This meets the need for depth and breadth within the flat. A painted image is not enough. There need to be deeper and wider dimensions, and the support must contain my index. Why? Because I just cannot see the point of it otherwise. The wall supports the film, the film supports the photographic paper, the paper supports the paint, the paint supports the touch, and touch runs through each layer.

There is a need to paint over. No faces are allowed; just the poignant points of touch. There is a covering up, to create in turn a window, a gap, a hole through which to see something. While putting on the paint, there is a compulsive need to cover irrelevant parts and have great painty bits that leave the poignant parts open and raw. I feel I must cover faces and parts that aren't touching anything.

There is no intended comparison or competition between painting and the photograph. Is the photograph actually here? The photographic paper is a tool. It is a way of bringing the film to the wall – a way of making the film a support, a means of touching the film and getting paint onto it in specific places, leaving the poignant places bare. The non-touch is the important bit. Unpainted parts still contain touch, far back, away from the surface.

The content of the film, a discussion about painting while the dot is made, and the paint are the important things. However, the feel of the paint on the photographic paper is significant. Like too much lotion on the skin. Need to put on more...

The paint-touch is at once a sensor and a censor.

Viewing optically, there appears to be a code, a sign language emerging. Haptically, there is a new skin taking over. I constantly jump between the two, and try to exist in between.

Must cover, must not touch.

Must cover, must not touch...

It is as much about not touching as it is about touching. There is a stuttering, a jarring, as if the poignant parts are out of bounds, resisting and repelling the watery tracing.

The paint must at once record the touch and leave the subject of it open.

The stapling was difficult and painful and I thought the painting would be easier. But it is not. It is just as hard. The flow is prevented. There is no chance of spreading or free sloshing, or satisfyingly long, luxuriously broad swipes. This is a tiring, stilted, stuttering touch. I have to tread carefully. I hate the drips. It takes a while to cover ground. I do not want to cover or leave too much. It is a fine line: the desire to smudge drips that seem to appear everywhere despite the care taken to get the amount applied right, and the accidental covering of parts that were perhaps supposed to be left bare because the risk of pushing right up to the edge of the poignant part became too joyous to avoid, and the way my touch can only respond to the demands of the application, enslaved by it, reminds me that the paint is the most important thing. It can take over at any time, and there are many things beyond my control. Not all the touch is mine.

Why did I keep the film sequence in places? Why didn't I staple the cells at random?

Why didn't I spread the folded pieces around the wall, with spaces in between?

Because it's one body, one surface, one Touch Screen. Not a display of photographs.

However, while there is a sense of one body, there isn't continuity within it. There's jarring. Like the touch within the studio, that stops and starts, stops and starts. Maybe there should be more continuity. Maybe I'll add more paint...

Touch Screen is an examination of touch within a secondary, ongoing investigation into the problem of the support. Here the two are inseparable, since at this stage in the research, at this moment, the examination of touch requires a fluid medium that sets on the surface of a support that does not cause textural

interference yet holds meaning within: the index. Krauss (1977) states that the photograph maintains an indexical relationship with its object: “every photograph is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface.”² The photographic paper here is useful as a support because it both contains the index and offers a slippery surface, on which I examine touch through the medium of paint. While previous work, to which I refer in the introduction, has examined the problem of using paint without a support (for example, *Grey Paintings 18–21*, 2010³), *Touch Screen* involves thinking about touch through a touching-through-paint, which does require support. The support, the photographic paper, must embody meaning: the index of a film I made, *Making a Point* (2010), about painting and touch.

However, it is questionable whether the indexical relationship is maintained here at all, as the presence of the photograph is in doubt. Krauss states that there must be a physical imprint transferred by light, whereas here the light has been transferred to digital videotape which has then been stopped to form digital stills which have in turn been printed onto photographic paper. In the image embedded in the materiality of the photographic paper there is a reference to this moment about touch, but is it really an indexical image or just a reference that has been coded and then uncoded from digital material?⁴

Thinking through the question of the index is useful in considering the many layers of touch, and while the photograph and therefore the indexical relationship are in doubt, the presence of a skin with some depth is more certain. The photographic paper is a skin within which the many frames of a film about the surfaces/skins of painting and the tattooing of a tiny dot onto a finger are contained. Touch is reiterated through these many skins (the skins within the film, the skin of the film, the photographic paper, the overlapping scales of the screen, the paint), and builds a body with which I engage *haptically*.⁵

Those who have defined the haptic sense⁶ tend to agree that it involves the whole body, encompassing the somatic senses of touch – the tactile, the kinaesthetic, and the proprioceptive senses – working together. Marks defines haptic perception as a “combination of tactile, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive functions, the way we experience touch both on the surface and inside our bodies.”⁷ Marks distinguishes haptic visuality from optical visuality, stating that while optical visuality depends on a separation between the viewing subject and the object, haptic visuality “moves over the surface of its object rather than plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture...more inclined to move than to focus...to graze than to gaze.” The tactile way of seeing through haptic visuality means travel across the surface of another skin while being aware of our own, rather than a penetrating look.

As Marks states, experience requires both haptic visuality and optic visuality: “it is difficult to look closely at a lover’s skin with optical vision and it is hard to drive a car with haptic vision”⁸. *Touch Screen* has a skin that I touch optically *and* a screen-body with which I engage haptically. Touch, here, occurs between the two. While making the first skin of *Touch Screen* (folding and pinning the cells/scales to the wall), perception constantly oscillated between optic focus on the image within the photographic paper (which part of the film is still to be isolated through folding, and how will the resulting cell/scale be stapled to fit with its neighbouring cells/scales?) and haptic involvement while in close proximity with the growing screen. While optic decisions were more conscious, haptic decisions were less so. However, the undulating shape of the first skin of the screen resulted from a combination of both: the optic connection with the image within the film stills dictating their folding and stapling to isolate ‘poignant parts’, and the body’s haptic involvement with the pinning of the slippery surface to the wall during the aggregation of the cells. While *Touch Screen* becomes an object with which I interact haptically, the cells still contain an illusion into which I enter optically. The need for depth of touch (the photographic paper contains meaning via film stills) possibly comes at the detriment of the effectiveness of the touch

experienced on the surface, but the optic decisions guide the haptic. *Touch Screen* requires this constant alternation between the optic and the haptic.

Touch Screen developed according to my human scale – my reach within the wall space. The wave of the scales formed according to the folding up (handling the photograph and bending around ‘poignant parts’ of the film), overlapping (no pieces of wall can be seen between the scales – the surface must be like unbroken skin, although its smoothness is limited to individual cells) and stapling (the pinning down of a “tactile kind of radiance,” a skin “touched by light”⁹). I was aware of my bodily involvement and movement throughout the making of the work. The making process oscillated between haptic and optic, as I engaged with the materiality of the paper and paint across the surface, while also watching where I wanted to tread according to the image. However, the haptic reigned throughout, as thoughts remained focused on touch through the paint: the body up close to the surface; the fingers swirling paint within each slippery cell/scale – a bodily interaction with an object; thinking through my skin while applying soothing lotion to the staggered stills of the skin of the film.¹⁰ This was interrupted by the optic decision to leave ‘poignant parts’ of touch – small windows to the index of the film – untouched, although they are still loaded with paint due to their being stills from a film in which I discuss painting. There was therefore a continuous oscillation, a vibration, between the haptic decisions and the optic decisions, both working together but never exactly at the same time.

My awareness of the tension between optic, conscious intentions and haptic, fluid processes echoes the Merleau-Ponty motif of the ‘chiasm’ (more commonly known as the touching hands), in that there is more than just a dualism – there is a possibility of overlapping and encroachment between the two:

If my left hand is touching my right hand, and if I should suddenly wish to apprehend with my right hand the work of my left hand as it touches, this reflection of the body upon itself always miscarries at the last moment: the moment I feel my left hand with my right hand, I correspondingly cease

*touching my right hand with my left hand. But this last-minute failure does not drain all truth from that presentiment I had of being able to touch myself touching: my body does not perceive, but it is as if it were built around the perception that dawns through it; through its whole internal arrangement...it is, as it were, prepared for a self-perception, even though it is never itself that is perceived nor itself that perceives.*¹¹

Touch Screen is multidimensional in its dealings of touch. I feel the ‘chiasm’, the reversibility of the position of subject and object, or the oscillation between modes of inter-subjective embodiment: haptic immersion and optic decision-making (suddenly I remember I have an object and I am separate from it). MacDonald describes this better as ‘the twist’: “Embodiment is a continual inscription of the two loops of being sentient and being sensed. It is a folding over of opposites... There is a cross-over, a meeting place that is also a place of divergence, a moment when inside turns out and outside turns in. That is the twist.”¹²

Although I have established that the photograph here is in doubt (these are just film stills digitally printed onto photographic paper), it should be pointed out that *Touch Screen* does not intend to present a debate between the photograph and paint. Rather, photographing or filming the work and then printing the images or film stills enables a reduction, a distillation, into a smooth, light, thin surface that is at once distanced from the object and *still* the object.¹³ It both contains something I have made and is condensed and useful as a flat, light surface on which thinking about touch through paint can take place. Connor’s description of the photograph as “the modern embodiment of the contiguity between looking and grasping” makes a good case for its use in this research project:

*The first such modern skin-surface was perhaps the photograph, in which a particularly pellucid relationship was established between touching and looking, skin and image. Photographs...have been touched by the world, leaving its trace upon the surface of the photographic film.*¹⁴

Already touched, and containing touch (the film), the photographic paper becomes an “ideal skin”¹⁵ and the paint is applied tenderly, with as much

continuity as the overlapping cells allow.¹⁶ However, the tender application is not a response to vulnerability; neither is the paint a means to deface or damage a “more than human perfection”¹⁷. This is not the “reverent kind of touch...a touch in which we keep the living, vulnerable surface of the object intact, instinctively preferring to hold it by its edges...”¹⁸ If there were no breaks in the surface, the paint would have been continuously applied, the fingers only surrendering contact in order to quickly reload. The breaks in the surface are essential in order to appreciate the lack of continuity, the lack of flow, as the dissatisfying substitute for uninterrupted application which in turn becomes something more, something ‘chiasmic’.

Connor continues to associate the “flesh” of photographs, posters, and screens that look like touchable, idealised skin, with “a touchability of a higher order than the ordinary touchability of skin...an immaculate, intactile, imperishable touch of the eye”. The layer of photographic paper of *Touch Screen* has received the opposite form of touch: a messy, tactile, stuttering touch of the body – it has been folded, stapled and defiled, despite the care of the paint-loaded fingers.

In ‘Cabbages, Raspberries, and Video’s Thin Brightness’ (1996) and *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* (1999), Gilbert-Rolfe states that the surface of the photograph/screen/digital¹⁹ is a surface “which is brighter than any that preceded it, unimaginably thin – describable only as an exterior when viewed as an object, a surface without depth – and continuous by definition. Everything that painting is not: an uninterrupted surface born of pure reason.”²⁰ Gilbert-Rolfe goes on to compare this super-surface of the digital with the surface of painting, the plastic surface that had come before it, “that had been a plasticity made out of openings, interruption and conjuncture. A plasticity of morsellation...adding up...layering and even reconsidering.”²¹ *Touch Screen* upsets this screen/paint dichotomy by offering a form of continuity through the adding up and layering of different skins within which are included the super-surfaces of the digital: film within photograph, photographic paper, and paint. Perhaps *Touch Screen* falls somewhere in between the “heterogeneity of painting’s surface” that “forecloses access for it to

the continuum of the instant” and “the homogenous surface of the photograph”. Although there is indeed a “mass of foci all uncomfortably related to each other”²², a stuttering, there is also a smooth skin of slippery cells, held together by a flow of thinking about touch through paint. Does *Touch Screen* bridge the gap between the skin of the film and the surface of painting? I believe it would need to be bigger for this to be investigated further.

In 2010 I interviewed Dan Hays²³ for research into the digital sublime while writing a dissertation on Peter Doig’s *Blotter* (1993).²⁴ We discussed painting’s relationship with the photograph and I was introduced to a small, matt, grey book, *Gerhard Richter, Sils*, which contained reproductions of the photographs that Richter took (while staying at Sils, Nietzsche’s house in Switzerland) and painted, i.e. added paint to their surface. It is difficult not to refer to Richter when discussing the relationship between painting and photography, and *Sils* is relevant to *Touch Screen* in that the paint on the photographs causes a constant oscillation between haptic and optic engagement. In his introduction, ‘Circulus vitiosus pictus,’ Obrist points out paint’s disruption of the photograph, but in terms of the image rather than the surface:

*The photographic landscapes appear to be wrong due to the superimposition of paint... Photography’s pretence of claiming reality is relativized by the repaints. Splashes of paint present just as much “reality” as the base on which they appear...Whereas the application of splashes of paint makes certain parts of the photographic source look as if it were painted, the paint blends in with parts of the background.*²⁵

Obrist refers to ‘repainting’ and the ‘repaints’, which implies that the photographs in *Sils* are already paintings before the paint has been applied, or that the photograph becomes a painting because it is indistinguishable from the added paint that blends with the snowy mountains. Have I ‘repainted’ the film and photographic paper layers of *Touch Screen*? Obrist points out that the reversal of the relationship between the figure and ground, “which is at the same time in a field of tension with the obviousness of the production process”, is essential to the works, and this is similarly important for *Touch Screen*.

¹ The reference here to Lacan's lamella links to a previous work, *someother* (2011), that shows the all-encompassing, insistent surface of painting as lamella taking over collapsed paintings. Having fallen into abeyance, their faces sucked out from their frames and joined together by the invincible lamella, the paintings have become one surface connecting with the universal face of painting that pulls you in and never lets go. Images can be found under the 'On site' tab and in the 'Home' page of www.puysoden.com. Surface as the source of painting's gaze trap ("This picture is simply what any picture is, a trap for the gaze." Lacan, quoted in Levine, S.Z. *Lacan Reframed: A Guide for the Arts Student*. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2008), 79) recalls Lacan's 'lamella' (in Miller, J.-A. ed. 'From Love to the Libido' (1973). In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*. 2nd ed. (London and New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), 197, and Žižek, S. 'Troubles with the Real: Lacan as a Viewer of *Alien*' in *How to Read Lacan*. (London: Granta Books, 2006): "The lamella is an entity of pure surface...[it] does not exist, it insists..."). The lamella/surface is therefore at once the all-encompassing other that pulls us in and the symbol of painting's/the painter's 'death drive.' It is all glued together – the painting's surface, our onlooking faces, the surfaces of other paintings, the paint, the painter who is painting – and it all pertains to a practice that refuses to relinquish its hold. Because of this, and as a part of it, both painter and viewer are "held in thrall by an interminable libidinal fixation" (Mooney, J. 'Painting, Poignancy and Ethics.' *FOIL* (2000), an exhibition at Gallery Westland Place, London, Falmouth College of Arts, and Herbert Read Gallery, Canterbury).

² In 'Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America, Part 1' (1977): 75, Krauss states that "every photograph is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface. The photograph is thus a type of icon, or visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object. Its separation from true icons is felt through the absoluteness of this physical genesis, one that seems to short-circuit or disallow those processes of schematization or symbolic intervention that operate within the graphic representations of most paintings."

³ www.puysoden.com

⁴ I am aware that there is some debate as to whether digital film and photography can be said to hold any indexical relation to the events that they record. For example, see the discussions in Doane, M. A., 'Indexicality: Trace and Sign,' special issue of *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol.18 no.1 (Spring, 2007).

⁵ In the context of film, Elsaesser and Hagener refer to "the idea of skin as an organ of continuous perception that understands cinema also as a haptic experience" in 'Cinema as skin and touch', in *Film Theory, an introduction through the senses* (London and New York, 2010), 110.

⁶ For definitions of the haptic sense see: Marks, L. *Touch – Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 3, 17–18, and Marks, L. *The Skin of the Film. Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, North Carolina and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 183-185; Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. *A Thousand Plateaus – Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Massumi, B. (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 493; Fisher, J. 'Relational Sense: Towards a Haptic Aesthetics,' *Parachute 87* (1997): 6; Marinkova, M. *Michael Ondaatje, Haptic Aesthetics and Micropolitical Writing* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 4–12; Fulkerson, M. 'The Sense of Touch' (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010); Harland, B. 'A Fragment of Time in the Pure State; a Mapping of Painting's Time, through Proust, Deleuze and the Digital Image' (PhD diss., University of Southampton, 2010); Paterson, M. *The Senses of Touch – Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007); Elsaesser and Hagener 'Cinema as skin and touch', in *Film Theory, an introduction through the senses* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 108–128.

⁷ Marks, L. *The Skin of the Film. Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, North Carolina and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 162.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁹ Conner, S., 'Mortification', in Ahmed S. and Stacey J., eds., *Thinking Through the Skin – Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 36-37.

¹⁰ There is potential here for discussion around the "authentic corporeal trace." Does the photograph in the context of *Touch Screen* have less than the *Touch Screen* object as a whole? Is it important that the photograph is there as a 'blank' over which the maker's trace, or touch, can be more apparent? Krčma discusses this in terms of drawing in a digital age: "...involvement of the body in the production of drawings nevertheless implies a responsive relationship with conscious intentions or unconscious processes of the artist, and contrasts both with the production of most photographs,

which tends to actively bypass the interference of the maker's body..." Krčma, E., 'Cinematic Drawing in a Digital Age', *Tate Research Papers* issue 14 (October 2010), accessed January 28, 2013, www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/cinematic-drawing-digital-age.

¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, M., *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Lingis, A., ed. Lefort, C. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 9.

¹² MacDonald, J. 'The Knot.' One of twelve self-sufficient yet interconnected pieces of academic writing within an online presence forming part of MacDonald's PhD research, 2010. Accessed March 18, 2013, www.julietmacdonald.co.uk/phd_files/Site_hand_eye_p/theknot.htm.

¹³ "The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discoloured, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model." Conner, S., 'Mortification', in Ahmed S. and Stacey J., eds., *Thinking Through the Skin – Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 36–37.

¹⁴ Ibid., 36-37.

¹⁵ Ibid., 37.

¹⁶ "...The gloss is an ideal skin, flesh transfigured, but the ideality of that skin (its intangibility) is what seems to guarantee its quality of tenderness, that word that signifies both the quality of something touched and the manner of our touching." Ibid., 37

¹⁷ Ibid., 37

¹⁸ Ibid., 37

¹⁹ "...in the electronic simultaneity of the contemporary photographic image, painting finds not its antinomy but a technological double or parallel. Painting's surface already contains the photographic idea of a surface made out of light, and it is as such that it plays with the idea of limit, which in painting is not the hypothetical and invisible limit of a mechanism but the visible one of a material seeking to dissolve its own materiality in its referent, and as such a solution to be materially active in some other way – as event rather than crust, movement now rather than symptomatic trace. Always a matter of parts, the specificity of the stretched (or unstretched) canvas obliges it to become involved in the question of how bodies end so that others may begin (be outside them). This involvement would culminate in the provisional realization, as indetermination, of formlessness, the collapse of the thing into what lights it, or of light as a being or a kind of mobility without substance – meaning before semantic realization, surface without depth..." Gilbert-Rolfe, J., 'Cabbages, Raspberries, and Video's Thin Brightness,' *Painting in the Age of Artificial Intelligence, Art & Design Profile* no. 48 (1996):15.

²⁰ Ibid., 14–15.

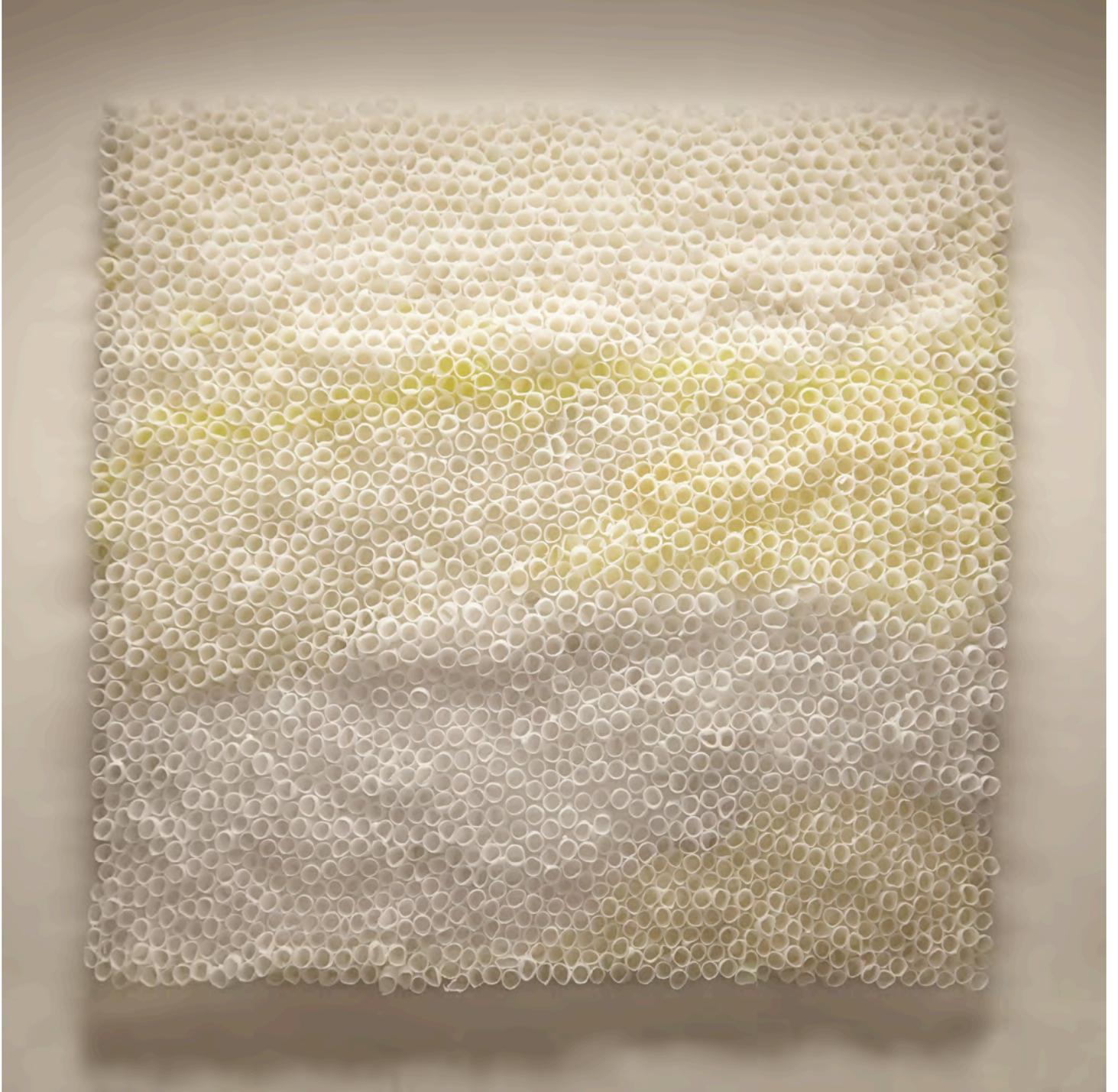
²¹ It would also be interesting to compare *Touch Screen* and ongoing work to the continuous surface of plastic. As Gilbert-Rolfe describes, plastic, with a continuous surface that has not been built, has thing-ness. The built-up surface of *Touch Screen* still creates a sense of a thing, especially when worked on and viewed haptically – close up and from the side (so the object contracts to form a piece of fish skin or bird wing attached or suspended on/near to the wall), and there is a form of continuation achieved through the non-stop staccato between painted skin and photograph skin. "Plastic's most obvious point of comparison to painting is its status as the first continuous surface which, in not being an accumulation or combination – not built or woven or otherwise assembled – is a thing, rather than an image, with the properties of a photograph. One adds to that the evenness and clarity of plastic, properties generally found desirable in flesh..." Ibid., 15.

