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Empathic Attention; Feeling Into and
Intimacy
in Contemporary Art Practice

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2018

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements of the University of
Northumbria at Newcastle for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

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Arts, Design and Social Sciences
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Abstract

This research addresses how a practice of making art engages empathic attention. The ideas are arrived at through a studio practice, which is focused on intimate gestures, mirrored responses, and images of a strangers, developed through video, performance to camera and text.

Key thinking lies in the understanding that art has the ability to activate, what I am calling 'empathic attention' both in the methods of its making and the reception of the completed work. Empathy is referred to as a sense of 'feeling into', coming from the German *Einfühlung*, *ein* meaning 'in' and *Fühlung* meaning feeling/to feel. Etymologically speaking, empathy is a type of cognition that offers a penetrating sense of entering into, a type of becoming. The methodological approach has been to pursue intimate encounters, contingent on intersubjectivity, where work can be made. Some of these encounters are located in an exploration of the materials of others, for example an archive of personal letters¹. Where I have written about encounters with art works I limited myself to those works that I have had first hand experience of, consciously engaging a subjective response.

The aim of this doctoral research has been to establish, with regard to specific contemporary art practices, empathic perception as a particular kind of knowledge located in the provisional, in the oscillating, and the speculative sense within the work of 'becoming other'. In doing so it engages with phenomenological, aesthetic and

¹ Letters between Vernon Lee and her partner Kit Anstruther-Thomson are used as a backdrop to the work in *Vernon's Right Hand* and *My Dearie Dearie* (see Vimeo <https://vimeo.com/user4892127>)

experimental methods² such as; filming isolated gestures, using the body to mirror actions, exploring details in archival materials and developing discreet installations as a response to them.

Attention and orientation are considered ‘a form of participation’³ and as such the research is concerned with generating a particular kind of audience encounter, one that is closer to the experience of ‘alongsideness’⁴ than it is to the form of art practice we recognise as participatory⁵. While the backdrop to the research is implicitly social, being that it’s foundational touchstone is intersubjectivity, it is primarily focused on the one to one experience. Following this line of thought this thesis firmly locates the practice as a bridge to thinking and feeling that is constituted *with* others. This practice led approach produces new knowledge in uniquely identifying empathic attention as a methodological approach to making art and also a means to understand our embodied responses to art. This was arrived at through a reframing of the works of two key philosophers, Edith Stein and Vernon Lee. Engaging with these texts, both with and through the practice, offers a new perspective on the work of these two philosophers and frames my artwork in the intersubjective experience that underlines the research.

² See Methodology section pp.32-40 for a more detailed description of the practice methods.

³ Catherine Wood, 2018, *In Conversation* Catherine Wood and Sha Xin Wei, Mirror Touch Synaesthesia, ed D. Martin

⁴ At a seminar in Baltic 39 in Nov 2014, the artist Imogen Sidworthy discussed ‘alongsideness’ as a particular method used by French educator Fernand Deligny

⁵ Participation ed. Claire Bishop,

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Empathic Attention; feeling into and intimacy in contemporary art practice

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It would not have been possible to do this without the enduring support and advice of my partner Allan or without the tolerance of my three little boys who have missed play dates and parties because Mammy has had to work.

I am forever grateful to my family at home, to Mum, Dad and my sister Laura; your unwavering encouragement, supply of Barry's tea, cards in the post and long phone calls sustained me.

And to Emma, I can feel you alongside me, even now.

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

An ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved.

Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on
26/02/2014

I declare that the word count of this thesis is 43 721.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Portfolio of Artworks

This introductory portfolio foregrounds three key bodies of work which will provide a context for the reader to better understand the ensuing volume of critical writing; *Backstory*, *In the Hands of Others* and *My Dearie Dearie*. It is not intended to be an exhaustive folio but a point of reference for the reader and a succinct representation of the culmination of work for the presentation of practice led research for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Broadly, the artworks presented here use photographs and video to engage with ideas of attention. This is explored through a variety of subject matter, from the handling or works of art by Conservators to an archive of intimate letters. These works propose *inclination*, *orientation* and *being led by* as affective experiences that constitute empathic responses to artwork.

The solo exhibition *Backstory* was held at Catalyst Arts in Dec/Jan 2013. The exhibition is comprised of a number of objects, materials and videos. Key to the installation is a small, framed photograph of a woman with her back to the camera titled *Backstory*. This posture is echoed on screen in a performance to camera piece *Screen One: Her Translation*. Engaging with ideas of 'perspective shift' there are three interrelated videos, installed on screens in the gallery. Each of these videos were made in response to a series of stories and prose submitted through an open call-out to local writers. These were collected into a handmade book *Backstory (into which we escape)* with quotes from the stories embroidered onto second hand scarves *First Person You (The Many I's)*.

Title: *Backstory*

Media: Framed Photograph

Year: 2013



Title: *Backstory (into which we escape)*

Media: Hand made book with images and text.

With text contributions from: Darren Caffrey, Jan Carson, Elaine Donnelly, Jessamyn Fiore, Liz Kennedy, Steph Moore, Céardha Morgan, Joseph Nawaz, Jason O'Rourke, Rowan Sexton, Simon Walker

Year: 2013

Image courtesy of Jordan Hutchings and Catalyst Art Gallery, Belfast



Title: *First Person You (The Many I's)*

Media: Individually embroidered scarves

Year: 2013

Image courtesy of Jordan Hutchings and Catalyst Art Gallery, Belfast



Title: *Scene One: Her Translation*

Media: Stills from video (performance to camera)

Year: 2013

Camera: Allan Hughes



Title: *Scene Two: She Is Camera*

Media: Stills from HD video

Year: 2013



Title: *Scene Three: Where It Is Written*

Media: Stills from HD video

Year: 2013



Title: Installation shot of *Backstory* at Catalyst Arts, Belfast



In the Hands of Others, 2015, was produced in response to a residency in Burt Hall, the work place of trainee Fine Art conservators. In following and observing their approach, I made film and photographic works that focus on gestures of care and attention - to the tackiness of glue, the feedback from a brush, and the slight colouration of the paper's edge.

Making artworks that reflect on the role of the conservator and their methods of looking and working I used a trope, perhaps most familiar to narrative film, the close-up. Synonymous with the forensic and the emotive, the intimate and the magnified, here, it draws attention to the minutiae of each movement, to the nature of 'handling', and simultaneously to the material being handled.

Title: Installation of *In The Hands Of Others* and *Handling* at Burt Hall, Newcastle

Media: Mixed, video on bespoke paper screens, photography

Year: 2015