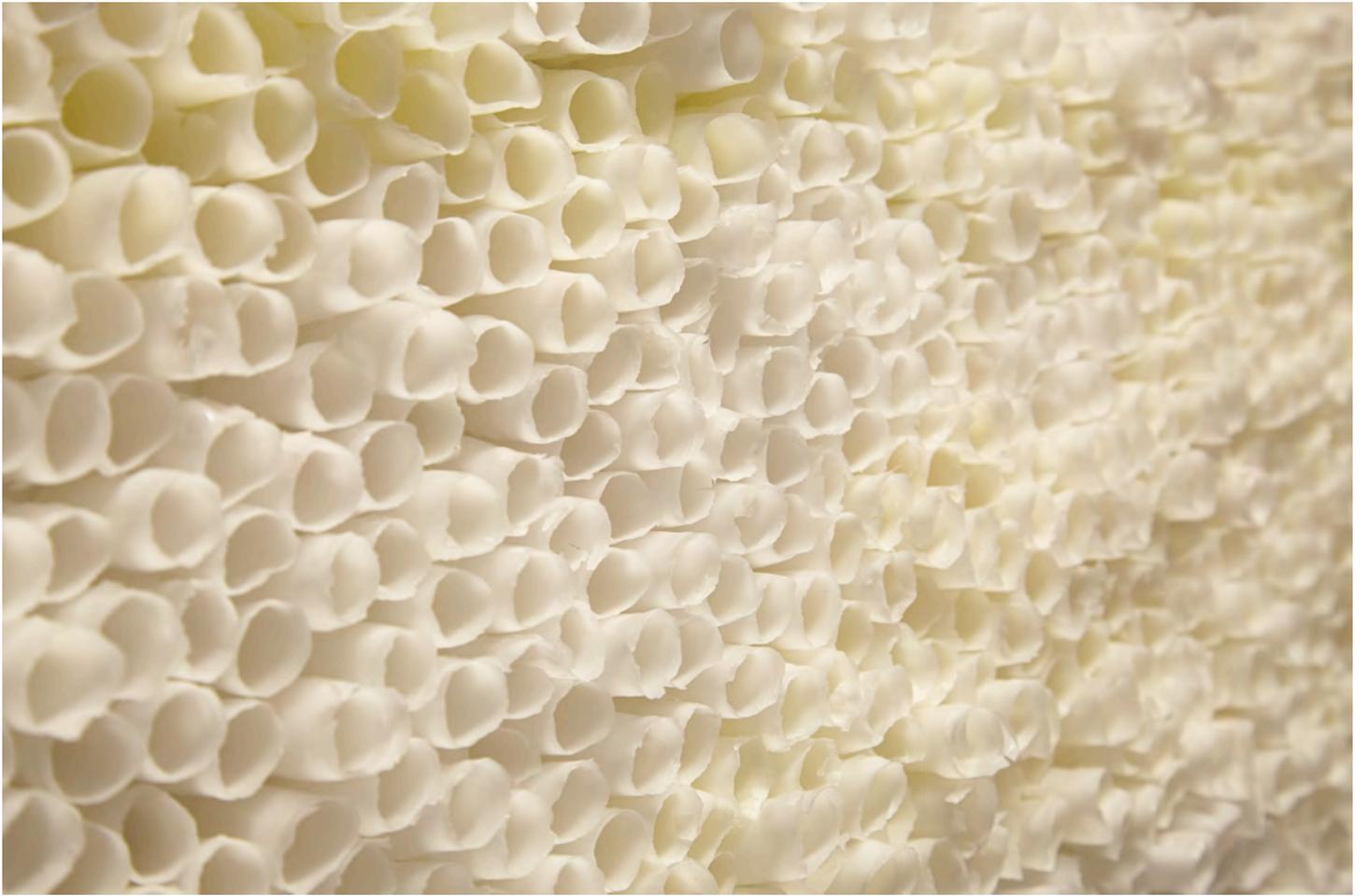
²² Ibid., 18.

²³ In 1997 Dan Hays won the John Moores Painting Prize with his painting of an oversized, empty hamster cage, *Harmony in Green*.

²⁴ 'An enquiry into the beautiful and sublime of Peter Doig's *Blotter* (1993)' (BA diss., University of Huddersfield, 2011).

²⁵ Obrist, H.-U. 'Circulus Vitiosus Pictus,' in Richter, G., *Sils* (London: Ivorypress, 2009), 8.







WHERE'S THE 'OUCH?, 2013

Painted studio wall, candle wax

95 cm × 95 cm

“...the first thing I did was find out how things worked. You find out what’s going to happen...There’s a lot of...just trying.”¹

“I thought I would try and see what would happen...”²

There is a detachment from the tool (my hand), a loss of the fingers’ being in the world, and a taking over of the material (candle wax) and the method (dipping, building, removing). The hand becomes less than a tool – an ‘M’ of three dipping sticks. At the point just before removal they are no longer my own fingers – numb with wax they have become prosthetic. They cannot feel each other, nor anything else they touch. They can only feel themselves, and the heat, inside the hot casings. They are cocooned from the world, yet they print touch within. Every dip and layer thickens the wall from the world and fills the tube with more and more touch.

The removal of the cast entails pulling and wriggling, by both the left hand as it grasps and tries to pull off the cocoon without ruining its form, and the right hand’s fingers as they try to free themselves. Right fingers cannot feel left. Left fingers cannot feel right. Left fingers grasp the casings. Right fingers wriggle free. Right fingers become objects. Left fingers become greedy, pulling, grasping. Right fingers seek release.

Right fingers shed the casings like silkworms leaving cocoons – a forced, premature exit. The fingers are raw, wrinkled and livid. The vessels are like discarded skins, still warm, alive and full of touch. Left fingers examine. Left fingers stick right fingers’ skinful of touch to the wall while still warm. Touch as substance.

There are thoughts around ritual, memory, and loss, evoked by the repetitive dipping, waiting, dipping, waiting, dipping, waiting...removal. Wax is ceremony, yet this is no memorial. Rather, once released, the scorched digits return red with life and their casts are fast growing on the wall like coral.

This is so time-based. Enforced pauses. Cooling, setting. It’s always about a fluid material freezing. I am forced to wait for the wax to cool. I want to type with bobbly fingers but I

can't. It's a form of disabling. What if I wax-coated my feet and tried to walk before removing their casts at the door?

Scolding. Endurance. Sore ritual. Numb dipping. Building. Wait. Wriggle. Struggle. Removal. Reward.

So crude compared to bees.

There was a plan to stand them up like vessels and fill them all with paint to the same level, so that the surface of the paint created a surface of a painting, cutting through and across the individual cells, crammed together as if each represented a brushstroke or point of touch within a painting – an 'event'. I couldn't stop thinking about filling them with paint. So I tried this and kept the failures, made a small painting of them by the sink.

They work better full of nothing but touch, so instead of filling them with paint I try sticking them perpendicular to the wall while still malleable. They work better. This shows their lightness, and enables them to work as units of touch. It looks as if something has nested, hatched and left the cocoon, egg shell, skin sticking out of or into the wall. Are they coming out of the wall, going into the wall, or just touching it? Touch is strong – enabling the cases to stay in place. Touch is pushing into the wall. MY touch that was inside and outside the discarded remnant.

Matt. Opaque. Solid. But fragile. Only staying put because they froze there. Their embodied energy remains despite the cooling off.

There is now a body of a painting taking form. The casings will fill a square space on the studio wall and become a painting. The casings are individual cells, individual brush strokes, full of touch.

Touch is there. The putting on of matter is there. The echo of the Ryman nearly-square is there. Is it a painting without paint? Are casts full of nothing but touch enough?

Scorched 'M' of three fingers. Endurance and building. No enjoyment. No longer play.

The body dictates. The body is the blueprint. The tubes are prints, marks, impressions made by the body.

There's no more 'just trying.' We are just to burn our fingers.

The touch experiments with wax that led to *Where's the 'Ouch?* began with thoughts around Ryman's well-quoted explanation of the origins of his work, and was one of the pieces that I made while researching Ryman prior to the Hallen visit. The consequent return to an early 'just try and see what would happen' experience enabled the reliving of a childhood phenomenological experience – a being-in-the-world through losing oneself in a medium. At a very young age I was encouraged by my mother to simply enjoy the build-up of molten wax (hot water poured over old candle ends in a plastic mixing bowl) as it covered my fingers with each dip. Back then there was no intention to make anything. There was only the fascination with losing one's fingers after the initial succumbing to scorching heat, dipping and building, numb warmth, and finally, a return to the world through satisfying release. At that time the wax thimbles were melted again as soon as they had been removed to prolong the dipping and encasing. This was more than just play; I was completely absorbed in the world of the wax and I was learning about its materiality at work with my own. Only now in the studio has the decision to connect the still-malleable tubes to the wall been made as their value as touch prints, or 'events', has been recognised, within a reference to the Ryman square.

Would the units function as touch prints off the wall? The decision to use the wall enables the work to meet several criteria: there is a putting on of matter, a pictorial field that echoes the Ryman square, a haptic experience through making and viewing, and the possibility of the touch being exhibited and infinite (are they coming out of the wall or are they going into the wall? How far back do they go?). Is *Where's the 'Ouch?* a painting? Greenberg in 1948 blamed the uniformity, the dissolution into "sheer texture, sheer sensation, into the accumulation of similar units of sensation,"³ for the destruction of the easel picture, so perhaps it is merely a waxy memorial. The reference to encaustic painting is unintentional yet unavoidable given the use of wax, but there are connotations of the ritual in terms of a repetitive compulsion both within the action of dipping and in the hanging on to one or more elements of a painting (here, the wall and the square). I share Ryman's feelings for the square, in that it's just "a comfortable, equal-sided space,"⁴ but I am aware of its historical weight which pulls on the lightness of the waxy tubes, and certain things I am trying to say about touch with this piece could not be said without it. Each tube represents a putting on, 'an event', and holds an important space inside – they contain fingerfuls of space. With *Where's the 'Ouch?*, the thinking around the subjective investment, the body-index, as discussed with *Touch Screen*, is taken further, and held within a tighter format.

With both *Touch Screen* and *Where's the 'Ouch?*, the work has been placed directly on the wall and will not survive without it. Ryman sums up the difference between a painting working haptically within a space, on a wall, and an optic viewing of a picture: "...usually

paintings, if they're pictures, hang invisibly on a wall...it's the image we're looking at in the confined space...My paintings don't really exist unless they're on the wall as part of the wall, as part of the room."⁵ For Ryman, it is often about "the way the painting reacts with the wall plane."⁶ For *Where's the 'Ouch?*, it was more about filling up a space with "small, very precise programs"⁷ of touch, and the wall offered the best solution for their independent adherence as well as haptic viewing.

In his PhD thesis, 'The Sense of Touch'⁸, Fulkerson states that "body-directed touch is a direct experience of our own bodies, from the inside, whereas externally-directed touch is an experience of external objects."⁹ During the making of *Where's the 'Ouch?*, both forms of touch were experienced simultaneously. My fingers dipping into the hot wax involved an entirely body-directed experience, with my attention entirely focused on the present thermal state of the fingers. The building up of wax then caused my attention to shift to the creation of a casing, the feeling of an enveloping, a numbing of the heat of subsequent wax layers and the world – an externally-directed experience.

The desire to crush the 'finished' piece with my hands or make an imprint with a large, blunt instrument is strong; however, destruction may appear trite and predictable. Yet, is this the real reason I refrain from the crushing? In fact, it is likely that I resist and leave it intact because I have an attachment to this fragile work: it has meaning as it is linked nostalgically to a childhood experiment and a fondness for the Ryman square, and because it is full of my subjective investment. The act of making the tubes was more important for the research but the resulting group was the goal at the time of making, so it should remain. I sought the satisfaction of filling that imagined space, but also wished for more wax, wall and time in order to go on and on until something else came or everything felt lost, not just the fingers.

¹ Ryman in an interview with Barbaralee Diamonstein, in Diamonstein, B., *Inside New York's Art World* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1979), 331.

² Ryman's statement (1986) about the beginning of his practice is quoted frequently. For example, by Hudson, S. P., *Robert Ryman – Used Paint* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009), 9–10.

³ Greenberg, C., *Art and Culture, Critical Essays*. 2nd ed. (Massachusetts: Beacon Press Books, 1989), 224.

⁴ In an interview with Phong Bui in 2006, Ryman was asked about the square and he replied: "Well, I don't know exactly. I've always been comfortable with that because it's an equal-sided space...It could be large, it could be small. It just has a good feeling..." Asked if there was any thinking in reference to Malevich, Mondrian or Albers, Ryman replied: "No. It's just that it's a comfortable, equal-sided space." Bui, P. 'Robert Ryman with Phong Bui', *Art INCONVERSATION, The Brooklyn Rail, Critical Perspectives on Arts, Politics and Culture*, 2007. Accessed March 18, 2013, www.brooklynrail.org/2007/06/art/ryman.

⁵ Ryman (1979), quoted in Storr, R., *Robert Ryman* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1993), 156.

⁶ Ryman (1992), quoted in *ibid.*, 204.

⁷ Frémon, J., *The Paradoxes of Robert Ryman*, trans. Evenson, B. (New York: Black Square Editions, 2008) , 16.

⁸ Fulkerson, M., 'The Sense of Touch' (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

Advancing the Hallen experience¹

Introduction

While holding a thick, shiny orange slab of a book, I am as sure as the book is bright and solid that I do not intend to write an analysis of all the critical texts on Robert Ryman and his work². There are small white marks on the front cover: white house paint. A trace of the book's studio presence and a reminder that my traces, my findings, are to lead this analysis. The orange book is *Robert Ryman, Critical texts since 1967*, compiled by Colaizzi and Schubert (2009), now a well-thumbed anchor of the reading on Ryman. Since this text and others have covered the art-history review of Ryman, I will discuss, from a practice-led perspective, the points that critics have made which are relevant to this research project on touch and relate them to my findings in the Hallen and in the studio. Neither is this thesis a catalogue raisonné³ of the Ryman works installed in the Hallen.

This chapter's introduction begins with Bois, who talks of endings⁴. Bois' essays 'Ryman's Tact' (1981), 'Surprise and Equanimity' (1990) and 'The Undertow' (2002) all aim, with self-confessed difficulty, to 'write about' Ryman's work directly, to position it within the art history of painting⁵. Bois opens 'Ryman's Tact' with a question that "must be asked at the very outset: why is it so hard to write about Robert Ryman's work?"⁶ I am not going to try and write about Ryman's work (nor am I going to compare all those who have echoed Bois regarding this difficulty, along with the much-mentioned irreproducibility of the paintings, the 'realism', the paradoxes, etc.). However, I am going to write about the *experience*: how the work *feels*, to me as a practitioner, through *being* with it over those three days, while using an analysis of the critical texts on Ryman that focus on experience and feeling as a structure. This writing of a feeling, the making fact of the memory of that feeling, plays an important role in the inquiry into touch: "...*the way it feels*. That's what's there."⁷ It is possible that the difficulty found in writing about Ryman has been due to the concern to categorise, which impedes a willingness to give way to experiencing the work and documenting that experience. Perhaps the work cannot be written about directly: "the best moments have been when my writing did not master the object but brushed it, *almost* touched it."⁸

Let us remember why Ryman is included in this project at all: to provide a part of the methodology that enables me a) to leave unsaid much of the continual conversation on painting

that is the undercurrent of all my questions (by choosing to reflect on Ryman, I've said it); and b) to push my research corner into something more specific, in that there has been no previous practice-led response to a three-day experience in front of Ryman paintings that uses the [phenomenological] data of that experience to investigate touch once back in the studio.

From objective to subjective observation

Bois asks if it might be “tempting, but tediously elementary...to compile a list of ‘what’s there’ in a work of Ryman’s, a recipe (‘the way it’s made’), a checklist? Yet isn’t this what he as the artist invites us to do?”⁹ Ryman famously follows this descriptive method himself: “ask him *why*, he’ll always answer *how*”¹⁰. I found this urge to “list what’s there” to be an invitation of the work, rather than the artist, who always asks instead for a direct experience of feeling the paintings. Therefore, the first stage of the three-day Hallen data gathering was based on an elementary (i.e. dealing with or arising from the simplest facts), non-judgemental viewing of the paintings, and provided an objective baseline over which the more subjective observations could be layered. Although admittedly tedious, the endurance enabled further observations and feelings – and therefore the gathering of more material from which to work. The ‘what’s there’ recordings made at the start of the Hallen data collection provided a foundation of ‘control’ material. I spent the first hours “stepping up to take my own turn as detective (the evidence: the paintbrush, the paint, the support)”¹¹. Although this return to straightforward, objective observation was an important exercise, as it formed the preparation for later moments when more interesting things started to happen, I choose not to analyse the transcriptions or the memory here, and do not include them in the annexes. I can add little new to the many how-it’s-done Ryman descriptions already in existence – cannot improve on his own – and will focus instead on that which is relevant to my research question: the how-it-feels that I experienced directly in the Hallen. The “process-account”¹² created a distance, a space and a delay at the beginning of the experience so that any subjective feelings could emerge later in their own time, once I’d got over the ‘what’s there’.

Texts on Ryman frequently mention the importance of first-hand experience, often quoting one of Ryman’s simple statements, such as: “The main thing is you just look at it and you see if you have a feeling about it or not. That’s what’s important.”¹³ The “you” in such statements refers to an unspecified, generalised viewer and is characteristic of Ryman’s familiar directness,

constantly bringing discussion back to the individual experiencing the “why” for him/herself. However, there are few accounts of the individual experience of viewers. Here is the gap: Ryman’s own words about his paintings simply state the ‘what’s there’ or the ‘how it’s done’, and he leaves anything that might exist beyond that for the viewer to experience himself, through looking and feeling directly.¹⁴ Those few critics who do expand on experience beyond the usual ‘how it’s done’ speak only of it generally, briefly, and in blunt terms ranging from boredom (Perrone and Lippard) to enlightenment (Storr, Sirmans and Raussmüller). There is no visible account of an actual experience of fully being with the work.

It is established that a first-hand experience with Ryman’s paintings is essential, lacking in the literature, and useful for this work. So, what of this experience? What happened in the Hallen?

Subjective response: reflexivity

The distancing that can be felt in front of a painting about painting gave way to the very opposite, in that the reflexivity at work within the paintings imploded back towards the absolute closeness; an awareness of the reflection of myself. For Bois, Ryman’s repeated failure to “outflank the tautological reflexiveness in which modernism has been locked” amounts to his success: “Ryman has attempted to paint that he paints that he paints; ...his success is due not to having attained that literally unthinkable reflexivity, but to the fact that every failure of his audacious attempt removes him further from his object, driving him to produce objects that are increasingly enigmatic and indeterminable.”¹⁵ I would add that the success is in this effect: reflexive-painting → distanced-object → self-reflection.

Having incessantly “painted that he paints that he paints”, painting over and over about painting, Ryman has created works that move further and further away from his object. I imagine a painting that has become so pared down and engrossed in its task that it appears to be very far away, causing the viewer, now disproportionately scaled, like an overgrown Alice stuck inside a house, to find it surprisingly near, and peer at it, at once intrigued by this self-reflective-distanced thing and painfully aware of her own ungainly body.

My body did feel awkward during the three days of researching the works within *Advancing the Experience*. I experienced disproportion like Alice, both enlarged and shrunken, and some body

parts seemed to feel the work more strongly than others, such as my feet, teeth, tongue and mouth. Everything came back to my own subjectivity, both as an artist imagining the making of the work and as embodied being with a sensory understanding of the surface. Various critics have discussed the return to 'the self' in terms of reflexivity that can be experienced through really looking at a Ryman painting¹⁶. As the viewer's curiosity dissects the painting into those different parts that Ryman consciously employs to make up a whole, the painting reflects back that enquiry and makes the viewer aware of his/her own components. As Gilbert-Rolfe states: "When one looks at Ryman, one considers the act of looking through identifying the act of making, both the polarities of a transaction at the centre of which is oneself...to the tautology latent in the notion of the ritual mark, to self-reflexivity..."¹⁷ Ryman's feeling found within the making of the mark, the 'event',¹⁸ is reproduced within the viewer, who is "invited to rehearse the visible traces of its making."¹⁹ I certainly experienced a desire to make work, to use paint, while see-feeling the 'events' of Ryman's works, and this combined with a heightened sense of being a body within the space has led to a greater understanding of haptic perception. This has been worked into the making of *Blanks*, addressed in chapter four. My own sense of self, my own subjectivity, felt more and more ungainly and awkward as I became increasingly aware of it, and my attention constantly switched between my subjectivity as an artist making work, my embodied being moving about the paintings, and the phenomenon of the self very much grounded through cold, flat feet.

Subjective response: body movement – haptic perception

For the purpose of this project, and as previously explained in Chapter one, *Touch Screen*, haptic perception has been defined as the combination of tactile, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive functions: the way touch can be experienced with the whole body, inside and out. The return to the self that I experienced on the second and third day in the Hallen was primarily due to an awareness of the body in space due to the constant movement required in an attempt to grasp the paintings. Critics on Ryman have noted this awareness of the body²⁰ through movement but not in relation to haptic perception. Paterson has discussed the significance of touch in terms of painting's surface, referring to Merleau-Ponty's discussion of Cézanne in 'Eye and Mind,' and argues that the experience of being with art in a space is "a haptic, visual-tactile-kinesic involvement in the physical witness of things."²¹ Fisher states that exhibitions demand movement through the spaces of display:

It is through proprioception – the sense of dimensionality and motion in space – that we understand exhibitions. In this way, haptic awareness encompasses a key aspect of exhibition experience accounting for “how we are touched” by the kinæsthetic demands of exhibition choreographies and the proprioceptive impact of both ambience and arrangement.²²

The following analysis of the Hallen subjective material (a selection of the many recordings of my response to the Ryman paintings that I made with a Dictaphone) seeks to extract the essence of the first-hand experience, evidence of my haptic involvement with the works, in order to create work of my own that investigates touch in response to these haptic discoveries.

Extracting the essence of the Hallen subjective material

The information gathered there consists of my response to works dealing with the transference of touch through paint. This is to be gleaned for potentially interesting, relevant material for further practical enquiry into touch. I see the three days spent with the Ryman paintings as one large net that captured information in the form of recorded reflections and movements. I now intend to extract and distil the essence of these findings and use the concentrate to drive new work on touch in the studio.

Subjective recording 13 and analysis for studio work

Subjective recording 13 was the thirteenth Dictaphone recording (one of the longest out of some fifty-five) made while with the Ryman paintings in the Hallen. It was made as I walked from painting to painting, stopping in front of each for a few minutes. The following sections of *Subjective recording 13* (the full transcription can be found in Annex D), the italicised text in boxes, have been selected for studio study given their poignancy and potential for pushing the research problem. The text in blue is about body movement and the text in red is about feelings in parts of the body. A short summary of each box’s contents follows in non-italicised text.

The number is 1, the title is ‘Roll’, the year was 1989, what I feel is:

....Height.... I’m very aware of the bottom left point of the painting because it’s catching the light..., and it makes me more aware of pointy feelings, such as the edge of the paper, the coolness of the Dictaphone, the cord round my

neck.... It's warm and small.... It makes me feel like I'm outside, on top of something, looking down.... A sense of being...above things, but also, wanting to hold it. The warmth makes it smaller and I want to hold that.

Body position and altered view points. Something to hold.

The number is 2, the title is 'Untitled', the year was 1958, right now what I feel is:

Prickly, and dirty. Felt a pinprick in the... middle part of my right thigh... and now I'm feeling aches in my legs, rocking backwards and forwards, onto my toes and heels. Makes me feel a bit uncomfortable, a bit grubby. Makes me want to clear it up, smooth it out, but, if I move to the... right...A view from the side more haptically... I find it annoying because there aren't enough blank spaces that have that sheen. The sheen is very broken up by the rough matt strokes and the bobbly bits. It's like fluff on a jumper that you want to de-fuzz or.... Head on it's very matt. If I go back to head on, I like it more now. It feels like, um, something stony rather than grubby. So from the side, it's a bit like... dusty icing – so, shiny icing that's become dusty – and so when I go to the front again... the mattness is uniform - there's no shiny bit, although there's lots of variation. And it's rugged. I like its rugged, weathered, stony look rather than its... grubbiness...

Synaesthetic reaction in legs and feet. A desire to clear up, smooth out, de-fuzz.

The number is 4, the title is 'Embassy #1', the year was 1976:

Aaaaannnd breathe... I instantly want to come up close, I want to move to the side, I want to see...across it - into it, into it, it's infinite. Across it, I can attach some kind of understanding or meaning to it, and now it's annoying; why can't I just accept it from the front? But then to only accept it from the front would be to accept a certain way, or to restrict a certain way of looking... Whereas the movement of the body from side to side makes me aware of myself. I brush the cold wall – it's very chalky.... The noise of my shoes, the floor - I'm aware of the whole thing. Again, the wall. Back to the wall, touching the wall...

Heightened awareness of own body through movement.

The number's 5, the title is 'Untitled (Background Music)', the year was 1962:

It's just about the play of the paint – nothing else. Why try and get something else out of it? I do take joy from...mapping what he's done, thinking about him in front of it....

Standing in the place of the maker. Mapping his trace. Aware of own subjectivity as artist.

The number is 6, the title is 'Anchor', the year was 1980:

I just think about being... pelted in the face with hail.

Synaesthetic reaction to the surface. My face feels the hits to the painting's sur-face.

The number is 7, the title is 'Prototype 10/11/15/16', the year was 1969:

*Right now I just want to lie in front of it and have a sleep...I can feel the process of my own things, I can feel being in the studio...I've been looking at surfaces like these for years...It's the skin around the edge that I like – the peeling, oniony, flaky...flaky bits. ...And the fibres...underneath the thin, shimmery paint... **Playing with my fingers** a lot. It's like I need to be making stuff, I don't know... Itching to do something. Itching. Itchy. Now I feel itchy... Itchy insects. Wings. Fluttering – something pinned down or clipped, just stuck up there. They look... obviously very carefully placed, as if they're just... thrown up there, by static...*

Fingers itching to make things leads to the itch of an insect and thoughts about wings being pinned down.

The number's 9, the title is 'Bond', the year was 1982:

*It makes me think of a workplace. Something about objects my dad used to have in his office. Things I've touched... It's like an old rubber or something that was translucent, like the top part of this... painting... It's like a drum, almost – I want to see if I could... punch a hole through it, although it's solid – it's backed onto a piece of wood, so it's solid, but you don't know that **until you stand to the side of it**, and then when you do that, the surface of it looks even more stretched, and taut and fragile like a skin of a drum – like **an eardrum**. It looks translucent, but it's obviously a solid thing. Lugano from here changes again.*

Nostalgic return through the memory of a specific, touched object. Taut and fragile like the skin of an eardrum.

The number is 10, the title is 'Post', the year was 1981:

*...With the subjective descriptions, **I'm moving around a lot more, going to the sides a lot more, standing up closer**, holding my book in the right hand, gesticulating to myself like an idiot with the left, the space is actually empty at the moment so I'm talking to myself and quite conscious of this...conscious of myself. These paintings make you aware of yourself... **I'm moving around it a lot...** It's almost like you're really busy **on the sides, and then head on** you're calm and quiet and still.*

Heightened awareness of self through the constant changing of the body position directed by the painting's light-sensitive surface.

The number's 11, the title is 'Accord', the year was 1985:

It feels like a knife....Slipping... and slotting....Makes me think of slotting... A cheese wire. It feels good. It feels clean. I'd like to slide through that gap and feel the cold of the steel and the cold dry of the wall on the different sides.

Knife, slipping, slotting, wire, clean, slide, cold, steel, dry.

The number is 13, the title is 'Arrow', the year's 1976:

*It makes me want to **clench my teeth and bite**. It's the sandwiching of the Plexiglas and the bolt, so, it's different texture touching another one – makes me **feel different things in my teeth**. Bolt to Plexiglas, Plexiglas to wall, Plexiglas-painting to wall, paint on top of that, thinly, and then Plexiglas brackety thing on top, so you can see the*

paint through it – these are the beautiful bits – you can see these squares where you've got half – like a little triangle of paint, where the Plexiglas bracket has overlapped the paint, and then nothing. I want to be in those bits.... It's very wet. It's very wet. Ttttttttt.

Synaesthetic response felt in the teeth. A desire to bite, and to 'be' in certain parts of the painting.

The number is 14, the title is 'Annex', the year was 1988:

...The dark, dried blood underneath makes me feel sore....

Tender skin responds to a visceral undertow.²³

The number is 20, the title is 'Untitled', 1973 was the year:

*...The paint looks quite warm and pinky, fleshy, very smooth. It makes me think of eggs. And then when I think of eggs I think of cracking them....This one makes me think of **my tongue. And my teeth. My tongue over my teeth....My tongue round my teeth and also my...upper lip – the inside of my upper lip. Now which part of my tongue is that? That's really hard to work out. So it's the underneath of my tongue on the underside of my lip...and it's the... upper part of my tongue... on the front part of my teeth...Makes me think of fluids. Makes me feel fluid...and light...and empty... and calm.***

Fragile shell, then the mouth becomes isolated. One of many experiences of various body parts becoming disembodied. A lip-teeth-tongue moment reminiscent of the Merleau-Ponty touching hands motif.

The number is 23, the title is 'Concord', the year was 1976:

*I feel...one big stroke all over. I do feel the brush strokes. Big, long, ...strips.... I want to lie on it – I want to make the painting... flat on the floor and lie on it. It makes me aware of myself again, it makes me think of myself curled up in the middle of it really small like a foetus position like a tiny snail. **In the middle of it...***

Shrinking into a small, vulnerable being and falling into the middle of a large, billowing sail.

The number's 26, the title is 'Criterion # II', the year was 1976:

*I approach this slowly from the side. I see other paintings in its reflection. I know that my reflection is going to appear – there I am....I can feel my pulse. I stopped breathing... I can see **pulses in my eyelids.** There are these different shapes. My hair, shoulders. If I look at my eyes I just see an animal, some kind of owl... I can't see myself clearly – my eyes keep moving around. Kind of...like a cat... It's weird. Now if I focus on the surface of the painting I see myself still, the silhouette...like a – ohhh it's really weird. I see my reflection, the surface, reflection, surface. And it makes me feel the surface of the book – my fingers have been moving around the front of the book, 'cause that's got a similar kind of faintly orangey peely leathery ...texture, so this is like a leathery... texture underneath...the glass.... There's balance here – it looks like the glass is balancing on these Plexiglas brackets, like it's squidged onto the wall. Squish. So there's tension, which you don't notice, and then when you look at the surface again, you feel this tension*

again, because you've noticed that the Plexiglas squares with the bolts... have... pushed it into place, holding it there by gravity and force. ...I want to look back at it. Looking at myself - vanity. My reflection is this pale grey. I can see 'Counsel' reflected, too, and parts of the building – it becomes a painting of the building and a painting of a painting – a painting of the whole thing. Maybe this one sums up the whole place – you see yourself, the paintings, the composition, tension...calm, simple but complex... My book touches the wall and I feel... a continuation of it.

A connection with the entire workings of the work. The animal returning the gaze. Heightened awareness of self yet not recognising the reflection. Understanding through feeling.

Number 29, 'Counsel'. The year was 1982:

...Urge to stand right back as far as I can go against the wall on the opposite side. So my bum and back – I'm aware of the gaps between my body and the wall, even though my bum and my upper back are... touching it, so I've got this need to flatten it out as if I'm in yoga and it feels great... I feel like I shouldn't be leaning against the wall, because it's part of the thing. What if I leave a mark? It's more about where I'm standing rather than looking at the painting, and what I'm feeling against the wall.... Moving forward... coming to the... side of the painting... moving back to the front, lines develop on it. Long, horizontal bars, and vertical bars, too. The painting becomes really....deep, when you go to the side even though it's not that thickly painted on, it's just that there are so many different shades because of the different directions. It's like roughed up suede in... millions of different areas... And from the front you don't see this – you just see the lines, the ridges left, by the pushing of the paint. I'm thinking about pushing now.... Things being pushed to the side. Paint being pushed to the edge of the brushstroke....I've got this biting sensation again when I come to the side because I can see all the different... different areas...

Constant movement around the painting. Synaesthesia in the mouth. A desire to bite.

It is necessary to present a definition of synaesthesia for the purposes of explaining the phenomenological experiences listed above which involved feeling sensations in different parts of the body while looking at the paintings. Cytowic, in *The Man Who Tasted Shapes*, states that “in synaesthesia an individual experiencing a sensation in one sensory modality also experiences, involuntarily, a sensation in another sensory modality,” and that we might all be synaesthetic at a subconscious level.²⁴ Daria Martin's publication, *Sensorium Tests*, which centres on a 16mm film of the same name and was produced for an exhibition at MK Gallery, resulted from Martin's research into 'mirror-touch synaesthesia' (people experiencing touch on their own bodies when they see other people, and sometimes objects, being touched).²⁵ A point relevant to this chapter is the mentioning of “multisensory perception in response to artworks”, such as the “ghostly sub-anatomical event in teeth and gums”.²⁶

The main themes of *Subjective recording 13* could all be described as pertaining to a haptic perception of the works. It has been established that haptic perception involves a symbiosis of tactile, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive functions, and although each finding is often both specific and isolated (“felt a pinprick in the...middle part of my right thigh”, “like a tiny snail”, “something pinned down or clipped”, “an eardrum”), when considering *Subjective recording 13*

as a whole, all those senses that work together in haptic perception are involved, particularly the kinaesthetic. The body will continue to be a crucial component in the making of the studio work in response to this experience. I will be constantly aware of my movements inside the studio while revisiting the memories and feelings of these findings in my mind/body: “something to hold, legs and feet, mapping the trace, wings pinned down, teeth and mouth, disembodied parts, small vulnerable being, soreness, taught skin, pelted face...”

Summary of other subjective recordings and analysis for studio work

The various transcribed subjective recordings (including *Subjective recording 13*) and written notes (the most significant are included as Annexes B – H) have been studied as a whole. Four main groups of references in response to the three-day close engagement with the Ryman works have emerged. I summarise the four groups in the following list and then in greater detail (fragments and sections lifted and collated from the various subjective, written and spoken recordings made in the Hallen):

- i. birds (and their fluttering), fragile organisms (eggs, snails, tadpoles, worms, insects and their wings);
- ii. my feet and their shod or unshod connection with the fascinating floor;
- iii. my teeth, lips, tongue and mouth in relation to chewing, biting, and sensing themselves or a foreign body such as a hair;
- iv. the change of my body position due to the paint/surface/light-led need to constantly move around the paintings installed within a large space and see-feel the surfaces from all angles.

i. Birds, fragile creatures and related objects:

Warm bird/solid and beating inside/light and feathery; Not worms; Flighty bird/Fluttering to get out; 4 wings/clipped; Egg – beginning of/something/Shell – the end, remnant; Curl up like small/snail and fall; ...the black dots come and go, move around the edge, like bugs...or a tadpole; ...itchy insects. Wings. Fluttering – something pinned down or clipped...; It makes me think of eggs. And then when I think of eggs I think of cracking them...; ...it makes me think

of myself curled up in the middle of it really small like...a tiny snail; If I look at my eyes I just see an animal, some kind of owl...

ii. Feet and floor:

Objective, estate agent, boots on...Subjective, receptive, boots off; Boots off; Everything feels soft. Even my socked feet on the hard ground, padding around; Padding; That floor. Cold through material. Padding; With boots on. Felt right – sharper – colder; socks on floor; Feet/feet/floor/fl fl fill fill ffilllll; If you felt this floor without shoes you'd keep yours off also. Korea. Shoes off; Feet feeling free and cold and wriggly. Imagining the socks as white and padded; Tiptoes; makes me tiptoe; my cold feet. Cold, flat/feet; Just my/big, flat/cold bottomed feet; only hands + feet/and a soreness/inbetween; now I am feeling aches in my legs, rocking backwards and forwards, onto my toes and heels; The noise of my shoes.

iii. Teeth and mouth:

What's the tongue doing?; lips together; Makes me clench/my teeth; Chewing gum; Lick it; STUCK. I feel a hair/stuck in my tooth; It makes me want to clench my teeth and bite...makes me feel different things in my teeth; This one makes me think of my tongue. And my teeth. My tongue over my teeth...My tongue round my teeth and also my...upper lip – the inside of my upper lip. Now which part of my tongue is that? That's really hard to work out. So it's the underneath of my tongue on the underside of my lip...and it's the...upper part of my tongue...on the front part of my teeth; I've got this biting sensation again.

iv. Body position and movement:

Sit in front of a painting...and wait; head up – detached – arm low down; Lying on bench; Then suddenly, I've/Moved, and it's billowing/out; Come in from the side/into the painting, as/it comes out at you; Fall to the side/Stand to the side/Slide to the side/Wide side; Makes me sit tall; Mind is cleaned/Then body can/move. I rock from/side to side watching/shape moving from side/to side in front of me; Actually feel moved/when I've moved to/the side +/-seen the change; Up close so looking up./Why the/need to be up so close?/Go right back; It makes me feel like I'm outside, on top of something, looking down...A sense of being...above things; I instantly want to come up close, I want to move to the side...the movement of the body from side to side makes me aware of myself...Back to the wall...I then go side on; Takes you backwards and forwards constantly; when I move to the side; but you don't know that until you stand to the side of it; With the subjective descriptions, I'm moving around a lot more, standing up closer...conscious of myself. These paintings make you aware of yourself; So when you move backwards and forwards; I approach this slowly from the side; Urge to stand right back as far as I can...Moving forward...coming to the...side of the painting...moving back to the front...The painting becomes really...deep, when you go to the side.

The main, lasting memory is that of myself as a fragile, big-mouthed, flat and cold-footed being in constant movement. According to Paterson's chapter on "geometry with eyes, hands and feet", I was essentially mapping out the Ryman installation space through haptic exploration.²⁷ The memory of the cold-footed being will be carried in the studio while work investigating touch

is made in response, and haptic mapping of studio activity is an area of touch-related practice that I intend to take further beyond this project.

¹ This title echoes that of the permanent Ryman exhibition in the Hallen für Neue Kunst, Schaffhausen, Switzerland. The small, discreet information plaque at one end of the Ryman installation states that on “21st April 2008, all works were taken off in order to create the free space for another stage of connecting Ryman’s paintings with light and space and their surroundings. In May 2008, when it became evident that the work in progress together with Rausmüller would result in a work itself, Ryman chose to entitle this new work as *Advancing the Experience*.”

² This has been done: the editors of the orange book, Colaizzi and Schubert (*Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967*, London: Ridinghouse, 2009), have compiled most of the main texts as the title states, and Hudson (*Robert Ryman: Used Paint*, Cambridge, MA and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2009) has studied the discourse alongside Ryman’s statements in detail within a historical account.

³ Amy Baker Sandback, Director of Collection Research at Dia Art Foundation, is in the process of writing the catalogue raisonné of Ryman’s work.

⁴ “In relation to modernism, Ryman...: standing guard at its tomb, like any sentry, he holds an untenable position. He is perhaps the last modern painter, in the sense that his work is the last to be able graciously to maintain its direction by means of modernist discourse, to be able to fortify it if necessary, but above all radically to undermine it and exhaust it through excess.” Bois, Y-A., ‘Ryman’s Tact’, in *Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967*, eds. Colaizzi, V. and Schubert, K. (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 173. And later, “I have often labelled Ryman the guardian of the tomb of modernism. If indeed modernism was an enterprise of motivation, of purging from art the arbitrariness of those conventions not “essential” to it, then Ryman is the last modernist painter, in the sense that he definitely puts an end to this tradition by keeping its flame alive: the reduction of arbitrariness is an infinite labour.” ‘Surprise and Equanimity’, in *About Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967*, eds. Colaizzi, V. and Schubert, K. (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 241. Even later, “The odd thing is that very few people read my essay as a plea for painting – or, at least, as an affirmation that it was at best naïve to bury it, since it was not yet a corpse.” ‘The Mourning After’, roundtable with Arthur C. Danto, David Joselit, Yves-Alain Bois, Thierry de Duve, Isabelle Graw, David Reed, Elizabeth Sussman, *Artforum*, vol. 41, no. 7, (March 2007): 267, quoted in Colaizzi, 17.

⁵ Hudson remarks on this difficult encountered by critics attempting to ‘place’ Ryman. Hudson’s PhD thesis “addresses the reception of Ryman’s paintings as they were first exhibited in the sixties, discussing the ways their a-rhetorical operation frustrates absolutist readings and categorical or stylistic affiliations (with movements including Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, and Conceptualism), and thus embarrasses over-determined structures of art historical meaning.” Abstract from Hudson, S. P., ‘Robert Ryman: Painting Pragmatism’ (PhD diss., University of Princeton, 2006).

⁶ Bois, Y-A., ‘Ryman’s Tact’, in *Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967*, eds. Colaizzi, V. and Schubert, K. (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 167. Bois repeats this same question later: “Returning, then, to the initial question: why do I find it so difficult to write about Ryman? Isn’t it enough to describe and analyse not the process itself but the process of the process...?” *Ibid.*, 171.

⁷ Ryman, R. quoted by Bois, in ‘Ryman’s Tact’, in *Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967*, eds. Colaizzi, V. and Schubert, K. (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 167. Originally published in Tuchman, P., ‘Interview with Robert Ryman’, *Artforum*, vol. 9, no. 9 (May 1971), 52.

⁸ Marks, L., *Touch – Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), ix.

⁹ Bois, Y-A., ‘Ryman’s Tact’, in *Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967*, eds. Colaizzi, V. and Schubert, K. (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 167.

¹⁰ Bois, Y-A., ‘Surprise and Equanimity’, in exhibition catalogue, *Robert Ryman: New Paintings* (New York: Pace Gallery, 1990).

¹¹ Bois, Y-A., ‘Ryman’s Tact’, in *Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967*, eds. Colaizzi, V. and Schubert, K. (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 168.

¹² Bois, Y-A., ‘Ryman’s Tact’, *Robert Ryman, Critical texts since 1967*, London: Ridinghouse: “Any attempt at commentary, especially when it addresses the visual “asceticism” of Ryman’s paintings, even more when it examines them at very close range, becomes distanced from its object, or, rather, sees its object become distant.” (169) “Making the work the objective complement of a

series of transitive actions (squeezing the paint, stretching the canvas, etc.), the process-account refuses to believe in the enigma of the work's potential intransitivity." (171).

¹³Ryman, 1971, quoted by Reise, B. R., 'Robert Ryman: Unfinished III (Position)', in *Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967*, eds. Colaizzi, V. and Schubert, K. (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 71.

¹⁴ Ryman always says the paintings only really work within real experience. For example: "Painting does not exist independently as a thing, but exists in relationship. The meaning of painting depends not only on the interaction between a painting and the viewer, but on the painting's relationship with space. Painting interacts with space (the wall, ceiling, floor, light) and with the viewer. It is the interaction that initiates experience. You cannot understand painting by explaining something. You can only understand painting by experience." Ryman, 1985, quoted by Hudson, S. P. *Robert Ryman: Used Paint* (Cambridge, MA and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2009), 192.

¹⁵ Ibid., 173.

¹⁶ Other critics in *Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967*, eds. Colaizzi, V. and Schubert, K. (London: Ridinghouse, 2009) have commented on this reflection: "It illuminates itself in that light, the light in those forms, and so adds to them, reflexively, showing them to themselves and so much of our present to us." (Ratcliff, 33) "... perhaps no other artist has produced so essential an experience of the individual viewer facing himself as Ryman...his work is the *stade du miroir* in its least tarnished form." (Domingo, 37) "...the actual large scale of formalist painting is figured in terms of its proportion to the viewer and his actual space; this, in turn, increases the fictive scale where an illusion of infinity is provided by the proportion of surface size to surface particle or incident...Staying on the surface, one is aware only of real scale, the proportion of the painting to one's self...this relationship...functions to make the viewer aware of his own cognitive activity, to make him apprehend himself in the act of apprehension." (Crimp, 53) "There is nothing to find in the paintings but oneself." (Perrone, 94) "Anyone who has lived for some time with a Ryman painting will say it: this thing is alive, the hours of the day change it completely just as they change you even if it is without your knowledge, and there lies the quality of your relation to a Ryman." (Frémon, 187) "...the more you experience their effect, the more you will notice that you yourself open up, that your perceptive capacities react in a more nuanced way, that you become sensitive to subtleties, details, and intermediary tones – not just in relation to the paintings, but in principle, above and beyond them." (Rausmuller, 363).

¹⁷ Gilbert-Rolfe, J., 'Appreciating Ryman', in *Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967*, eds. Colaizzi, V. and Schubert, K. (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 81.

¹⁸ Christian Bonnefoi, referenced in Colaizzi, V., introduction to *Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967*, eds. Colaizzi, V. and Schubert, K. (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 16.

¹⁹ "A painting by Ryman exists in a continuous relationship to the embodied viewer, who is invited to apprehend its scale, to rehearse the visible traces of its making, and to note its constant changes according to vantage point and ambient light." Colaizzi, V., introduction to *Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967*, eds. Colaizzi, V. and Schubert, K. (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 12.

²⁰ For example: "...our appreciation of Ryman occurs on the visual and kinaesthetic realm because that is where he takes us." Colaizzi, V., introduction to *Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967*, eds. Colaizzi, V. and Schubert, K. (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 19; and "in sum, the whole work is extraordinarily sensitive to the viewer's slightest movement. Wherever you stand, or especially when you walk slowly past the work, the panels continually change in relation to each other and to the viewer. Ryman has set up a stringent set of conditions which we know to be one thing: regular, orderly, static; but which we can only experience as the opposite: shifting, unstable, and ever-changing. Such fixed elements as the uniformity of the square units, their equidistant spacing and the precise, even-handed lighting give way when actually confronted in real time and space to continually shifting optical distortions." Thompson, W., 'Art at the Edge: Ryman's Vector and Cézanne', in *Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967*, eds. Colaizzi, V. and Schubert, K. (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 198.

²¹ Paterson, M., *The Senses of Touch. Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007), 95.

²² Fisher, J. 'Relational Sense: Towards a Haptic Aesthetics.' *Parachute* 87 (summer 1997), 6, <http://www.david-howes.com/senses/Fisher.htm> Accessed January 31, 2014.

²³ "Beneath the surface flesh, visible and tangible, lies a hidden vitality that courses within me. Blood is my metaphoric term for this viscosity. 'Flesh and blood' expresses well the chiasmatic identity-in-difference of perceptual and visceral life...the notion of flesh and blood must characterise not only the body in isolation but the relationship between body and world. In the perceptual chasm, body and world reach out to each other from across an ineradicable space. Merleau-Ponty writes of a "thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing,"...Perception is only possible via the mutual exteriority of the perceiver and perceived. Yet in addition to this perceptual communion of the flesh, I am sustained through a deeper "blood" relation with the world. It is installed within me, not just encountered from without...I am not just gazing upon the world but one who feeds on it, drinks of it, breathes it in." Leder, D., *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 66.

²⁴ Cytowic, R. R. *The Man Who Tasted Shapes* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2003), x–xiii. It is also worth noting that according to 'Table 3. Types of Synaesthesia', vision → touch is uncommon, with just 0.8% of the 365 cases examined. The most common is graphemes → colour (66.8%). Other touch-related synaesthesia are: coloured touch (1.9%), taste → touch (1.1%), smell → touch (1.1%), touch → taste (0.5%), touch → hearing (0.5%), and touch → smell (0.3%). *Ibid.*, 233.

²⁵ Martin, D. and Spira, A., eds. *Daria Martin: Sensorium Tests*. Published on the occasion of the exhibition: MK Gallery, January 20 – April 8 (Milton Keynes: MK Gallery, 2012). The fact that Martin includes an excerpt from Marks on haptic visuality and embodiment and Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* in her 'Anthology' at the back of the book reinforces the links between phenomenology and haptic engagement.

²⁶ Scarry, E. *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4, quoted by Martin, D. in *Sensorium Tests* (Milton Keynes: MK Gallery, 2012), 93.

²⁷ "Historically, measuring space has often been done with the body...body parts therefore become components of the mechanisms of measure...underlying such abstracted geometry...is the relation between body movement and measure: the set of tactile-muscular experiences that go to make up the measuring process...geometry already entails haptic forms of perception." Paterson, M., *The Senses of Touch. Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007), 72-73.















BLANKS, 2013–2014

63 clay pieces made on the right thigh, dipped in white house paint

113 clay pieces made on the right foot, wiped with white house paint

Back in the studio, a while after the Hallen visit, the main body memory is all about feet. I remember that floor: padding around, body awareness, how the cold, smooth floor felt through the feet. My weight pressing down. Presence. Groundedness. Thinking about ground.

How can this transfer? The preoccupation is now the question of the support. Where do I let touch play out? Does touch need a support?

I must make my own blanks. The floor, the ground, some clay. A support that contains my index is the only support I can support. No surface is truly blank but the point is that they are my blanks.

I also remember I “felt a pinprick in the middle part of my right thigh.” Let’s start with the thigh: a small human blank on which French roof tiles were traditionally made. From the body (thigh) to the roof (French tiles). From the floor (Hallen) to the body (thigh) to the wall (my blanks).

I press a lump of the cold, damp clay onto my right thigh, pushing it out and flattening it hard against the skin, fat, muscle and bone. Over and over I press. Making more and more thigh prints. The printing right thigh cools and hardens, contracts, exposed with one side of the overalls peeled down, while the covered-up left grows warm and fleshy, smug and spongy like a well-fed fat man tucked up inside. The right works hard in the cold, and the build-up of residue dries like frost.

Perhaps they will hang and overlap. Like cells of memory from the Hallen experience. Printed from my body. I want to make with the body. I want to remember with the body, during and after.

Where is the touch while making? The clay is cold and damp; I can feel the cold of the clay on my thigh and my hands. I can feel the resistance of my thigh with my hands and the pressure of my hands with my thigh. There is a multi-layered touch sandwich (thigh–clay–hands): my thigh feels the cold of the clay and the pressure of my hands, as well as something happening in my thigh; my hands feel the cold of the clay, the give of the clay, the dull resistance of my thigh, and something happening in my hands.

I remember the cold of the floor through the soles of my socked feet.

I remember the strange pinprick in my right thigh and the aches in my legs while standing in front of Untitled (1958).

Where is the touch after making? While writing this I can feel the cold still in my right thigh. I went to bed forgetting about the frosted right thigh, and when I found it in the morning, I felt the cold of the clay and itched to print more. This is all about touch and memory.

Enough homage to Provence. Now for the feet.

The foot as printing blank is more relevant. The enlarged slab feet of the Hallen stand out in the memory.

Moulding the clay onto the right foot, with my right leg resting on my left knee, I can't see the clay on the outer side of my foot. I have to feel it flat. There's a pain in my knee due to the continued bend. All I am doing is wiping, rubbing and pressing a bit of ground onto the upper part of my foot. Touch and the ground. Grounded.

The blanks must hang bare on the wall, exposed and open. Each is given a lip when placed on the table for drying. The lip will hang over a wire or a thin pole. The lip is moulded over the nearest thin pole-like things to hand: old, unused, forgotten paintbrushes at the bottom of a box. Some are orange like the orange book.

The thigh blanks are dipped in white house paint – basic silk emulsion. The B&Q 10L tub is orange like the orange book. Achilles heel. The most important part is the undipped part. The 'poignant parts' of Touch Screen. The meditative immersion into painty joy as the blanks are submerged and resurfaced. They hang on their brushes to dry. Brushes nowhere near paint. Mere hooks. Supporting poles from which new supports for touch trials hang. But the touch trial is there already. In the hang, the brush, the blank.

The brushes will stay. They have become an essential, accidental part of the piece, from which it all hangs.

There is both the memory of the feet pressing into the cold ground at the Hallen and the pressing of the cold clay onto the thigh or the foot. Within this pressing, there are two kinds of touch, defined by Fulkerson in his thesis, *The Sense of Touch* (2010) as “externally-directed touch” (the experience of external objects through touch) and “body-directed touch” (the direct experience of the body through touch).¹ During the making of *Blanks*, there

seems to be both an externally-directed and a body-directed experience of touch at the same time. Fulkerson argues that body-directed awareness is unique to touch.²

*A body-directed touch is an experience of the present state of our sensitive bodies...of our legs feeling pressed. These experiences may involve having sensations, but they are not themselves sensations or feelings as such. They are a special kind of touch experience that takes the body as object. It is not the feelings themselves that are the objects of such experiences, but rather the body.*³

In making *Blanks*, a loop of touch occurs: body-directed touch is experienced in the body-object when the clay is pressed onto the thigh; externally-directed touch is experienced in the body-subject when the hands feel the give of the clay, and the body returns to object as the hands and the thigh feel resistance and pressure at once. There is a grounding of the body, back to object, back to earth, and the foot phenomenon felt in the Hallen is transferred to touching ground, this time the ground brought to the foot. My standing in front of the Ryman works, feet firmly planted, brings a groundedness to the experience. Krauss discusses the baseness of the ground in 'The Crisis of the Easel Picture'⁴, in relation to our verticality as beings that stand up. The axis called for in the exchange between the viewer and a painting on a wall is verticality: "For example, a painting may acknowledge its frontedness, or its finitude, or its specific thereness – that is, its presentness; and your accepting it will accordingly mean acknowledging your frontedness, or directionality, or verticality toward its world, or any world."⁵ In front of the Ryman works, my blunt verticality is felt crudely through the soles of my feet as they spread and sink. Back in the studio, I have to be seated to make a blank, which will later be hung on a wall, from the top of the foot. The blanks must be made from the foot but by moulding as onto the thigh, not through treading. These are not footprints but blanks made from the body. The ground, and the groundedness (the memory of pushing into the floor of the Hallen through my feet), return to verticality, just as I, in the Hallen, returned to ground. However, we must not be fooled by the solid baseness of ground, "for all grounds, all foundations, are suspect"⁶: the pieces of ground that lift off my feet now stick to the wall, tilting the axis, implying that I lie parallel to the floor, as if back on the bench, asleep in the Hallen, in front of Ryman's *Bond*.⁷ Where is the ground now?

Marco Chiandetti⁸ works clay and other materials into "very simple gestures"⁹ and uses making as "a sounding board of how I am in the world and how I see the world."¹⁰ The body is very much the protagonist in the performance¹¹ that occurs while making and that exists within the artwork-body cooperative function of the finished pieces, which:

...hold the body of the artist and the physical labour of doing, its force and impressions, materially as well as temporally...there is presence and absence in the

*negotiation and representation of the body, each piece carrying a sense of the phantom limb or corporeal body that was directly involved in producing its final impression.*¹²

While I share Chiandetti's interest in "learning about oneself through the material", and the "traces of ourselves and the traces of our thinking that we leave behind"¹³, for me the making of blanks is part of the problem of the support, through or on which I intend to investigate touch. The blank is therefore the means to something further rather than an end in itself, unlike Chiandetti's "sculptures by the hand for the hand"¹⁴, for example. However, while this was the intention initially (make blanks from the body while working with a memory of the groundedness in the Hallen, to then have a ground-surface containing my body-index on which to carry out touch trials through paint), I now feel that perhaps enough is already said about touch within the blanks suspended from paintbrushes.

Chiandetti works touch hard into his hand pieces and sculptural performance pieces (*Hook*, for example). The body's work continues once the piece is made (*Unique Casts*, for example – three bronze tubes that are bent to balance and fit the thigh while seated), and this work is at once direct and delicate. In terms of locating my work in relation to other artists in the context of making *Blanks*, I would say that I would be somewhere in between Marco Chiandetti and Natasha Kidd¹⁵. My body's direct touch is continually involved in making of the clay supports and is important in order to give the supports meaning, a body-index. The body-index pulls *Blanks* towards the area within which Chiandetti works, where "clay incites bodily action and reveals the traces of physical engagement,"¹⁶ but the clay in *Blanks* has the supporting role on which painting must take place, rather than being the end in itself.

Kidd's work is at the other end of the touch spectrum. Kidd constructs systems machines that paint, and is exploring "the practice and history of the removal of the artist's expressionist touch through the use of automatic or mechanical modes of production."¹⁷ *The Painting Machines* (2000–2005), including *Microswitch*, consist of mechanical contraptions that dip canvases into vats of white paint, over and over, creating rhythmic folds in the paint as it builds in thin layers. While I have dipped the thigh blanks into a large tub of white silk emulsion house paint instead of putting the paint on with my hand or a tool such as a brush, the fact that I dipped them is important. The bare clay strip left at the top of each *Blank* that is defined by the edge of the paint, a tide mark of the dipping, is essential – the Achilles heel of each *Blank* is exposed and leaves an unpainted record of my touch. A 'poignant part' is left naked, and there is a tension between this upper lip of uncovered, previously touched clay held up by a brush and the lower painted portion. Kidd "struggles with the relevance of the artist's mark"¹⁸ but the love of paint is not absent:¹⁹ "I wanted to make visible...what I

was experiencing in the studio – the lusciousness of the paint, the smell, the movement. It is a complete indulgence in paint.”²⁰ While at the Slade School of Art, Kidd began by dipping her canvases repeatedly by hand into a container of white paint until the machines took over²¹, implying that Kidd is not just specialising in the laying bare of a mechanical painting process, concerned with authorship and mass production. The machines “don’t actually mass produce anything.”²² I believe Kidd’s removal of touch is more about allowing the paint to visibly function at its very best as a material, revealing the joy of its qualities at work, while negotiating the delicate play between distanced personal intervention and a letting go. I share this love of paint, but I follow a line of enquiry that involves my body in the investigation of touch while applying a painterly matter. The touch I am investigating is that of a painter in search of a suitable support (that contains my touch in the body-index) onto which the traces of my making can be left via paint.

¹ Fulkerson, M. ‘The Sense of Touch’ (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010), 45, and 61: “Externally-directed touch is focused on the world, directed at external objects and their properties. It is a form of external perception that gives us knowledge about the things around us, allows us to act and move with respect to a varied and changing environment, and is often coordinated with the other external senses. Body-directed touch is directed inward, at the present state of our own bodies. Through the latter form of touch we are alerted to critical changes in our body, to pleasurable and unpleasant stimuli on our skin, and to our current bodily thermal state...Body-directed touch represents the body as a special kind of object, unlike an ordinary external entity.”

² Ibid., 70.

³ Ibid., 75.

⁴ Krauss, R. E., ‘The Crisis of the Easel Picture,’ in *Jackson Pollock, New Approaches*, published in conjunction with the exhibition *Jackson Pollock*, November 1, 1998 – February 2, 1999 (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999).

⁵ Cavell, S., *The World Viewed*, (1971), 110, quoted by Krauss, R.E., ‘The Crisis of the Easel Picture’ in *Jackson Pollock, New Approaches* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 165 and 178.

⁶ On viewing texts haptically, probing the pictorial texture: “Such ‘touching’ with the eye did not lead to a secure tactile experience of being firmly planted on the ground, for all grounds, all foundations, were suspect, however they may be construed. We are, as Nietzsche knew, swimming in an endless sea, rather than standing on dry land. To ‘touch’ a trace, groping blindly in the dark, is no more the guarantee of certainty than to see its residues.” Jay, M., *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1994), 512.

⁷ See the transcription of a later recording in the Hallen at Annex E: “Nearing the end of day three. 26th May 2013, ten to three. I’m lying on the bench that faces the long wall, in front of Bond... so I’m now seeing it from a completely different...angle, as I’m parallel to the floor and the bench...All my perspectives change and shift all the time. I could be anywhere...I could be floating above the floor. The wall could be a floor...”

⁸ I was introduced to Marco Chiandetti’s work by Ben Street, who I met at the Brighton Phoenix symposium, *What is the future of painting?*, on 16 February 2013. See Key to appendices.

⁹ “You make something which is very simple – you change something which is very simple into something which is very extraordinary – it’s just a simple gesture – the work that I make is really just a very simple gesture.” Chiandetti, M. in *The Alchemy of Possibilities*, A Lincoln Fernandez Film, 2013, <http://www.marcochiandetti.com/>.

¹⁰ Chiandetti’s “making as sounding board” is an echo of Heidegger’s *Dasein* dealing with, or handling things, to make sense of the world into which he is thrown. The world is discovered through *Dasein*’s involvement and handling of the things within which he finds himself in the middle. This is discussed in the context of creative practice by Bolt, B. *Art Beyond Representation. The Performative Power of the Image* (London and New York: I. B. Taurus, 2010), 52–86.

¹¹ “...exploration of the earth – one of our earliest sensory projects...primordial tactile experience...primal engagement with clay...clay incites bodily action and reveals traces of physical engagement. Marco Chiandetti forms bone-like structures which bear the imprints of his body in particular positions; the grip of his hands, the space around his thigh – suggesting an oeuvre of performative self portraiture.” O’Neill, J., for the exhibition *Figure and Ground*, curated by Loughnan, M. and O’Neill, J., March 9–13, 2012, UTOPIAN SLUMPS, Melbourne, Australia.

¹² Press Release for the exhibition *MARCO CHIANDETTI & RUDOLF POLANSZKY*, Ancient and Modern, March 22 – April 28, 2012, <http://www.marcochiandetti.com/>.

¹³ Chiandetti, M. in *The Alchemy of Possibilities*, A Lincoln Fernandez Film, 2013, at <http://www.marcochiandetti.com/>.

¹⁴ See images of this body of work at <http://www.marcochiandetti.com/>.

¹⁵ I met Natasha Kidd at *Paint Club*, a visual symposium organised by University of the Arts London's Student Research Network, at Beaconsfield, on April 26, 2013. See Key to the appendices and Appendix 1.

¹⁶ O'Neill, J., for the exhibition *Figure and Ground*, curated by Loughnan, M. and O'Neill, J., March 9–13, 2012, UTOPIAN SLUMPS, Melbourne, Australia.

¹⁷ Kidd's working PhD title at the time of *Paint Club*, April 26, 2013.

¹⁸ Sethi, A., "White Matters," *The Guardian*, January 26, 2006, accessed January 10, 2014 as a pdf on the artist's website, <http://www.natashakidd.com/>.

¹⁹ "I love paint straight from a can, the smell, sound, what it can do, things beyond your control." Ibid.

²⁰ "Spirit in the Machine," *London Institute Magazine*, accessed January 10, 2014, as a pdf on the artist's website, <http://www.natashakidd.com/>. Other comments have been made about the joy of paint: "...Kidd's work is a homage to our lasting love affair with paint – our fascination with its very substance, and its dripping, messy, lipsmacking appeal." Williams, G., "Microswitch – Houldsworth Gallery," *Time Out*, April 2000, accessed January 10, 2014, as a pdf on the artist's website.

²¹ Gleadell, C., "The Power of Paint," *The Telegraph*, September 16, 2000, accessed January 10, 2014 as a pdf on the artist's website, <http://www.natashakidd.com/>.

²² Kidd: "While it alludes to mass production, these machines don't actually mass produce anything...the machines never make the same painting twice, even if the canvas is dipped in the vat for exactly the same number of days – it is dependent on the weather, dust in the atmosphere, the way I made the stretcher..." "Spirit in the Machine", *London Institute Magazine*, accessed January 10, 2014, as a pdf on the artist's website, <http://www.natashakidd.com/> .

For further consideration

There is potential for further research in terms of how haptic experiences of painting can feed the practice-based enquiry into touch. *Blanks* is a project that has only just begun, and I intend to continue the investigation through the making of supports in ways with different materials that both contain the body-index and provide a place where touch can be examined via paint and painting.

The Hallen findings offer a great deal of data which could be used to develop the idea of see-feeling during the viewing and making of work. For example, the objects that I imagined and sensed (possibly through synaesthesia) while experiencing the Ryman works, as seen in annexes G and H, could be replicated with made objects, enabling a material thinking through of very specific sense memories. I am interested in how this might enable a haptic translation of a response (to artworks that deal with touch) through the use of objects, and how painting while sensing the objects laid out could then provide a 'remove' and a means of see-feeling materially.¹

Having experimented with the method of making work in response to the data gathered while experiencing an installation of works, I would now take this enquiry into touch further by using other means of collecting findings, such as response to performative exploration of haptic perception. The awareness of the body moving around the space dominated the Hallen experience, and I intend to push this further by tracing, via paint, the movements of the body in the studio while making. Collaboration would be useful at this stage to challenge and stretch the enquiry.²

¹ Marinetti's 1924 manifesto, *Tactilism*, and his work, *Sudan-Paris*, involved the haptic translation of landscape through objects and texture laid out on a table. See Fisher, J., 'Tangible Acts, Touch Performances', in Banes, S. and Lepecki, A., eds. *The Senses in Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 166–178.

² I have made contact with Paterson and hope to engage in an ongoing email exchange of ideas relating to the haptic experience of the body mapping out space through materials. This would bring depth to the enquiry into touch through a cross-disciplinary discussion. Paterson's research covers many areas relating to haptic perception and technologies, but it is with his work on the interrelated senses of kinaesthesia, proprioception and the 'spatialities of the body' where we might find common ground. In Paterson, M., *The Senses of Touch. Haptics, Affects and Technologies*, the chapter "'How the World Touches Us': Haptic Aesthetics", discusses the haptic experience of art and the use of the body for mapping out space (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007), 79–102. For current research online: <http://www.comm.pitt.edu/person/mark-paterson-phd> and <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/scienceheritage/MarkPaterson.html>. Accessed January 30, 2014.

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Key to the annexes

Annex A – A list of the twenty nine Robert Ryman paintings in *Advancing the Experience*, Hallen für Neue Kunst, Schaffhausen, Switzerland, which I numbered in the order that I found them.

Annex B – Condensed notes from a journal commentary made during the three days' data gathering with the Robert Ryman paintings of *Advancing the Experience*, May 24-26, 2013.

Annex C – The words from the individual A5 pages that had been removed from a notebook when blank and placed on the floor in front of each painting for note-taking during close engagement.

Annex D - The transcript of subjective recording 13, the longest subjective recording of over fifty Dictaphone recordings made during the three days of data gathering within *Advancing the Experience*.

Annex E - The transcript of a subjective Dictaphone recording made near to the end of the three days.

Annex F – A subjective recording made during the afternoon on the third day.

Annex G - References to body awareness within subjective recording 13 (Annex D).¹

Annex H – Objects within subjective recording 13 (Annex D).

¹ It is important to note here that although I am interested in the word-object relationship, the content of annexes G and H is not intended concrete poetry. These annexes show part of the process of distilling the Hallen research findings and have been created by simply removing the text of subjective recording 13 apart from references to body awareness (annex G) and references to objects (annex H). Pignatari, D. and Tolman, J.M., 'Concrete Poetry: A Brief Structural-Historical Guideline.' *Poetics Today*, vol. 3 no. 3 (summer 1982): 189-195.

Annex A

A list of paintings by Robert Ryman in *Advancing the Experience*, Robert Ryman and Urs Raussmüller, Hallen für Neue Kunst, Schaffhausen, Switzerland

The Robert Ryman installation on the fourth floor of the Hallen für Neue Kunst consists of twenty nine paintings. The installation of un-numbered paintings is to be viewed as a whole from within, rather than in any particular sequence. Therefore the viewer can begin with any of the paintings and experience the body of work from any position. However, at the very start of the three days for the purpose of methodical data gathering (but also just because, as I now realise, I had the urge to mark out, or claim the space as my own in some way), I numbered the paintings by simply following them along the walls. This later proved useful, for example, when I needed to pick three paintings at random for especially close engagement (I asked friends to choose three numbers between 1 and 29 inclusive, and then took the three most popular). The paintings were numbered as follows:

1. *ROLL*, (1989), 63.7 x 63.7cm, oil paint and pencil on gatorboard with aluminium
2. *UNTITLED*, (1958), 139.5 x 139.5cm, oil paint on cotton
3. *FINDER*, (1976), 160.5cm x 160.5cm, oil paint, pencil and elvacite on Plexiglas
4. *EMBASSY # 1*, (1976), 160 x 160cm, oil paint and elvacite on Plexiglas with steel
5. *UNTITLED (BACKGROUND music)*, (1962), 175.9 x 176.2cm, oil paint on linen canvas
6. *ANCHOR*, (1980), 223.4 x 213.7cm, oil paint on linen with steel
7. *PROTOTYPE 10/11/15/16*, (1969), 50.9 x 50.9cm, polymer on fiberglass panel
8. *LUGANO*, (1968), 228.9 x 229.7cm, 12 sheets, polymer on paper
9. *BOND*, (1982), 81.6 x 76.4cm, enamelac on fiberglass
10. *POST*, (1981), 151.7 x 145.4cm, oil paint on aluminium
11. *ACCORD*, (1985), 148.4 x 50.8cm, oil on aluminium with steel
12. *UNTITLED*, (1962), 35.6 x 35.6cm, vinyl on aluminium
13. *ARROW*, (1976), 34.9 x 30.5cm, oil paint on Plexiglas with steel
14. *ANNEX*, (1988), 55.8 x 55.7cm, oil paint on gatorboard with steel
15. *UNTITLED*, (1960), 124.3 x 123.9cm, oil on linen
16. *VERSIONS XIV*, (1992), 34.4 x 33.1cm, oil and pencil on fiberglass with wax paper

17. *UNTITLED*, (1965), 28.6 x 27.3cm, vinyl paint on cotton canvas
18. *UNTITLED*, (1960), 149.2 x 149.2cm, oil paint on cotton canvas
19. *ESSEX*, (1968), 300 x 300cm overall, oil paint on linen canvas and acrylic paint
20. *UNTITLED*, (1973), 96 x 96cm, enamel on aluminium
21. *UNTITLED*, (2007), 27.9 x 27.9cm, epoxy on birch panel
22. *CONNECTION*, (1985), 93.9 x 93.8cm, oil paint on aluminium with steel
23. *CONCORD*, (1976), 260 x 244.2cm, oil on linen, metal fasteners
24. *DELTA I*, (1966), 266 x 266cm, oil paint on cotton canvas
25. *# 1003*, (1960/61), 42.8 x 41.7cm, oil paint on unstretched linen canvas
26. *CRITERION # II*, (1976), 66 x 61.2cm, oil paint on acrylvin with Plexiglas and steel
27. *UNTITLED*, (1959), 22.8 x 22.8cm, oil paint on paper
28. *UNTITLED*, (1958), 17.7 x 17.7cm, casein, pencil on paper
29. *COUNSEL*, (1982), 259.1 x 243.9cm, oil paint on linen canvas with steel

Annex B

Notes on a visit to *Advancing the Experience*, Robert Ryman and Urs Raussmüller, Hallen für Neue Kunst, Schaffhausen, Switzerland, 24-26 May 2013

Over the course of the three days I kept various records including a running commentary of notes in a journal. These notes documented the activities and thoughts that happened, and also the summaries and plans that were made. The following is a condensed version of these hand written journal notes.

Day 1

A need to map out – the human trait of discovery/conquest.

Numbered the paintings. One page placed in front of each. Pages torn from book. Cutting up the space with a ripping through the air. The floor is a skin or skins. Very smooth. Everything is smooth and soft. Even the air. Although everything is hard. Boots off.

Trying to stay objective and descriptive. This was difficult. The impression is always a feeling first. Detail later.

Sit in front of a painting, start with *Roll*, and my roll, and wait..

Why speak so softly? Barbara: "it's not a cathedral."

Everything feels soft. Even my socked feet on the hard ground, padding around.

Padding.

Cushions.

Use the drawings to make an object for each painting, then paint them. Or film them. Or perform with them.

thing: (Painting→thing→painting)

If you make a thing from the feeling of a painting, distilled in a drawing, while thinking about touch, can you then get that feeling from the painting?

Very hard to just describe.

The smaller paintings are easier to hold.

On day 1, the five that do the most are *Roll* (1989), *Finder* (1976), *Untitled* (1973 – enamel on aluminium), *Lugano* (1968), and *Bond* (1982)

Started drawings on the roll. Looking, thinking, feeling, describing, mapping and planning.

Planning systems for recordings to make on day 2:

1. Objective, estate agent, boots on

- the number is...
- the title is...
- the year was...
- the description says...
- what I see is...

2. Subjective, receptive, boots off

- the number is...
- the title is...
- the year was...
- the description says...
- what I see is...

Michael Rüsenberg, from a group tour, mentioned the play, *Art*. Yasmina Reza, refers to Robert Ryman.

A List for day 2:

1. Record descriptions of work
2. Make notes at the same time
3. Sketch from head on and from side
4. Draw without looking at the drawings – just look at the paintings – head up – detached – arm low down. On ground. Head and eyes up. Arm and hand down.
5. Find (must be randomly – starting to judge too much - must resist this need to find favourites) 5 to study intensively/for longer periods.
6. Make sounds for each one separately. What's the tongue doing?

p a g e

The blank sheet in front of each painting is more interesting without writing on it.

Towards the end of day 1:

- was meant to be objective – was it? A mixture. I probably adopted all strategies/approaches at once
- didn't feel like I slowed down much
- there are some which had an immediate effect (what was this effect? is it more than just liking?)
- a lot of flurry in a large space
- manic at times
- mainly stayed in one area
- talked to the touring group
- everyone very welcome but within a very tight structure
- a need to map out, label, document
- resistance to stopping and absorbing – probably due to a desire to produce drawings document better for memory of sensation – I remember more from a drawing
- also, time restraint – there actually aren't that many hours

The floor, the floor, the floor...

That floor. Cold through material. Padding. Rubbings. Drawing with cold floor behind.

Behind, underneath, underpainting. Next to more neutral than under. Against means supported. Side by side can mean relationship/collaboration. In contact with. Covering the floor. Over. Involved with. Coating. The paper coating the floor. But not stuck.

How much paint to paint the Hallen walls?

Two books borrowed from gallery.

Sent email requesting three numbers between 1 and 29 to choose paintings at random.

Day 2

Objective recordings. One hour to describe all the paintings. With boots on. Felt right – sharper – colder. Echoes for sense of size of space – distance, hollowness.

Got tired and tedious. Felt very sterile. Difficult not to talk poetically or more phenomenologically. Learnt more about the paintings by looking more closely. Rhythmical – “the number is..., the title is..., the year was...”

Thinking about RR saying just experience the paintings.

Information. Important for, or killer of, experience?

After much discussion, allowed to take pictures of pages on floor. Pleased the pale grey writing can't be seen. What I wrote doesn't matter.

Socks on floor. Floor is forming bond. Different segments of flesh tones, browns, pinks, blacks, greys, ocre. Smooth, hard, cold, but warm. Cracked but smooth and shiny unlike dried earth. Patchwork, scars, age. A skin. The body of the museum. What are the paintings, then?

What objects would you put in front of the paintings? Or traces of objects? Sounds?

lugano lugano lugano

Drawing roll used up. Now just look. Phenomenological recordings from now on.

Sitting in front of *Lugano*. It's got everything there. It straightens my head out.

Slow down and look and record the feeling.

Resistance to slowing down.

Day 3

Will a hangover help?

Feet.

feet

floor

fl fl flll fllll ffffflll

If you felt this floor without shoes you'd keep yours off also.

Korea. Shoes off. Use of space. Sometimes open (in the work), sometimes cramped.

Drawing packed up. Just notebooks, Dictaphone and pens.

Feet feeling free and cold and wiggly.

Imagining the socks as white and padded.

Matinée group carrying black chairs. Sitting in the space. Taking considered time.

What is the difference between mindfulness/meditation and this?

Thinking about lying on the bench. Wondering why I'm thinking about what I'll look like.

Lying on bench and looking at *Lugano*.

Not much feeling. No enlightenment. Just nothing. Not even peace, really. But definitely a sense of being where I wanted to be.

Slept on bench. No one. Nothing. Paintings not doing anything.

Flat light for whole of three days.

Very cold.

Made sound recordings.

What have I really felt?

Been more about being with them than really feeling anything.

Annex C

Pages

Blank, A5, ivory pages were torn from a notebook and placed on the floor in front of each painting. During close engagement with a painting, notes were written in pale grey ink on the corresponding page which was left on the floor for the duration of the first day. The floor, an interesting, pink and brown polished skin-like surface full of scars from the building's past as a textile factory, became a focus. There was something significant about the pale pages on the fascinating floor referring in sparse words to the paintings on the wall. The pages on the floor were the only things I was permitted to photograph during my visit. The numbers refer to the paintings as listed in Annex A.

<p>1</p> <p>Warm bird</p> <p>solid and beating inside</p> <p>light and feathery surrounding</p> <p>hands go round</p> <p>heart goes out</p>	<p>White becomes a smother</p> <p>rather than a layer.</p> <p>I go back to lines.</p> <p>Then a thick page or layer</p> <p>sliding over.</p>	<p>Moved, and it's billowing out.</p> <p>It won't come at you from head on.</p> <p>It gets you from the side.</p> <p>Secret entry.</p> <p>Come in from the side, into the painting, as it comes out at you.</p>
<p>2</p> <p>Out or up or down</p> <p>lines</p> <p>now I know it was read, red,</p> <p>does it matter?</p> <p>Yes. White is so much more,</p> <p>so much thicker, so much</p> <p>more smothering.</p>	<p>Then when I'm optic, it's light +</p> <p>liney again.</p> <p>Haptic – heavy.</p> <p>Optic – light.</p> <p>3</p> <p>Thin thin thin</p> <p>Thin + crisp.</p> <p>Then suddenly, <u>I've</u></p>	<p>4</p> <p>Why draw a solid square when it's anything but?</p> <p>Crispin</p> <p>Fall to the side.</p> <p>Stand to the side.</p>

Slide to the side.

Wide side.

Glide. A plane.

Then millions of lines.

You don't have to.

Drawings from the side.

Drawings head on.

5

Heavy brush to something light

+ busy.

Lumps left

Dance over dance over dance

clogs and clumps

Not worms.

Slow looks fast

Heavy looks light

Complex looks easy

Go inside.

Wade in

Pulls you in.

You don't slip off,

unlike Crispin.

Squirmmmmmmmmmmm

. Lips together.

Vibration

6

No icing, no cake.

No cake, no icing.

True?

Dead red.

Light, live white.

Look up. The non ridges.

Look down. The ridges.

Fleshy flour.

Flighty bird.

Fluttering to get out.

Window. Top left.

7

4 wings

Clipped

You can't

Draw traces.

So I won't.

Marked by a

gap. Skins where

things have been cut away or

removed.

You can't draw those.

Finger prints → I feel my own. Over + over

between index finger + thumb – remembering paint no longer there.

8

Feels appropriate.

Last thing I'm writing

inside RR space on

last day.

I feel all

straightened out.

9

Nostalgia for

office play.

...Remembered... Dad's

Tracing.

10

On bench 5 m away. Head on.	12	the side +
This expression, 'head on.'	Difficult.	seen the change from
Aware of all the cold points of touch –	Jarring.	mottled flat matt
fingers on hand, hand/skin to air.	Needs more time.	to a mass of
Feet on floor.	Clunky.	satiny finger prints.
Roll up + put under arm.	13	15
Pulled from top + bottom.	Tip toes, raised chin.	Putty.
Makes me sit tall.	Back of neck compressed.	Acidic Ryman image.
The slight off square exaggerates.	Compression –	
Blues + greys ebb + flow.	thin paint between	16
Can hear the rumbling sound of	pieces of foggy	Blue to grey
a rotating black board (that was	Plexiglas.	grey to blue
green) in Mr Vernon's geography	This tiny square	Precious line along top
glass (class!).	of paint inside	makes me tip toe,
	a sandwich becoming	after I thought about
	the picture, is where	the tiny nails as
	it's at.	tutting.
11	Makes me clench	
Mind is cleaned	my teeth.	
Then body can		17
move. I rock from		why do I
side to side watching	14	dislike you?
shape moving from side to side in front of me	Here's the 'ouch!	Irritation
inside the fog of the metal	Missing paint.	
body of the painting.	Actually feel moved	18
Got a hat on?	when I've moved to	Blunt smudges.

Pushing Plasticine into ground.		Dropped onto a taught, taut, clean, sheet. Not necessarily soft. Missing paint.
Chewing gum.	22	
Elastic.	Safe and sound	
Putty play.	warm and dry	
19		25
wooo		Churns me up.
hooooo!	SAFE + SOUND WARM + DRY	Churns. Takes me back. Nostalgia. Taller.
20	23	26
Here.	All this to make	Self. Looking up close,
Not here.	an infinite edge	See orange peel + self. Aware of own nose + pores. 'Mirrors of the ear'
Here.	possible.	Lick it. Take it off + Skim it across floor.
Not here.	The beginning + the	Self heed within.
Here.	end - where do I	Skim a slither of self across the floor.
Not here.	feel it?	I'm a willow the wisp.
On off –	In my ribs.	hhhhwuuuuuuuuuwiiiiissss sssssssspppp
on off –	24	
on off –	makes me widen	
on off –	inside.	
on off –	Pushes all the crap to the edge.	
Egg – beginning of something.	Curl up like small	
Shell – the end, remnant.	snail and fall into middle.	
21		
wet		

27

Glass + frame.
Reflections
of sky lights + walls +
other paintings.

These are bigger than
thought.

Want to take off wall +
put

on floor.

28

Up close so looking up.
Why the

need to be up so close?

Go right back.

Back is right up to
Lugano.

Feel is behind me.
Looming over.

Now the red small gap
and the black

large gap look almost
equally dark.

Sitting on floor. Cold
coming up through

bottom. Looking through
hairs in front of face.

Drawing doesn't make
me feel

as much. It's part of
information

gathering from the whole
place.

These smaller things
need to be

here for the effects of
others to feel

greater, or smaller.

29

Tiny lines become so
heightened –

so important. Suddenly
all I

can see are tiny hairs.

STUCK. I feel a hair
stuck in my tooth.

Worse – a pubic hair.

The dark squares at the
top pull me down –

my cold feet. Cold, flat,
feet.

My weight pulling into the
floor.

Very aware of gravity
here, - a big

force, and big forces –
space, light, things

we can't control so much
– then tiny things.

Makes me think of
Frémon's Paradoxes
book.

Feel self slowing down. I
feel very

short, very small. Like
my middle has

been removed. Just my
big, flat,

cold bottomed feet, and
some hands + wrists
holding

paper + pen, and some
eyelids, +

a fuzzy head. I am a
fuzzy head

with only hands + feet
and a soreness

in between. Not
empty, but sore.

Looking up takes the pain
away. Is that

physiological/spinal or the
painting soothes?

Hairs in soap.

Annex D

Subjective recording 13

The transcript of subjective recording 13, the longest and one of the most subjective (what is felt rather than just what is there) of over fifty Dictaphone recordings made during the three days of data gathering within *Advancing the Experience*, Hallen für Neue Kunst, Schaffhausen, Switzerland.

The number is 1, the title is *Roll*, the year was 1989, what I feel is:

...Height.... I'm very aware of the bottom left point of the painting because it's catching the light..., and it makes me more aware of pointy feelings, such as the edge of the paper, the coolness of the Dictaphone, the cord round my neck.... It's warm and small.... It makes me feel like I'm outside, on top of something, looking down.... A sense of being...above things, but also, wanting to hold it. The warmth makes it smaller and I want to hold that.

The number is 2, the title is *Untitled*, the year was 1958, right now what I feel is:

Prickly, and dirty. Felt a pinprick in the... middle part of my right thigh... and now I'm feeling aches in my legs, rocking backwards and forwards, onto my toes and heels. Makes me feel a bit uncomfortable, a bit grubby. Makes me want to clear it up, smooth it out, but, if I move to the... right, the warm orange of the wood underneath the canvas - it hasn't been stretched right up to the edge of the wood – makes it alright. A view from the side more haptically... I find it annoying because there aren't enough blank spaces that have that sheen. The sheen is very broken up by the rough matt strokes and the bobbly bits. It's like fluff on a jumper that you want to de-fuzz or.... Head on it's very matt. If I go back to head on, I like it more now. It feels like, um, something stony rather than grubby. So from the side, it's a bit like... dusty icing – so shiny icing that's become dusty – and so when I go to the front again... the mattness is uniform - there's no shiny bit, although there's lots of variation. And it's rugged. I like its rugged, weathered, stony look rather than its... grubbiness I felt having looked at *Roll* first. Makes me want to move on....

The number is 3, the title is *Finder*, the year is, was, 1976, what I feel is, or I am, right now, makes me want to:

Makes me want to move the bolts. But accept as well. Just accept. Just accept the way it is. It's very balanced... It's very cleansing. It pins you down. I'd like it to be bigger. But then you wouldn't have the proportion that you have now. When you look at it, right in the centre, keep your gaze in the centre, the black dots come and go, move around the edge,

like bugs,... or holes,... or something from my childhood, some small thing – maybe a bead...or a tadpole....Something beady. They look like they might have flown out to the side because of some kind of centrifugal force.... The dots are good – it makes me think about drawing, with a fine liner....

The number is 4, the title is *Embassy #1*, the year was 1976:

Aaaaannnd breathe... I instantly want to come up close, I want to move to the side, I want to see...across it - into it, into it, it's infinite, across it, I can attach some kind of understanding or meaning to it, and now it's annoying; why can't I just accept it from the front? But then to only accept it from the front would be to accept a certain way, or to restrict a certain way of looking at painting. Whereas the movement of the body from side to side makes me aware of myself. I brush the cold wall – it's very chalky.... The noise of my shoes, the floor - I'm aware of the whole thing. Again, the wall. Back to the wall, touching the wall... Then I might want to go back to the previous painting...which is *Finder*....I then go side on to that and I look at the paint. Thin paint. The layers and the pencil marks and the gaps and the spaces left. He hasn't painted certain squares around the edge. He's painted them once rather than twice. So he's left a tiny bit of the undercoat, to be seen next to the black bolts, and the pencil mark on the Plexiglas. It's only down one side – I hadn't noticed that before – it's only down the left edge. Descriptive, objective recording adds up with these paintings. You don't get them all at once. So ideally, there would be a combination, a layering, of objective, subjective, objective, subjective...

The number's 5, the title is *Untitled (Background Music)*, the year was 1962:

I've been looking at this one quite a lot....I think (*Background Music*) is a very literal title for it. Takes you backwards and forwards constantly....Up close...I want it to be bigger, so that I can't see the edges – or...but maybe I need to see the edges of the painting, to be aware that it's a painting, to accept that it's just a painting. It's just about the play of the paint – nothing else. Why try and get something else out of it? I do take joy from...mapping what he's done, thinking about him in front of it....

The number is 6, the title is *Anchor*, the year was 1980:

These strokes are more closed, so the lines come out more....A sense of wanting to read the lines.... Sometimes the lines come out more; sometimes the non-lines come out more. Side on, it's mainly the non-lines....Becomes...a readymade surface in itself when you stand side on, like...beaten metal. I just think about being... pelted in the face with hail.

The number is 7, the title is *Prototype 10/11/15/16*, the year was 1969:

Right now I just want to lie in front of it and have a sleep...I can feel the process of my own things, I can feel being in the studio...I've been looking at surfaces like these for years...It's

the skin around the edge that I like – the peeling, oniony, flaky...flaky bits. ...And the fibres, ...underneath the thin, shimmery paint... Playing with my fingers a lot. It's like I need to be making stuff, I don't know... Itching to do something. Itching. Itchy. Now I feel itchy... Itchy insects. Wings. Fluttering - something pinned down or clipped, just stuck up there. They look... obviously very carefully placed, as if they're just... thrown up there, by static...

The number is 8, the title is *Lugano*, the year was 1968:

I just feel so straightened out when I stand in front of this one. And when I .. when I move to the side it's just so cooling and calming. It's like jumping into a cold pool. The paint is so beautiful, it's so... ethereal. It's like he's pinned down a wave or a cloud. And I love the lines made by the raggedy edges of the paper. It's like a silk pillowcase, or something. ...Come back to that...

The number's 9, the title is *Bond*, the year was 1982:

This is just the studio, again. Or w-work, a workplace. It makes me think of a workplace. Something about objects my dad used to have in his office. Things I've touched... It's like an old rubber or something that was translucent, like the top part of this... painting... It's like a drum, almost - I want to see if I could... punch a hole through it, although it's solid – it's backed onto a piece of wood, so it's solid, but you don't know that until you stand to the side of it, and then when you do that, the surface of it looks even more stretched, and taut and fragile like a skin of a drum – like an ear drum. It looks translucent, but it's obviously a solid thing. Lugano from here changes again.

The number is 10, the title is *Post*, the year was 1981:

...With the subjective descriptions, I'm moving around a lot more, going to the sides a lot more, standing up closer, holding my book in the right hand, gesticulating to myself like an idiot with the left, the space is actually empty at the moment so I'm talking to myself and quite conscious of this...conscious of myself. These paintings make you aware of yourself. This one's really....kind of alpine. Things beginning with 'al' kind of work for it - alfombra, aljibe.... There's lots going on in that. I need a lot longer. I'm moving around it a lot... It's almost like you're really busy on the sides, and then head on you're calm and quiet and still.

The number's 11, the title is *Accord*, the year was 1985:

It feels like a knife....Slipping... and slotting....Makes me think of slotting... A cheese wire. It feels good. It feels clean. I'd like to slide through that gap and feel the cold of the steel and the cold dry of the wall on the different sides.

The number's 12, the title is *Untitled*, the year was 1962:

...I don't know why, and I shouldn't say it, but I dislike it. It's one that probably needs the most time and work..... I can't even talk about it.

The number is 13, the title is *Arrow*, the year's 1976:

It makes me want to clench my teeth and bite. It's the sandwiching of the Plexiglas and the bolt, so, it's different texture touching another one - makes me feel different things in my teeth. Bolt to Plexiglas, Plexiglas to wall, Plexiglas-painting to wall, paint on top of that, thinly, and then Plexiglas brackety thing on top, so you can see the paint through it – these are the beautiful bits – you can see these squares where you've got half – like a little triangle of paint, where the Plexiglas bracket has overlapped the paint, and then nothing. I want to be in those bits.... It's very wet. It's very wet. Tttttttt.

The number is 14, the title is *Annex*, the year was 1988:

It's the edges where you... from far away, you see this kind of movement round the edge, ...travelling, and then up close you see that it's just from... different layers. So Ryman has exposed more about the paint through leaving it... very ragged. So you can see the layers - it makes me think of that peely skin again... The dark, dried blood underneath makes me feel sore....

I'm going down to the other end of the long wall...passing ones we've already discussed. *Lugano* – I feel like I'm going through a vacuum when I walk past that... There's two other people... People really take their time here, when they look.

The number is 15, the title is *Untitled*, the year was 1960:

There are two that are called *Untitled* 1960 and this is the one with the yellow Ryman painted a third of the way along the bottom from the left...I can't talk about that one. Too much colour for me. It's very irritating. I can't talk about *Versions*, either – that's number 16. Nor 17, which is *Untitled*, 1965 – I just can't talk about those.

16 / 17 / 18 - Can't talk about those.

Now 19 is *Essex*. So, the number is 19, the title is *Essex*, the year was 1968:

Well this is like a big hallelujah... How else can I say that? The yellow frame that he's painted on the wall, isn't a frame, it's a painting – it becomes a frame because there's a painting that's stuck with staples in the middle of it, which is canvas, with these big brushstrokes... So when you move backwards and forwards, looking at the brushstrokes, the yellow's on the periphery. It's almost not yellow anymore. It's like the colour you have when you shut your eyelids... I don't know – I need a lot longer on that.

The number is 20, the title is *Untitled*, 1973 was the year:

The bright part of the...the bright part of the steel on the left – I feel the need to pick up my Dictaphone now and hold it to my mouth so that people don't think I'm crazy talking to myself, because you can't immediately see the Dictaphone, because it's hanging round my neck so I don't need to use my hands. The paint looks quite warm and pinky, fleshy, very smooth. It makes me think of eggs. And then when I think of eggs I think of cracking them....These people with children are walking through quite quickly. This one makes me think of my tongue. And my teeth. My tongue over my teeth....My tongue round my teeth and also my...upper lip - the inside of my upper lip. Now which part of my tongue is that? That's really hard to work out. So it's the underneath of my tongue on the underside of my lip...and it's the... upper part of my tongue... on the front part of my teeth...Makes me think of fluids. Makes me feel fluid...and light...and empty... and calm.

The number is 21, the title is *Untitled*, the year was 2007:

That's just a small object – I don't really feel much about that. It's like a...it's just a mark on the wall.

The number is 22, the title is *Connection*, the year was 1985:

...Let's ask these people.... "Hello...hi. What do you think of the paintings? How do you feel about the paintings?" "The arrangement is very..it's absolutely perfect here..." "Do you think they, um, do you think make you feel something, the individual paintings?" Laughs. "I think you need a long time." "Sorry?" "To experience them." "Ah ok". Laughs. "Sorry". "No, it's good – thank you!"....

The number is 23, the title is *Concord*, the year was 1976:

I feel...one big stroke all over. I do feel the brush strokes. Big, long, ...strips.... I want to lie on it – I want to make the painting... flat on the floor and lie on it. It makes me aware of myself again, it makes me think of myself curled up in the middle of it really small like a foetus position like a tiny snail. In the middle of it. It makes me think of things... bending under weight.... [breathing]...

The number is 24, the title is *Delta 1*, the year was 1966:

This is about...this isn't about enlightenment – this is one for me that's been put in not to experience but to just see... paint as it is, because of the edge. That's an edge. It's just one big edge. Ddddggge.

The number's 25, the title is #1003, the year was 1960/61:

Can't look at that....

The number's 26, the title is *Criterion # II*, the year was 1976:

I approach this slowly from the side. I see other paintings in its reflection. I know that my reflection is going to appear – there I am....I can feel my pulse. I stopped breathing...There are these different... I can see pulses in my eyelids. There are these different shapes. My hair, shoulders. If I look at my eyes I just see an animal, some kind of owl... I can't see myself clearly – my eyes keep moving around. Kind of...like a cat... It's weird. Now if I focus on the surface of the painting I see myself still, the silhouette...like a - ohhh it's really weird. I see my reflection, the surface, reflection, surface. And it makes me feel the surface of the book – my fingers have been moving around the front of the book, 'cause that's got a similar kind of faintly orangey peely leathery ...texture, so this is like a leathery... texture underneath...the glass.... There's balance here – it looks like the glass is balancing on these Plexiglas brackets, like it's squigged onto the wall. Squish. So there's tension, which you don't notice, and then when you look at the surface again, you feel this tension again, because you've noticed that the Plexiglas squares with the bolts... have... pushed it into place, holding it there by gravity and force. ...I want to look back at it. Looking at myself - vanity. My reflection is this pale grey. I can see *Counsel* reflected, too, and parts of the building – it becomes a painting of the building and a painting of a painting - a painting of the whole thing. Maybe this one sums up the whole place – you see yourself, the paintings, the composition, tension...calm, simple but complex... My book touches the wall and I feel... a continuation of it.

Untitled, 1959, which is number 27, and *Untitled*, 1958, I can't talk about.

Number 29, *Counsel*. The year was 1982:

...Urge to stand right back as far as I can go against the wall on the opposite side. So my bum and back – I'm aware of the gaps between my body and the wall, even though my bum and my upper back are... touching it, so I've got this need to flatten it out as if I'm in yoga and it feel great... I feel like I shouldn't be leaning against the wall, because it's part of the thing. What if I leave a mark? It's more about where I'm standing rather than looking at the painting, and what I'm feeling against the wall.... Moving forward... coming to the... side of the painting... moving back to the front, lines develop on it. Long, horizontal bars, and vertical bars, too. The painting becomes really....deep, when you go to the side even though it's not that thickly painted on, it's just that there's so many different shades because of the different directions. It's like roughed up suede in... millions of different areas... And from the front you don't see this – you just see the lines, the ridges left, by the pushing of the paint. I'm thinking about pushing now.... Things being pushed to the side. Paint being pushed to the edge of the brushstroke....I've got this biting sensation again when I come to the side because I can see all the different... different areas. I've almost got an urge to

finish this and start writing. There's always this looking ahead business – 'what will I do next, what will I do next, what will I do next?' Now I'm just going to walk around the paintings.... [Yawn].

Annex E

“Nearing the end of day three...”

The transcript of a subjective Dictaphone recording made near to the end of the three days.

Nearing the end of day three. 26th May 2013, ten to three. I'm lying on the bench, that faces the long wall, in front of *Bond...* and *Arrow* and *Accord*. And... looking up, not straight ahead, looking a bit up, to *Lugano*, so I'm now seeing it from a completely different... angle, as I'm parallel to the floor and the bench... Thinking about why I should be aware of what I look like. Why should I? Trying to get comfortable on the bench. It's impossible. My hands are really cold... They look much more like tiles. All my perspectives change and shift all the time. I could be anywhere. It doesn't matter where the sky is... Now my body is facing the wall, I could be floating above the floor. The wall could be a floor. Or the paintings could be holes in a ceiling. Or the underside of skylights. And the paint you see is the movement in the sky. The different things in the sky. I could just go to sleep... It's quite hard work looking up to *Lugano*. It looks like it could just flutter down at any minute. Like it's stuck on the ceiling like a pancake. Like it could just peel off and *splat* down on my face. Or just gently glide down like a piece of paper. Cover me up. I do want to wrap myself in it... I'm not feeling many emotions, really, I'm just aware of... detail,... what things look like. I think the experience is still very optic... A child just walked by and looked at me a few times quite curiously. Didn't seem to be that judgemental, just looking at what I was doing. The ceiling looks very pink. I wonder if that's reflection from the floor. I realise now that it's painted that colour. I think I need to get that colour... I feel very in the here and now... The paintings keep you here... I feel more comfortable now as I suspected I would. The body flattens out... Closing eyes...

Annex F

A subjective recording made during the afternoon on the third day.

So it's day three, and it's twenty to four, I've been lying on the bench, I've had a bit of a sleep. I haven't got up yet. I'm still looking at *Lugano* from a funny angle. Why is it a funny angle? Just 'cause it's not from standing. Like we're meant to. It's very cold. *Lugano* looks *really* high up, although it's not high up at all. It's *along* from me. I've lost all sense of...I've lost all sense of...um...where the ceiling is – there's no ceiling. There's just a...a wall that's going on and on in front of me, and two walls either side, 'cause the front of my body is parallel with the - with the wall in front where the paintings are, 'cause I'm lying on my side. I'm very aware of the side of my body that's in contact with the bench 'cause it's cold and it's sore. Corresponds with the naked part of the painting, which is now along the, along *my* left hand side of the painting, like, along *my* left hand side of my body. It's where the paper's been left naked. I do feel like that's part of my body. And then the part above it, the part of my body that isn't against the bench, is like the rest of the painted painting, like airy, aired, cold, exposed. That looks like the empty bit. The bit that's painted looks like the *non-painted*. That naked 'L'. With a little foot. [Yawn] Looks like the painted bit... The floor's sort of merging with the left side of my body that's being *pushed* into the bench. So the paintings in front of me feel like the right side of my body which is light and free and cold and aired. There's a lot of soreness in my left hip and thigh, and left shoulder and arm. It's something I can live with. I feel that my left knee and thigh have gone a bit numb, and my nose feels a bit cold even though I'm not touching it. My body feels really aware of the temperature and hardness. All the time I see this *Lugano*. I just realised that there's more edge that's exposed than you think. Ahh it's really cold... Maybe I need to move. I've started that kind of internal shivering you get. A sort of shuddering inside, in my diaphragm area, solar plexus area. I'm wanting to draw my knees up, still staying on this side, looking at the paintings. This wall that has become... my reflection. This... long, white – it's never-ending because I can't see past – I can't see the ending of it. When I look up as far as my eyeballs will go, I can just see, a sort of, a small yellow blur of *Essex* right up there, but I know that the paintings go on beyond *Essex*. And then if I look down as far as I can, I see my hand, which is tucked under my chin, so now I'm aware of the bones in my jaw pressing against the back of my left hand and my thumb of my right hand that are squidged together under my face. I can feel the jaw bone move as I'm talking. And now I'm thinking about the boniness of the shiny, satin sheen of the matt, quite dull sheets of *Lugano* which look like bones, now... Maybe it's better when the light is flat; ...things stay the same more, but *you* move more, *you* change more... I'm not sure when to move... So *Lugano* looks like a kite. Looks like a diamond shape. What is a diamond shape? It's just a rhomboid. Rhomboid? [Shivers]... Elongating - the corner furthest away from me, which if you were standing with your feet on the ground it would be the bottom left corner, but to me it's the... top left corner, and the bottom right corner to me, but if I were standing on my feet it would be the top right corner, these are pushing away from one another and elongating the thing. [Shivers]... God it's like being in a tent when you're *really* uncomfortable camping. The bench doesn't feel

that hard anymore. Even though I haven't touched my nose I know it's freezing... The Dictaphone feels *really* cold. I might have to get up in a minute and move around. In fact I'm going to do it now... I'm turning round. Ahh bloody hell. [Shivers] Uuurrghh God it's freezing. [Shudders]... Now I'm standing up, shaking myself out a bit. I'll put my trainers on. I feel a bit dizzy. The left side of my head feels... oop.. just nearly fell over. I'm thinking of Lisa's after-drop videos she showed me. [Shivers]... Now I'm standing in front of the *Prototypes 10/11/15/16*. Because I feel cold, *they* feel cold. I'm just thinking about ice and the... thin crispness, and the bleeding skin of the paint that's seeped underneath where tape was. Tape's been removed so you can see the fibres of the neutral fibre paper, makes me think of looking at ice close up – you can see that the ice has grown. Ahh need to walk around. I'm more relaxed when I'm here during public time. I'm not being invigilated. I've just got the place to myself. It's amazing. I'm in the middle of some abandoned place. Some ghosts or some bits of Greenland [yawns]... I need to pick – I need to pick the third painting,... and spend the last hour on that. So, I emailed people – friends – um... the day before yesterday and, and asked them to choose three numbers between 1 and 29 inclusive. I chose the most popular, or the most frequently chosen, and they were 7 and 8. And having numbered the paintings on Friday, 7 was *Prototype 10/11/15/16*, and 8 was *Lugano*. So I'm now going to put...the other bits of paper which I've made packages of...so they were four numbers which were - had four strokes next to each, so they were equal [yawns and shivers]. Shaking. And I have a plastic bag from the bakery, and I'm going to – I've lost one number in the street so I've only got the three now. Putting them in the bag, and choosing one... and it's number 4. Putting the bag away – maybe I'll use that. Number 4, strangely, in the same area of the room, is, 1,2,3..., *Embassy #1*, 1976. It's interesting that the three that I've hoped to focus on are three that have had... more of a lasting impact than many of the others - not just in an interested way - so I'm interested in all of them, apart from the ones I said I won't talk about – they're smaller and more colourful and more bitty - these last three are [yawns] ...I feel really dazed. These last three – I can see all three of them at once in this space. I'm standing against wall so I can see *Embassy #1* obliquely. *Really* does feel like a sheet of ice. And then across to my left is the *Prototype*... They're in quite a lot of light. It's the same dull cold winter overcast light we've had all weekend. And then *Lugano* down the other wall right opposite me. A wall down the diagonal. So *Prototype*'s at 11 o' clock, *Lugano* at 12 o' clock, and *Embassy #1* at zero, really. Ground zero. I'm going to go and stand next to *Prototype* and look at the others, then. If I'm right up to *Prototype* I can no longer see *Lugano*. I can see the really – they look like, really thin sheets of some kind of precious metal. And then *Embassy #1* looks like a – just a plain white piece of paper. Not even anything marking it. Held on by these black...black squares. They look like they could be magnets...

Annex G

Felt a pinprick in the... middle part of my right thigh... and now I'm feeling aches in my legs, rocking backwards and forwards, onto my toes and heels. Makes me feel a bit uncomfortable, a bit grubby.

Aaaaannnd breathe...

Whereas the movement of the body from side to side makes me aware of *myself*. I brush the cold wall – it's very chalky.... The noise of my shoes, the floor - I'm aware of the whole thing. Again, the wall. Back to the wall, touching the wall...

Takes you backwards and forwards constantly....

mapping what he's done, thinking about him in front of it....

Right now I just want to lie in front of it and have a sleep...I can feel the process of my own things, I can feel being in the studio...

Playing with my fingers a lot. It's like I need to be making stuff, I don't know... Itching to do something. Itching. Itchy. Now I feel itchy...

Things I've

touched...

It's like a drum, almost - I want to see if I could... punch a hole through it, although it's solid

I'm moving around a lot more, going to the sides a lot more, standing up closer, holding my book in the right hand, gesticulating to myself like an idiot with the left, the space is actually empty at the moment so I'm talking to myself and quite conscious of this...conscious of *myself*. These paintings make you aware of *yourself*.

moving around it a *lot*...

I'm

I'd like to slide through that gap and feel the cold of the steel and the cold dry of the wall on the different sides.

It makes me want to clench my teeth and bite.

it's different texture touching another one - makes me feel different things in my teeth.

I want to be in *those* bits.... It's very wet. It's very *wet*. Ttttttttt.

underneath makes me feel sore....

The dark, dried blood

the colour you have when you shut your eyelids...

It's like

This one makes me think of my tongue. And my teeth. My tongue over my teeth....My tongue round my teeth and also my...upper lip - the inside of my upper lip. Now which part of my tongue is that? That's really hard to work out. So it's the underneath of my tongue on the underside of my lip...and it's the... upper part of my tongue... on the front part of my teeth...Makes me think of *fluids*. Makes me feel fluid...and light...and empty... and calm.

I feel...one big *stroke* all over. I do *feel* the brush strokes. *Big, long, ...strips....* I want to lie on it – I want to make the painting... flat on the floor and lie on it. It makes me aware of myself *again*, it makes me think of myself curled up in the middle of it *really* small like a foetus position like a tiny snail. In the middle of it.

I approach this slowly from the side. I see other paintings in its reflection. I *know* that my reflection is going to appear – there I *am....*I can feel my pulse. I stopped breathing...There are these different... I can see pulses in my eyelids. There are these different shapes. My hair, shoulders. If I look at my eyes I just see an animal, some kind of owl... I can't see myself clearly – my eyes keep moving around. Kind of...like a cat... It's weird. Now if I focus on the surface of the painting I see myself still, the silhouette...like a - ohhh it's really weird. I see my reflection, the surface, reflection, surface. And it makes me feel the surface of the book – my fingers have been moving around the front of the book, 'cause that's got a similar kind of faintly orangey peely leathery ...texture, so this is like a leathery... texture underneath...the glass....

I want to look back at it. Looking at myself - *vanity*.
My reflection is this pale grey.

wall and I feel... a continuation of it.

you see yourself,
My book touches the

...Urge to stand *right* back as far as I can go against the wall on the opposite side. So my bum and back – I'm aware of the gaps between my body and the wall, even though my bum and my upper back are... touching it, so I've got this need to flatten it out as if I'm in yoga and it feel *great*... I feel like I shouldn't be leaning against the wall, because it's part of the thing. What if I leave a mark? It's more about where I'm standing rather than looking at the painting, and what I'm feeling against the wall....

I've got this biting sensation again when I come to the side because I can see all the different... different areas.

Annex H

fluff on a jumper

icing

icing

bugs

bead

tadpole

hail.

beaten metal

insects. Wings

wave cloud.
silk pillowcase

rubber
drum

drum.

skin of a drum

ear

alfombra, aljibe

wire

knife

cheese

eggs.

eggs

snail.

cat owl

suede

Key to the appendices

1. *Paint Club* report.

A visual symposium organised by University of the Arts London's Research Student Network for those exploring what it means to research painting, at Beaconsfield, London, on 26th April 2013, which I attended and contributed to, funded by the Research Networking Fund, University of Huddersfield. At *Paint Club* I met Beth Harland (one of the main speakers who helped curate the one-day exhibition created on arrival), whose PhD thesis I had already read in relation to haptic visuality (referred to in *Touch Screen*, chapter one), and Natasha Kidd (whose work I refer to in *Blanks*, chapter four). The piece which I took to Paint Club, *Touch Screen Sliver*, is displayed in the studio (see studio map).

2. *Touch* symposium record.

A symposium organised and led by Puy Soden, for those involved in practice and research relating to touch, at The Parsonage Trust, Didsbury, Manchester, on 28th June 2013, as part of the Didsbury Arts Festival, funded by the Research Public Engagement Fund, University of Huddersfield.

3. *What is the future of painting?* symposium at the Phoenix Brighton.

I also attended *What is the future of painting?*, a symposium organised and hosted by the Phoenix Brighton, on 16th February 2013, in order to gain experience, context and contacts before setting up my own symposium on touch the following June. I have decided not to include the record here. Although the experience was valuable, especially in terms of meeting and discussing with contemporary painters from a different region (and therefore enabling further grasp of my own currency), the debate that I recorded on the day is not relevant enough to this research project to be included here. It is worth mentioning, however, that I met Ben Street at the symposium (one of the main speakers), who introduced me to Marco Chiandetti's work, which I have referenced in relation to *Blanks* in chapter four. The symposium was held in conjunction with the exhibition, *32 Paintings* (9th February – 24th March 2013), which was curated by Patrick O'Donnell and Nicholas Pace, and showed works by Louise Bristow, Matthew Burrows, Shaun Caton, Chris Gilvan Cartwright, Keith Esdale, Stig Evans, June Frickleton, Andrew Gifford, David Harkins, Tom Hammick, Emily Jolley, Christopher Kettle, Sam Lock, Anne Magill, Enzo Marra, Karin Mori, Tamsin Morse, Patrick O'Donnell, Nicholas Pace, Alan Rankle, Tania Rutland, Sarah Shaw, Sonia Stanyard, Christopher Stevens, Christine Tongue, Joshua Uvieghara, Julian Vilarubbi, Richard Whadcock, Alice Wisden, and Dawei Xiang.¹

4. *Looking for the skip, love?* Article published in the latest *radar*² edition.

The article I wrote for *radar* in October 2013 presents some thoughts on the engagement of publics with contemporary art based on three experiences: 1. association with the *Hoard*

collective in Birstall, Leeds, UK; 2. research at the Hallen für Neue Kunst, Schaffhausen, Switzerland; and 3. a symposium on *Touch* in Didsbury, Manchester, UK. As a 'compare and contrast' exercise I explore and localise the ongoing problem of the inside–outside dichotomy inherent in public versus private debates in the contemporary art sphere. I include excerpts here:

In February 2012, along with nine other contemporary artists, I joined Hoard – a collaboration organised by the Departure Foundation, a charity which promotes contemporary art in the UK by 'providing unique contexts for exhibitions and events in a wide range of interesting places.'³ ...My only encounter with a non-Hoarder during the time I was involved occurred as I searched for Unit 20 of Norquest Industrial Estate (Birstall, Leeds) in a car visibly crammed full of the work's residue. A member of the public in overalls approached my car while I tried to work out the industrial estate plan signpost and helpfully asked, "looking for the skip, love?" A load of old rubbish is exactly what he saw, and that is exactly what it was, until arguably, through collaborative experiment, it would become part of a contemporary art process. Why were we, the artists, there? For the space. Who wanted to look? Really, only us... It all boils down to: 'Why should I go? What's in it for me? What can I see? What is truly interesting? Do I believe in this?' Which is the most accessible and/or engaging: a Hoard visit, a Hallen talk or a Touch symposium? None of the above. Despite the impact and sense of revelation offered by the Hoard exhibit of private studio innards across an enormous bare concrete floor, the work was hard to get to in every sense. A Hallen talk could only reach a limited number of guests 'in the know', while the installations offered the privilege of incredibly close engagement with the work to anyone able to get to the gallery within certain times at a weekend. Although the Touch symposium benefitted those artists that attended and spoke, much more publicity would be required for any future contemporary art event set up within the structure of a music-/crafts-based arts festival such as the DAF if public engagement were to be a serious objective. Each experience offered extremely limited opportunities in terms of publics' involvement (mainly due to a combination of restricting location and lack of targeted outreach), but in each case the chance for the individual's close engagement with the work was considerable. While publics are now less intentionally distanced from the work in terms of their actual interaction with it (touch is invited in many exhibition spaces, and the use of data art installation relies on a participant, for example), the timing, advertisement and location of the draw-in must similarly work to close gaps. While discussing how artists can draw publics in, we must always return to the individual, for it is the individual's meaningful experience with the work that is real and lasting. The question is, do we need to help the individual to do this, and, if so, when and how? What's really in it for them? For me, the skip comment has been one of the most useful I've ever received.

¹ <http://www.phoenixarts.org/site-archive/365-32-paintings-symposium.html>. Accessed January 30, 2014.

² http://www.hud.ac.uk/tali/teaching%20and%20learning%20publications/tl_matters/archive_11/archive_11_feb/. Accessed January 30, 2014.

³ <http://www.departurefoundation.com/About.html>. Accessed July 17, 2013.

Appendix 1

PAINT CLUB

Painting as Research, Friday, 26 April 2013

“University of the Arts London’s research network Paint Club aims to publicly explore and debate what it means to research Painting within the context of contemporary art practice. In November 2012 we initiated a research network specifically aimed at PhD/MPhil researchers and their supervisors engaged in Painting research throughout the UK. The Paint Club Research Student Network Visual Symposium at Beaconsfield, Vauxhall, London, on Friday, April 26th is a one-day event, focusing on Painting as research, and is a valuable opportunity for PhD researchers from around the country to share their practice, network, and be involved in discussions about their practice in relation to research. Invited research students and supervisors will hang their artwork in the upper gallery. We will also hear from an exciting line-up of artists who have gained PhDs and emerged as some of the more significant painters practising in the UK. The speakers include Andrea Medjesi-Jones, Beth Harland, Sadie Murdoch and Ian Kiaer, with David Ryan chairing the event.”¹

Contributors: Alaena Turner, Alison Goodyear, Andrew Graves, Barbara Pfenningstorff, David Hancock, Donal Moloney, Emmet Kierans, Fiona Curran, Heather Boxall, Henrietta Simson, Jason Kass, Jim Threapleton, Kate Hawkins, Leticia Vázquez Carpio, Maria Christoforatos, Michelle Corvette, Mike Newton, Nadine Feinson, Natasha Kidd, Nina Pancheva-Kirkova, Rima Chahrour, Sarah Jones, Sarah Kate Wilson, Selma Parlour, Sharon Phelps, Simon J. Harris, Tom Helyar-Cardwell, Derek Harris, Emma Talbot, Jeff Dennis, Puy Soden.

Paint Club proved to be a valuable, worthwhile experience. The main outcomes were:

- i. Positioning my work, both literally (with Beth Harland’s help during the installation) and contextually, alongside other painting researchers, such as Natasha Kidd (referenced in *Blanks*, chapter four);
- ii. Gaining symposium experience prior to setting up my own on touch the following June;
- iii. Consolidating the understanding gathered through previous reading of Beth Harland’s research by engaging with her presentation which touched on matters relating to the haptic that are relevant to this research project.

i. Positioning the work

Not only was it interesting to meet and discuss with those researching a wide variety of issues, but it was also reassuring to find that no other researcher present is investigating the same specific area.

In summary, the contributors' working thesis titles related to aesthetics (e.g. "interpreting aesthetic experiences of the painter–painting relationship", "aesthetics of immanence", "seriality and repetition in the pictorial arts, and the aesthetics of memory"), process (e.g. "an analysis of the use of slow painting processes", "'durational painting' practices and their boundaries", "Agnes Martin: painting as making and its relation to contemporary practice", "moving slowly or not at all"), visual representation (e.g. "landscape forms and fragmented perspectives from the Renaissance to the present", "a language for visual representation of the melancholic", "still life and death metal", "very abstract painting and serious cycling", "cosplay: gaming in the real", "the blot: the material conditions of appearance in painting", "syntax and illusion"), colour/surface (e.g. "surface: how does the material presence of paint impact upon the reception and perception of colour in painting?", "what colour is the everyday?", "the corroded surface: portrait of the sublime"), culturally specific ("continuity and discontinuity between Socialist realism and contemporary fine art practices in post-communist Bulgaria", "the 'Other' doll as a site for cultural contestation in contemporary Lebanon"), and other investigations ("conscious objects, physical thoughts: contemporary practice as a means of exploring subjective "topography of the present", "sites of action: an investigation of performative painting and spectatorship", "review of the idea of painting a contemporary perspective: blurring boundaries", "how is the contemporary discourse on displacement being constructed in visual art and contemporary theoretical practice", "Deleuze and painting: re-thinking the formal"). The only artist-researcher whose work has proven to be relevant (but eight months later, when I began making *Blanks* in response to data gathered at the Hallen) is Natasha Kidd ("machines that make art: an exploration of the practice and history of the removal of the artist's "expressionist" touch through the use of automatic or mechanical modes of production"). I refer to Kidd's work in *Blanks*, chapter four.

On arrival, we were divided into groups of four or five and allocated a section of the large Beaconsfield hall where we were to install our work together. Beth Harland and I decided that the piece I brought (*Touch Screen Sliver*, a spokesperson for *Touch Screen* – see studio map) worked best 'offering itself up' from the space in between the steps.





ii. Symposium experience

Once the work had been installed we set up the symposium area within the exhibition and heard presentations from the four speakers. To keep this document relevant to the current research project, I will exclude the record of the talks and discussion (apart from that relating to Beth Harland's work with haptic visuality, which I include below). It was very useful to hear from painting-related practitioners who have completed practice-led PhDs, both in terms of their own experiences, methods and ideas in the context of their work, and their advice for those new to the process. The structure of the symposium worked very well: we got to know each other's work by installing it together (with very careful, considered curating), and the presentations and discussion that followed felt suitably contextualised within the new, one-day exhibition.



iii. Beth Harland², haptic

Beth Harland's writing had formed part of my early research at the start of this project. It was very useful to consolidate this early reading and listen to Harland's presentation³, as well as to see some of her work that was included in the one-day exhibition.

Harland referred to Riegl's categories of form that differentiated variations of mind and object (the haptic is not just about touch but also involves vision, and is very close to it) and Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus – Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (differentiating haptic, smooth space from optic, striated space) – common starting points for those defining haptic experience⁴. Harland's search for 'haptic time' in painting involves the use of film stills, and the index in terms of the relationship between painting and photography was mentioned. *Zone* is a series of large paintings-landscapes that deal with displacement, montage and appropriation. Through her research with Visual Intelligences, Harland documented every stage of the process of making a painting for an animation, which compressed the process, developing a strange sense of time. Harland seeks a definition of haptic temporality in painting.

*The process of copying/translation from digital print-out to painting is a form of mapping, bridging the retinal and the tactile. Due to the fragmentation of the original image, I'm perpetually losing my place and finding it again, and this experience transfers to the viewer, caught in the movement between clarity and indistinction – in flux.*⁵

This relates to the disjointed continuity of *Touch Screen*. I wished for a fluid flow of paint application (lotion smeared across slippery surface) but the experience was difficult and stuttering. There is similar 'flux' caught in the gaps between the layers of touch (wall, film, photographic paper, screen of scales, paint).

*The work tends to operate in the domain of 'haptic visuality' or close range vision: the boundaries are blurred and flawed, images partially absorbed and fleetingly described. The haptic is a form of looking that tends to move rather than focus, and one that alludes to senses rather than the visual; an embodied form of seeing.*⁶

Harland talks about how her work operates in terms of painting images haptically. I am searching for something that articulates touch without a painted image. Harland's haptic making towards a haptic reading of a painting depends on painting from images onto the optic space, which then allows the collision with the other, the haptic space/time.

*The physicality of the surfaces in the paintings is important, all are made in oil paint but numerous different approaches to making the surface and different consistencies/mediums are adopted to evoke sensory experience. The play of difference and fragment, yet coherence, becomes a delicate balance.*⁷

This is all held within the painting of an image on a shallow surface of a canvas. The surfaces I need to use for investigating touch have to go a lot further back (there has to be a remove: either the surface is that of photographic paper, that both contains the index and provides distance from it; or the surface is the thing containing the index itself, such as the clay *Blanks*).



¹ Introductory paragraph to a document provided on the day that included the biographies of the speakers. Videos of the speakers' presentation can be found here: http://paintclub.org.uk/events/beaconsfield_symposium.html. Accessed July 16, 2013.

² Beth Harland is a London-based artist, Reader in Fine Art and Head of Research Degrees at Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton. She studied painting at the Ruskin School of Art, Oxford and Royal College of Art, London and completed a practice-based PhD at University of Southampton in 2007 entitled: *A Fragment of Time in the Pure State: mapping painting's temporality through Proust, Deleuze and the digital image*. Harland has exhibited and curated widely, most recently: *Behind The Eyes; making pictures*, Gallery North, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (2013), and *The Seven Billionth Citizen*, Townhouse Gallery, Cairo (2012). She is principal investigator of *Modes of Address in Pictorial Art*, a research project in collaboration with the Centre for Visual Cognition, University of Southampton, with a first paper published in *Leonardo*, 2013. Biography provided in Paint Club symposium handouts, April 26, 2013.

³ Harland's *Paint Club* presentation, April 26, 2013, is available for viewing here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK51qKUxcPo>

⁴ I discuss the haptic in greater depth in *Touch Screen*, chapter one.

⁵ www.visualintelligences.com/flash/bh-interactive/beth-harland-interactive.html
Accessed March 20, 2013.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Appendix 2

TOUCH Symposium

28 June 2013, 10:00–13:00

The Parsonage, Didsbury, Manchester

PARTICIPANTS

Puy Soden – MRes Contemporary Art, School of Art, Design and Architecture, University of Huddersfield, u0864420@hud.ac.uk, www.puysoden.com

Carole Kirk – PhD Cultural Industries, School of Performance and Cultural Industries, University of Leeds, c.kirk@leeds.ac.uk, www.carolekirk.com

Holly Johnson – MA Performance, York St. John's University, johnsonholly89@gmail.com

Gabriela Wolany – PGR, Arts University Bournemouth, gabi_wolany@hotmail.com

Cecile Elstein – sculptor/printmaker, cecile@cecileelstein.com, www.cecileelstein.com

CONTEXT

Puy Soden is an art researcher based at the University of Huddersfield, currently making work through a practice-led enquiry into TOUCH. Soden made a call for papers at the end of May 2013 in order to locate and connect with fellow researchers also concerned with TOUCH in contemporary art-making. Those who answered the call with the view to present were Carole Kirk, University of Leeds, and Holly Johnson, York St. John's University.

The spirit of the event was that of open dialogue and debate. As well as enabling discussion amongst the artists, there was potential for public engagement through being part of the Didsbury Arts Festival. Artists had the opportunity to expose elements of the art-making process – the often unexplained factors that drive the research – to enable an enriching understanding of contemporary art and their work. What goes on in the studio/work site and how do we make meaningful work? What impact does talking through the process with others have on the work?

The following questions formed a context to the conversation¹:

'Public engagement' and 'impact' are current buzzwords in cultural and academic spheres, but what do they really mean in relation to contemporary art?

How do we define 'engagement' and 'impact' in these fields and who is 'the public' to which we are referring?

Should we, perhaps, be speaking of 'publics', and can 'engagement' be more easily understood as different levels of 'encounter' or 'interpretation'?

What might be the future of contemporary art in education, research and practice with/without effective public engagement strategies?

How might public engagement issues differ in a contemporary art context compared with other fields?

(Why) is it important that publics are able to engage with contemporary art practice?

What are the challenges and the barriers to public engagement?²

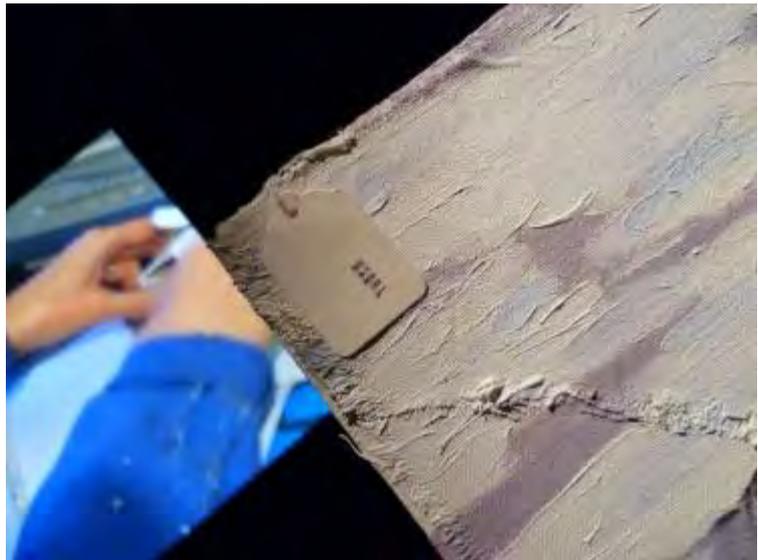
How do we TOUCH our audience, our viewers?

How do they TOUCH us back?

Is it the work that does all the TOUCHING? Is the matter all that matters?

CAROLE KIRK

Carole Kirk is a visual artist and PhD Scholar in the School of Performance and Cultural Industries at the University of Leeds. Kirk is currently undertaking practice-led research looking at making as a process of thinking that involves labouring with tools and materials through gesture and handling. Her painting practice combines images of family snapshots with climate change-affected landscapes, asking whether the ways in which we see ourselves as agents inform our relationships with the 'world'.



ABSTRACT

Please do touch: Inviting a haptic engagement with painting

My practice-led research investigates the tactile processes of *making* paintings in my studio as a kind of *thinking*, described by Bolt¹ as 'material thinking'. In the tactile engagement with

¹ BOLT, B. 2010. The Magic is in Handling In: E. BARRETT and B. BOLT, eds. *Practice as research: approaches to creative arts*. London: I.B.Tauris, pp. 27–34.

materials in my studio, I make sense out of physical 'sense'. But if the 'thinking' is in the *making*, how can I share this 'felt' knowledge with an audience? In part, I have attempted to investigate this by inviting viewers to *touch* my paintings. Many found this invitation uncomfortable. I am curious about this unwillingness to touch, and what it says about ocular-centric codes of viewing. Consumers of paintings have been educated not to touch – but what could be gained if these restrictions were removed? What additional meanings can be found in a work through physical touch? Could audiences be encouraged to overcome engrained resistance to touching paintings? And what can we learn – both from the resistance to touch, and from overcoming that resistance?

PAPER [in note form, from Soden's transcription of a recording]

Early stages of haptic engagement with painting – making by hand as a process of thinking. A process of sense-making. Labouring with materials. Gesture and handling. Responding constantly to tactile, gestural and emotional feedback from the image that's emerging. Manipulating and arranging materials – making more than just a painting; making sense. Rhythmic gestures. Exploring the emerging object as a landscape. Tim Ingold – we find our way through paintings, we inhabit them. I inhabit and explore the landscape even as I'm making it. Aware of my human dwelling in the world. Been explained by Paul Crowther as extended cognition – the made artefact becomes an outside reflection of ourselves – reflecting back to us. This refers to the Cartesian inside-out of mind – a reflection of self. Instead, the conception of cognition is ecological – involving movement and environment – not just mind. It's not just hidden to be brought out, it's a knowledge that's performed and improvised – in space and through time – and the artefact is just a trace of that process. 'The Absent Body' – motility – mental imagery that arises primarily through sensations of body movement and position – perception and movement as two separate things.

Video shown: <http://dancingwithpaint.wordpress.com/embodied-cognition/exploring-surface/>
Hands exploring the space of the canvas – textures and contours – gauging where things might sit – hands walking around the canvas. Perception as movement. Action happening on the surface of the painting rather than as an expression in a reality. Image-making has been important to humans since their beginning, yet universities still struggle to accept image-making as research, according to Graham Sullivan.

We've lost touch, in the digital age, with making things. Now making with hands and tools is lost in favour of the sole use of the fingertip. Labour that doesn't involve materials. What's lost? Tim Ingold, anthropologist: "It is a hand precisely because it is not tied to any particular way of working, but delivers an engagement that is both thoughtful and reflexive." Ingold demonstrates through making string by hand. The tension of the twisting holds the string together. Gestural process of using the hands. String retains that gesture. Ingold uses this for an exercise with students. The rhythmic concentration of movement – retains the memory of the gesture. Telling by hands. Hands telling. Materials and perception entwine – haptic making takes form. Handling takes on a different character in a digital society: instead of the gestural, the role of the hand is limited to the pushing of a button. A general shift away from movement (e.g. we just push a level to operate a forklift truck) – we're no longer grappling directly with the materials of the world. We no longer grasp the world.³

What does making have to do with thinking? John Roberts, viewing art as a process of labour, identifies the profound connection between the manipulative capacity of the hand and the development of human language and cognition. Using tools and making things develops human cognition, rather than the other way round. Are there implications for our human development in removing tool use?

“Not having to ‘think with one’s fingers’ is equivalent to lacking a part of one’s normally, phylogenetically human mind. Thus the problem of regression of the hand already exists today at the individual if not the species level.” (Leroi-Gourhan 1993, p.255)

As I become immersed in making representational painting, I become absorbed by the emerging image, and all that time my body is moving to form that image, even as I am dwelling in the image. My use of tools, brushes and paint, makes marks on the material and creates a feedback loop from the rhythmic gesture to my imagination. Seemingly incoherent threads of thought become woven; sensory activity then creates sense. In this weaving of materials and imagination, I’m developing empathy with matter. I’m learning to cooperate with material. I am learning that I am not always in control of material. The artefact is formed out of the process of wrestling with ideas, gestures, materials, tools. This is described by the painter Barbara Bolt as material thinking – a term borrowed from Paul Carter.

Video with audio shown. Torn fragments <http://dancingwithpaint.wordpress.com/embodied-cognition/torn-fabric/> – urge to add texture – material thinking – frayed edges – fabric says so much – torn fabric of society – bed sheets and clothing – weaving, embroidering stories.

Bolt, in *Art Beyond Representation* (2004), describes an aiming to develop the ‘logic of practice’ – a lot of the time we focus on our art works, or our theory, rather than on our practice. This has left a gap in our understanding of the work of art as a process rather than just an artefact. Theoretical framework drawn from works by two writers – Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘Logic of Practice’, and Michel de Certeau’s ‘Practice of Everyday Life’ – focusing on an operational logic of practice rather than a product. A logic of art practice involves body, materials and felt responses to the handling of materials. Bolt argues that it’s a type of thought that doesn’t fit with rationality – an alternative logic – and proposes that material handling can provide that alternative logic to rationality. Suggesting that creative practice involves a dynamic, material exchange between objects, bodies and images. This process leads to a kind of mutual reflection, where reality somehow gets into images. The images then produce real effects in the world. The book explores whether the visual image can move beyond just representing something, towards performativity. To bring into being.

Bolt (2000) explored the performative notion of *methexis*. Paul Carter used it – a non-representational principle, a concurrent actual production – like a pattern danced on the ground (shadows of leaves falling onto the ground), or in aboriginal sand painting (it’s not what they leave behind; it’s the actual making of the images in the sand that has the power). Methexis links the individual to the collective. Rather than meaning being revealed or clarified, it’s through concurrent actual production that social meanings are produced. Images don’t just signify things. Imaging produces reality. Performance produces signification, and signification in turn – the painting – has real effects in the world. If meaning is in the process of making, is it the painting as a noun that has real effects in the

world, that does something, or is it painting as a verb, or is it both? Exploring this through studio practice.

When working in the studio, I am keeping a journal and making videos so I can watch myself painting. I pay attention to how I feel while I'm making the work. I make audio recordings – listening back to my own voice – recording how I feel while watching the process of myself making the painting – I can feel meaning emerging. I am now asking myself, how can I share that feeling with the viewer? I have devised two ways to do this: by showing edited videos – to try and capture those moments when I feel something's happening, and secondly, by inviting viewers to touch my work.

Installation – *The Gesture of Thinking* <http://dancingwithpaint.wordpress.com/events/the-gesture-of-thinking/> Explored processes of embodied cognition through painting. Aimed to understand creative practice as an activity performed by a body moving through its environment, through gesture, materiality and the use of tools. A visual knowledge emerges – painting is a laborious process as thinking. Visitors were invited to touch. The only thing I asked was that they don't take the lids off the paint. I attached price labels to the work that read "touch". By taking a painting off a wall, it's perceived differently. Through touch you feel its materiality – feel the painting. The material fragmentation and vulnerability can be felt. Redefined value. Normally, work is protected behind barriers to conserve its archival worth. Videos were installed with the paintings to inform one another – durational and performative process. Feedback postcards from visitors gave a range of responses, such as: "you could give more texture to explore and surprise"; "I was immersed in texture"; "by taping up the lids on the paint, you put a barrier around the whole thing, and I couldn't take seriously your invitation to touch"; "I struggled to see the connection between content and process, but thought that touch could be the focus of both"; "I can't touch for some reason – simply not right to do so"; "didn't want to touch the floor displays – too composed." (Far from it!) Barriers. I don't feel like I should. Why? Habits and codes. What would happen if I drew attention to these codes? Facilitate the breakage of these views? What further meaning might they make from touch? Participant rather than viewer. Meaning – walk through rather than gazing at. Does touch make the viewer aware of their presence in the moment?

Future work – learning from immersive performance. Josephine Machon – immersive theatre – giving embodied attention to the ways in which one experiences the work – aware of one's presence and participation in the moment rather than simply in attendance, in servitude to the work. Heidegger – value of fine art – reveal, coming to presence of truth, happening, becoming. Do the viewer and participant enter into the presence of the work by being made aware of their own presence? Can touch, or the conscious realisation of the barrier to touch, make them more aware of their presence with an art work?

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DISCUSSION

PS: I can identify with a lot – the immersion in the process – material control v my control and the play between the two. Immersion in a material's play and the embodiment – paint, me, the relationship between the two and where I sit with the work within that relationship. This exposing of the process of artists – how do we make work and why? Involving viewers in the work by making them aware of their own bodies. They become the work. Looking at painting as a performance. Viewers become participants. How important is the image-making? The representation? Is this more than a continuing thread? Do you need an image?

CK – I started to paint only when I started to work with images. I am a representational painter. Materials are very important.

PS – There are many layers, then, and the image-making drives the material use.

CK – It's a very intuitive way of working. There is the urge to work with particular types of materials. Texts underneath. I am just rummaging through things.

PS – It's a haptic thing. Optic versus haptic.

CE – Why is it 'versus'?

PS – They go hand in hand, but it's sometimes said to be difficult to view something haptically and optically at the same time.

CE – Why?

PS – Laura Marks has used haptic perception to analyse embodied spectatorship. An example Marks uses is that of driving a car: looking at the windscreen's surface is haptic, while looking through the windscreen at the road beyond is optic. It is difficult to do both at the same time while driving. It is not necessarily one versus the other, just two different ways of experiencing. Haptic perception can be felt with all the senses. Being involved in a surface through haptic perception makes us more aware of our own surface, our skin, and therefore our body.⁴

CE – I think you have to use the whole, in everything. I don't think you separate it. You use all those senses together. I'm a sculptor printmaker. I have made a sculpture for a National Trust garden out of rope. The idea was to bring people in. The other sculptures were cordoned off. I used the rope to make my sculpture invite people in. There's a DVD of the whole process.

PS – What did you find?

CE – They came into the work, they lay in the grass, they played with the ropes. When we took it down we found little plaits. My original plan was to get people to look in different directions – outward, inward, from within my structure.⁵

PS – That engagement with the material – that is haptic – experiencing being inside it. Using your body.

CE – It engages you, doesn't separate you. They were engulfed in it in every way. Intellectual is important, experience is important, and you respond as a whole.

HJ – How can people who can't see interact with the work?

CK – This is something I'm interested in. How would it be if that's all you can do?

GW – It's interesting to feel the painting [that CK brought] with my eyes closed. There's a sharp structure – sharp edges – perhaps a landscape. I can feel where the primer's made the jagged edges of the fabric quite sharp.

PS – Touch is a more reliable informant during your making?

GW – Yes. When touching something, you build up a relationship with the thing. Vision is more about power.

HJ – There's a work by Victoria Gray⁶ – she's winding a cord around hooks on the wall without seeing. Touch creating an image.

CK – What kind of feelings emerge from different materials? Meaning emerges from making. Touch is something that has become more important since I've invited people to touch the work. Now I'm going on from there – where does that take me?

PS – Deleuze and Guattari – the smooth and the striated⁷. Your use of the snowscape etc. Horizons disappear. Experience is haptic.

GW – Simone de Beauvoir – Second Sex – language of female artists.

PS – *Thinking Through the Skin*.⁸

HOLLY JOHNSON

[Gloves handed out as HJ had requested – one glove per person]

Holly Johnson is an artist and performer whose artistic practice is concerned with the body and the images that can be created when the gendered body is employed within performance, employing interdisciplinary approaches to stage and gallery work.

In an attempt to create work that is both beautiful and disturbing, Holly is continuing to allow her fascination with death and the imagery concerned with it to filter into her artwork.

A recent Graduate of Art Event Performance at Leeds Metropolitan University, Holly is continuing her studies in MA Performance at York St John's University.

ABSTRACT

'The Palm of Your Hand' is an ongoing practice-as-research project focussed on and using the hands as a starting point and an integral element within this one-to-one performance.

My artistic practice is centred around the body, particularly my own and its interaction with the immediate surroundings and how these surroundings can confine and/or restrict the body in some way. This often results in my body being changed or altered in some manner within the work in an attempt to better understand meanings of confinement and restriction when applied to the human form.

One of the main aims of 'The Palm of Your Hand' is to reveal in some manner what it means to create work about the body, which a viewer can understand through immediate interaction with their own flesh rather than an understanding of what it might mean from watching another body experience these actions.

Adrian Howells considers one-to-one performance as a way of engaging with an 'authentic and nourishing experience of exchange' (2009:34). Through small gesture and touch 'The Palm of Your Hand' seeks to find a way of allowing a 'nourishing experience of exchange' between performer and audience to happen in a structured and non-intimidating manner.

Our hands are one element of the body where we have the ability to be explicit, gentle, discreet and open. This practice-as-research performance project aims to address and expand upon these ideas, asking, amongst other questions, 'what does it mean to hold hands with a stranger?'

PAPER [bold indicated PowerPoint slide change as HJ presented via Skype]

I am here to talk to you about my current ongoing practice-as-research project, 'The Palm of Your Hand'. But before that I would like some of you to put one glove on either your right or left hand and sit with it like that throughout the presentation. It will become apparent why I want you to do this later on in the paper. You don't need to worry, these gloves are nitrile so they are perfectly safe if you have a latex allergy – they just smell a bit.

I want to give you a small insight into what I normally do when showing and making performance work before telling you about 'The Palm of Your Hand'.

I create performance work that is usually durational in nature and is concerned with the body. My body in particular, as it is the only one I have to work with. One thing might happen, or have impact on my body over an extended period of time.

In this example shown the work is called 'Laced' and I take an hour to lace piercings in my back with 50 metres of black ribbon and then unlace them again. This can be difficult and take its toll on the body. The rings in my back get pulled and become inflamed and sore, and they may even bleed a little. My arms become tired from blindly trying to find the rings to thread the ribbon through, and from being in unnatural positions for the hour of the performance. I may begin to feel agitated as I grow tired of the repetitive nature of the task, and experience frustration at the difficulty of threading 50 metres of ribbon in and through 6 small rings that I can't see. I have to struggle to find them to complete the task.

Within these durational actions, I am interested in outside effects taking place on my body and changing the shape of it in some way. **These may be short-term changes**, such as welts, marks or bruises from pressure from the ribbon acting as a tourniquet, or more lasting **changes like the scars I have from being pierced repeatedly** in the same place. In this respect, viewers may only experience empathy or have an inkling as to what it might feel like for their body to go through these actions. 'The Palm of Your Hand', then, in some respects is my response to a desire to make work that audience members can experience on a direct and immediate level – not just what it might feel like.

The driving impetus to make this work was, as you might have guessed, my hands. I, of course, see my own hands every day, and as I have got older have become more aware that I have inherited my mother's hands and fingers. My younger sister also shares our mother's hands too. As for my mum, she feels that her hands are the same as her mother's hands, my grandmother's. My grandmother died when I was a baby, so it is strange to think that her hands, in some respects, live within my mother, my sister and me.

Gail Weiss asserts in *Live Art and Performance* (2004), **'To describe embodiment as intercorporeality is to emphasise that the experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is always already mediated'**. In some respects our experience is never truly our own; it is always shared. Arguably, the direct experiences I have through my own hands don't belong to me alone. They both belong to my sister and mother, as our instruments of touch, the hands, are shared. Similarly, the touch experiences of my grandmother are still echoed in our bodies: no longer a direct action, but the qualities of her touch perhaps still exist within us.

The second reason was that I wanted to create a one-to-one performance work. Arguably there are two trains of thought regarding one-to-one work, the first being **'camp intimate'**, in **which** thinking revolves around the idea that one-to-one performance allows intimacy to occur between both participants, and the latter, 'camp uncomfortable'. Dominic Johnson argues that, although we might want to read encounters of one-to-one performance as an intimate occurrence, the actual performance experience could be 'partly boring, partly threatening, possibly embarrassing or uncomfortable'; **and those difficulties might 'resolve themselves into an experience of beauty or wonder, however slight'** (2009: 39). The romanticised view of the one-to-one performance being a space for intimacy was one that I struggled with. How can we truly have a beautiful and intimate experience with someone with whom we share no history and therefore have no relationship of any kind?

Merleau-Ponty discusses ideas of 'the lived body' as a means of our connection with the world; however, this may or may not be on an immediate and intimate level. He suggests that the body in which we reside cannot be separated from our experience of the world; by engaging with the world we are certain of our own existence. We need to exist in order to engage with the world and therefore we must exist.

Those of you wearing gloves, I would like you to consider the gloves for a moment. At this point your hands may be feeling warm, slightly sweaty, perhaps itchy, due to their constant contact with your body in the short time you have been wearing them. Have they enriched or dulled your senses? Arguably, with 'the lived body' in mind, it could **be said that they have confirmed your certainty of your own existence as you may have been highly aware of their sensation on your skin, enriching your experience of the world and your lived body as a whole.**

My use of these gloves in 'The Palm of Your Hand' was a response to the idea of the lived body. It is socially accepted that surgical gloves represent cleanliness – think of healthcare professionals wearing them. I wanted them to create a barrier between the body of the audience member and the immediate surroundings, in much the same way as surgical gloves are used to create a sterile barrier between two bodies. They change sensations experienced through the gloves from that of an ungloved hand, leading to questions of whether we are actually experiencing these touch experiences. I don't actually think this may be the case; much the opposite. Rather than dulling the sense of being touched through the gloves, the gloves reiterate that the touch is happening, even though the feeling of the touch is no longer directly skin to skin, between performer and audience member.

I didn't initially have a true idea of what one-to-one work might mean for me, particularly when making it myself. I had become hung up on the ideas of what I believed it might mean – for me it was inevitable that audience members would be uncomfortable, but they would perhaps expect some intimate action to take place within the work.

I wasn't interested in making a performance work in which the idea was for audience members to feel uncomfortable, due to the potential for intimate performance between them and myself to take place. Nor did I want them to not experience some sort of exchange happening within the work between audience and performer. I was interested in making work that wasn't uncomfortable, but neither did it try to be over-familiar, therefore doing the inverse and resulting in the audience member experiencing discomfort. For me it was imperative to find a middle ground within the work that allowed for the audience to feel welcomed and 'in' the performance work, retaining the tangible possibility of exchange between performer and audience member.

One of my principle concerns within 'The Palm of Your Hand' as I began to develop the work was 'what does it mean to hold hands with a stranger?' and 'how does circumstance change this experience?' When speaking with a friend who works with children's theatre groups, she told me of the children's ease at not only wanting to hold hands with her within the sessions but also not seeing it as a problem that she may have only just met them. They were just as willing to hold her hand as other group leaders whom they knew and had a prior working relationship with.

Circumstance does play a major role in the acceptability of hand-holding with those we don't know. We think nothing of a nurse holding the hand of a patient – offering support, guidance and comfort in their hour of need. We may not feel the same if someone comes up to us and holds our hand as we are walking along the street. To be offered a hand to hold, which we subsequently accept, is different from our hands being held without our permission.

I have had to consider location within the development of the work. In a public place, it is less likely that audience would positively engage with the work. Being overlooked whilst interacting in a fairly intimate manner with another person they don't know changes the work from a sharing and exchange between two people to a performance to be viewed by others that has two participants. In this instance, I made the decision to keep the work within a theatre space. As audience members, we understand the politics and nature of going into a

theatre space to view work. We enter the space, sit in a designated space and watch the work, generally presented in front of us.

Of course, the politics and nature of a one-to-one performance work is slightly shifted from what we expect from entering a theatre space. By placing the work in a space that is 'othered' from the everyday, it allows the audience some level of preparation to experience something out of the ordinary. This may be supported by their knowledge of watching theatre but not necessarily having taken part in a one-to-one work. The audience member entering the one-to-one space may feel an expectation of 'other' that may happen in the work: by being in the theatre space, they may be more willing to accept what I ask of them as part of the work.

By having both the audience member's hands and mine as the focal point of the work it is quite striking how willingly people will disclose intimate and highly personal details about their lives that directly relate to their hands. Within the performance at this stage of its development, I invite audience members to put on a glove, like those of you wearing them in the audience, and ask them to offer me their palm. I then ask the audience member to tell me about the gloved hand, an action reminiscent of a palm-reader but reversing the roles as the audience member is often telling me about their past, not the palm reader divulging secrets of the future. I think it is the very nature of the specificity of the work that allows the audience member to feel safe within the work and therefore able to talk freely. Bear in mind that I am only asking people to tell me about their hands, and as a result of this question I have been told about accidents resulting in severe scarring, surgeries to correct bone structure and memories of loved ones who have died.

Peggy Phelan writes in *Unmarked* (1996), '**what one sees is who one is**'. We cannot pretend to be something we are not. Our scars enrich our personalities just as much as the other elements of the self. Each separate factor tells a story, that we cannot escape from or hide. When I touch the hands of an audience member, I am aware of slight pits or raised bumps in the surface of the skin, calluses and cuts. There might be slight but significant differences in the colouration of the skin. These are hands that come with a history and 'The Palm of Your Hand' is an opportunity for you as the audience member to share something of your history that you might not necessarily share in any other guise. The form of the one-to-one performance allows space for the audience to feel that they are able to share.

As 'The Palm of Your Hand' is a practice-as-research project, the work is ongoing and is constantly developing. At this juncture I don't feel that I have reached a place within the work that I can draw defined and finite conclusions. I feel the work has created a space within my body of performance work for me to share the lived experience of another individual. Perhaps again referencing ideas of intercorporeality, all sensations are shared and are not particular to the individual. My body, then, is not just for me; it is shared with you also.

DISCUSSION

PS – How did you feel wearing your gloves?

CE – I forgot I had it on.

CK – I was becoming very conscious of my hand being isolated from the rest of the room, being in its own environment within the glove.

PS – I'm keeping mine on. Again, something we all have in common: the work's work. Involving people in the work's work – the interesting meanings and where we progress

reside in the happenings. We pare down within that area of the work becoming its own thing – touch is a concise and precise area – this glove makes me think about this focus – I have a tendency to play – so the glove is a reminder to stay grounded and precise. It’s important to remember the body and its role in the making – while looking at these paintings in Switzerland, all I could think about was my feet – the whole three-day experience was dominated by my feet [and teeth] – I have to work with that because that was the happening. My feet felt gloved.

CK – Did you invite the audience to look at each other’s palms? The history of touches – the calluses – the history of repeated touch over time. A callus from a repeated use of a tool. A history of repeated touches.

HJ – I have that. I’m left-handed. I hold the pen with a very compressed middle finger. I thought my bone would wear through. Repeated touch might cause the end of my finger to fall off...

CE – Reminds me of ‘Digging’, by Seamus Heaney.

HJ – “Between my finger and my thumb the squat pen rests...”

PS – You’ve got a really good memory...

‘Digging’

Seamus Heaney

(From Death of a Naturalist, 1966)

Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pen rests: snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound

When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:

My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds

Bends low, comes up twenty years away

Stooping in rhythm through potato drills

Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft

Against the inside knee was levered firmly.

He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep

To scatter new potatoes that we picked

Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God the old man could handle a spade.

Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day

Than any other man on Toner’s bog.

Once I carried him milk in a bottle

Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up

To drink it, then fell to right away

Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods

Over his shoulder, going down and down

For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap

Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge

Through living roots awaken in my head.

But I’ve no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pen rests.

I’ll dig with it.

[HJ left the discussion at this point.]

PUY SODEN

Puy Soden is working on a Masters by Research at the University of Huddersfield, and will start a PhD, following the same practice-led enquiry into TOUCH, at the beginning of 2014.



ABSTRACT

Touch, to me, right now, is something that happens, moves and marks between two or many objects, from and into/onto their insides and their outsides, between and within one another, themselves, and the world. It is multidimensional and 'fleshy'. It is not separated from the visual. It is something to be felt again and again through haptic perception, and it is transferred through paint[ing]. It caresses rather than possesses, and is the poignancy, the point and the pitch of art-making. The work is the residue and only one tiny splinter of a whole world of touch. I am searching for that splinter. Where is the 'OUCH?

PAPER

Showed film.

The film is a basic documentary, a collation of recordings of various, recent activities all relating to the research into TOUCH. I do not want to dictate meaning, but rather encourage an open interpretation. Through the gathering together into film, and the distillation of forcing an expanded practice through a slippery screen, flattened out into a projection of light, something might be squeezed out – some essence of TOUCH that becomes that tiny splinter.

Much of the work seen in the film, and the work of the film, has been passed through a thinking around Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological studies in his last, unfinished text, *The Visible and The Invisible*.

Excerpts from Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*⁹ (discussed as a group):

If my left hand is touching my right hand, and if I should suddenly wish to apprehend with my right hand the work of my left hand as it touches, this reflection of the body upon itself always miscarries at the last moment: the moment I feel my left hand with my right hand, I correspondingly cease touching my right hand with my left hand. But this last-minute failure does not drain all truth from that presentiment I had of being able to touch myself touching: my body does not perceive, but it is as if it were built around the perception that dawns through it; through its whole internal arrangement...it is, as it were, prepared for a self-perception, even though it is never itself that is perceived nor itself that perceives...¹⁰

There is an experience of the visible thing as pre-existing my vision, but this experience is not a fusion, a coincidence: because my eyes which see, my hands which touch, can also be seen and touched, because, therefore, in this sense they see and touch the visible, the tangible, from within, because our flesh lines and even envelops all the visible and tangible things with which nevertheless it is surrounded, the world and I are within one another, and there is no anteriority of the percipere to the percipi...¹¹

When I find again the actual world such as it is, under my hands, under my eyes, up against my body, I find much more than an object: a Being of which my vision is a part, a visibility older than my operations or my acts. But this does not mean that there was a fusion or coinciding of me with it: on the contrary, this occurs because a sort of dehiscence opens my body in two, and because between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things...¹²

Already in the "touch" we have just found three distinct experiences which subtend one another, three dimensions which overlap but are distinct: a touching of the sleek and of the rough, a touching of the things – a passive sentiment of the body and of its space – and finally a veritable touching of the touch, when my right hand touches my left hand while it is palpating the things, where the "touching subject" passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things. Between the massive sentiment I have of the sack in which I am enclosed, and the control from without that my hand exercises over my hand, there is as much difference as between the movements of my eyes and the changes they produce in the visible. And as, conversely, every experience of the visible has always been given to me within the context of the movements of the look, the visible spectacle belongs to the touch neither more nor less than do the "tactile qualities." We must habituate ourselves to think that every visible is cut out in the tangible, every tactile being in some manner promised to visibility, and there is encroachment, infringement, not only between the touched and the touching, but also between the tangible and the visible, which is encrusted in it, as, conversely, the tangible itself is not a nothingness of visibility, is not without visual existence. Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world...every vision takes place somewhere in the tactile space. There is double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not merge into one. The two parts are total parts and yet are not superposable.¹³

If my left hand can touch my right hand while it palpates the tangibles, can touch it touching, can turn its palpation back upon it, why, when touching the hand of another, would I not touch in it the same power to espouse the things that I have touched in my own?...When one of my hands touches the other, the world of each opens upon that of the other because the operation is reversible at will, because they both belong (as we say) to one sole space of consciousness, because one small man touches one sole thing through both hands. But for my two hands to open upon one sole world, it does not suffice that they be given to one sole consciousness – or if that were the case the difficulty before us would disappear: since other bodies would be known by me in the same way as would be my own, they and I would still be dealing with the same world. No, my two hands touch the same things because they are the hands of one same body. And yet each of them has its own tactile experience. If nonetheless they have to do with one sole tangible, it is because there exists a very peculiar relation from one to the other, across the corporeal space – like that holding between my two eyes – making of my hands one sole organ of experience, as it makes of my two eyes the channels of one sole Cyclopean vision.¹⁴

What is open to us, therefore, with the reversibility of the visible and the tangible, is – if not yet the incorporeal – at least an intercorporeal being, a presumptive domain of the visible and the tangible, which extends further than the things I touch and see at present.¹⁵

Touch Screen

[PS showed a film via a digital projector.] The large wall piece in the film is referred to as *Touch Screen*.

At the back, towards the inside and expanding outwards, is a film ('Making a Point') of a talk I gave about the surface of painting. Over one thousand three hundred stills

have been taken in chronological order from that film and printed onto photographic paper. Most of these have been folded into parcels focusing on the poignant parts (areas depicting touch within the film in some form) and stapled to a wall, overlapping. Paint has then been applied to this joined-up yet disjointed screen of touch...

[See Chapter one, *Touch Screen*, which was presented as a paper at this point in the symposium.]

Fat Feet and Robert Ryman

We have all talked today about something going on between ourselves and the materials. The aforementioned three days spent in front of the Robert Ryman paintings were dominated by my desire for the material (paint) manifesting itself via sensation in my feet and mouth. The Ryman paintings are all about paint, painting and paintings, and as Cecile has said, the experience of the work is crucial. The three-day experience in front of the paintings was all about my matter, my flesh, desiring a merging with the matter of the paintings, their flesh/paint. Much has been said about the irreproducibility of the paintings. When with them physically, something supposedly happens – we are perhaps enlightened and opened up by the vision of the thing in front, this plain/complex object that is constantly changing with the light, and surprising us with ever-revealing detail. When I saw them in the flesh, the big news is, nothing really happened. But something happened in *my* flesh. I was preoccupied with my feet and mouth¹⁶ the whole time. References to my ‘cold, flat, fat feet’, and my teeth ‘needing to chew’ recur throughout the five hours of audio recorded and notes written¹⁷ within the Hallen für Neue Kunst where I looked at the paintings. The audio of the film you have just seen is from the end of day three when I was very cold and had woken up on a bench, shivering in front of ‘Lugano’, a painting with which I did connect. I can still feel the paint from that painting, ‘Lugano’, and others, in my mouth, and the paint from ‘Touch Screen’ on my hand while watching that film. While I’m working with ‘Touch Screen’, I remember the experience in Schaffhausen, and the desire to hold paint. I remember it in my feet, so there is work to be done there.

[PS shared books on Robert Ryman for reference.]

DISCUSSION

CE – It [the curving development of ‘Touch Screen’ as a naturally occurring product of a body] makes me think of Duchamp – the woman descending the stairs.

PS – Yes, then Gerhard Richter made a more phenomenological response in paint – painting still works. All this work is born from the questions – why a painter? Why painting? Painting and skin are where my interests and concerns with TOUCH and phenomenology lie. On viewing the Robert Ryman paintings, all I could think about was using paint, and the feeling of being very present in my feet and in my teeth. Analysing my experience with his work enables me to have a bit of structure for mine. Touch for me is very open ended.

PS – Gabriela, would you like to talk to us about your work?

GW – I am a conceptual artist rather than a photographer. I am using self-portraiture and photography to show how I feel. Some recent photography work is reminiscent of Jenny Saville's paintings of the body pressed against glass. I photographed myself behind a glass wall. Not participating, just observing. You can almost feel the glass that it's shot through. Then there are body studies, expressing something. It's all conceptual. And I am always thinking about the gallery and the museum – the question of people interacting with art. If I can see it online, why do I go into a museum? Interaction creates art.

PS – I need to go into a museum – I can't feel it online. And I've already mentioned the irreproducibility of the Ryman paintings (although they do seem to work in the direct, realist descriptions Ryman himself sets out) – I had to be in front of them. In Budapest, in the Museum for Fine Arts, there is a Hands On desk – a very grand, precious construction involving an alter-like, padded table with fleshy pink, circular space on the top (like a landing pad)¹⁸, rope cordon and backing of solid blue wall painted with letters in white announcing: "KEZET RÁ! – HANDS ON! Enjoy this special opportunity to handle original objects from the Egyptian Collection and learn more about them with the help of our trained volunteers. For the safety of the objects we kindly ask you to follow the rules indicated. The Hands On desk is open on the following days to individual visitors only..." It was empty when I was there. This refers to the debate about the pedestal, the podium, the plinth. Museums are thinking about engaging the public through touch but in an extremely controlled, sporadic way. This links to Carole's work and her interest in the work's development through the breaking down of public barriers that have been culturally learnt and socially imposed.

CE – I made a display box with shelves and light for my shell collection. My granddaughter said, "I can't touch them". So now there are shells to touch on the top. Now and again I can see that the shells have been moved.

PS – [Gabriela showed some more images on her laptop – some self-portraits of the face and upper body pressed up against wet glass – the camera on the other side from the face, and some photographs of the naked human form (models) in a great variety of positions, taken from many different angles – looking at body structures.] The face against wet glass is very powerful, melancholy.

GW – The body as a landscape. This gesture [a female form with an arm over the abdomen]. Holding the belly, protecting it.

CE – [Cecile picked up on Gabriela's gesture to explain making – the right hand moving over the left in circles – insinuating the creative process] The creative gesture – the space in between – it's beyond, and before language – you couldn't do it without your hands – it's in my DVD.¹⁹

Everyone agreed that we use photography as a tool, a channel.

¹ These are questions currently debated by Dr Anna Powell (Research Assistant in Contemporary Art) and Dr Catriona McAra (Research Fellow in Cultural Theory) of the University of Huddersfield. For previous issues of *radar*: <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/journal/radar/> To view the *radar* weblog pages (currently being updated): <http://contemporaryartengage.wordpress.com/radar/>. Accessed January 29, 2014.

³ After the symposium, I watched the DVD and read the companion booklet kindly given to us by fellow participant and artist, Cecile Elstein, 'Tangents, A Mindscape in a Landscape', Elstein, C. and Kendal, M. (2003), about Elstein's open air sculpture 'Together with Tangents', (1997). The following extract from the companion booklet drew associations with CK's point about the importance of manual making and the twisting/tension/string that CK mentioned in reference to Tim Ingold: "I am intrigued

by things of human ingenuity such as turnbuckle, tension wire, stake, rope, screw, spiral, triangle, oval, circle, tassel and twist...From simple knots, tassels fell in soft columns, forming curves within the form...Free waving grasses contrasted with the twist and tension in the surface of the ropes. The ropes held in tension appeared to float above the surface of the grass...The tassels were tactile and fell...”,16, 19.

⁴ “Haptic perception is usually defined as the combination of tactile, kinaesthetic, and proprioceptive functions, the way we experience touch both on the surface of and inside our bodies. In haptic visuality, the eyes themselves function like organs of touch. Haptic visuality, a term contrasted to optical visuality, draws from other forms of sense experience, primarily touch and kinaesthetics. Because haptic visuality draws on other senses, the viewer’s body is more obviously involved in the process of seeing than is the case with optical visuality. The difference between haptic and optical visuality is a matter of degree, however. In most processes of seeing both are involved, in a dialectical movement from far to near, from solely optical to multisensory. And obviously we need both kinds of visuality: it is hard to look closely at a lover’s skin with optical vision; it is hard to drive a car with haptic vision.” Marks, L., *Touch – Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 2–3.

⁵ “We looked forward to the opportunity of public engagement with ‘Together with Tangents’. Its open form encouraged movement around, in and through it. Visitors to the exhibition explored the sculpture in their various ways. Their questions and interpretations enriched our understanding of different approaches in experiencing the sculpture...A popular response was to climb into the open spaces of the sculpture. Some people found their own temporary private space there. Often people would lie amongst the growing grasses. Sometimes we found tiny plaits in the tassels where they had played. This inclusive approach was in contrast to some other sculptures, which had to be cordoned off for protection...” Companion booklet to the DVD of ‘Tangents, A Mindscape in a Landscape’, Elstein, C. and Kendal, M. (2003), 22.

⁶ <http://www.yorksj.ac.uk/arts/faculty-of-arts/staff--contact-details/victoria-gray.aspx>. Accessed June 29, 2014.

⁷ “First, “close-range” vision, as distinguished from long-distance vision; second, “tactile,” or rather “haptic” space, as distinguished from optical space. “Haptic” is a better word than “tactile” since it does not establish an opposition between two sense organs but rather invites the assumption that the eye itself may fulfil this non-optical function... The first aspect of the haptic, smooth space of close vision is that its orientations, landmarks and linkages are in continuous variation; it operates step by step. Examples are the desert, steppe, ice, and sea, local spaces of pure connection. Contrary to what is sometimes said, one never sees from a distance in a space of this kind, nor does one see it from a distance; one is never “in front of,” any more than one is “in” (one is “on”...)” Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1987), *A Thousand Plateaus – Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 492–493.

⁸ “...we call for a skin-tight politics, a politics that takes as its orientation not the body as such, but the fleshy interface between bodies and worlds. ‘Thinking through the skin’ is a thinking that reflects, not on the body as the lost object of thought, but on the inter-embodiment, on the mode of being-with and being-for, where one touches and is touched by others.” Ahmed, S. and Stacey, J., eds., *Thinking Through the Skin, Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 1.

⁹ Merleau-Ponty, M. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Lefort, C. ed. Lingis, A. trans. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹² *Ibid.*, 123.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 133–134.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 142–143.

¹⁶ In *Sensorium Tests*, (published on the occasion of the exhibition: Daria Martin: *Sensorium Tests*, MK Gallery, January 20 – April 8, 2012, Milton Keynes), Martin quotes one of her online contributors to her research into how sensory feeling might be shared visually between two subjects – into the little-known condition of mirror-touch synaesthesia, where a person can feel, on their own body, sensations that are visually observed on those of others: “MY mirror-touch isn’t exactly feeling what other people experience, but instead I can feel things if they’re pointing at me...The intensity of the pressure varies depending on the object – book corners are dull sensations, while pens and fingers are sharper and ‘deeper’. However, it seems that I have to see the object, even just out of the corner of my eye, to ‘feel’ it....Another sensation I’m beginning to wonder if it may be mirror-touch is that sometimes, when looking at an object, especially if it’s spindly or sharp, I can feel it in my mouth. It’s really unpleasant, especially since I ‘feel’ insects and spiders on my tongue!” Martin, D. and Spira, A., eds. *Daria Martin: Sensorium Tests* (Milton Keynes: MK Gallery, 2012), 2.

¹⁷ *Tiny lines become so heightened –*

so important. Suddenly all I

can see are tiny hairs.

STUCK. I feel a hair stuck in my tooth.

Worse – a pubic hair.

The dark squares at the top pull me down –

my cold feet. Cold, flat, feet.

My weight pulling into the floor.

Very aware of gravity here – a big

force, and big forces – space, light, things

we can't control so much – then tiny things.

Makes me think of Frémon's Paradoxes book.

Feel self slowing down. I feel very

short, very small. Like my middle has

been removed. Just my big, flat,

cold bottomed feet, and some hands + wrists holding

paper + pen, and some eyelids, +

a fuzzy head. I am a fuzzy head

with only hands + feet and a soreness

in between. Not empty, but sore.

Looking up takes the pain away. Is that

physiological/spinal or the painting soothes?

Hairs in soap.

Soden, P., No. 29 from *Pages* (2013) – writing in front of painting 29 (*COUNSEL*, (1982), 259.1 × 243.9cm, oil paint on linen canvas with steel), in Hallen für Neue Kunst, Schaffhausen, Switzerland. [See Annex C]

¹⁸ The shape of this 'landing pad' on the top of a 'Hands On station' in Budapest echoes the circular sieve in Gustave Courbet's *The Corn Sifters* (1855) referenced by Elstein in the companion booklet to the DVD of *Tangents, A Mindscape in a Landscape* (2003): "Courbet...views from above the scene of a young woman kneeling on the ground, winnowing corn through a sieve. Her strong arms hold the oval sieve in tension parallel with the ground upon which the sieved wheat falls lightly. Our attention is drawn to her connection with the earth..." Companion booklet to the DVD of 'Tangents, A Mindscape in a Landscape', Elstein, C. and Kendal, M. (2003),15.



¹⁹ “In a dialogue between Maureen Kendal and Olga Damant, Olga explains the creative potential of children from different artistic backgrounds, and their responses to events at Wimpole Hall Gardens. Olga’s rapid gesture shows as a space between her two hands. This is shown in real time in the documentary. As an expansion of this, in the video ‘Present’ the clip of her hands is reconstructed in close up and in slow motion to accentuate ‘potential creativity’...” Companion booklet to the DVD of *Tangents, A Mindscape in a Landscape*, Elstein, C. and Kendal, M. (2003), 25.



Stills taken from *Present*, a film made by Elstein, C. and Kendal, M. in response to the many questions asked by visitors about *Together with Tangents*, 2003.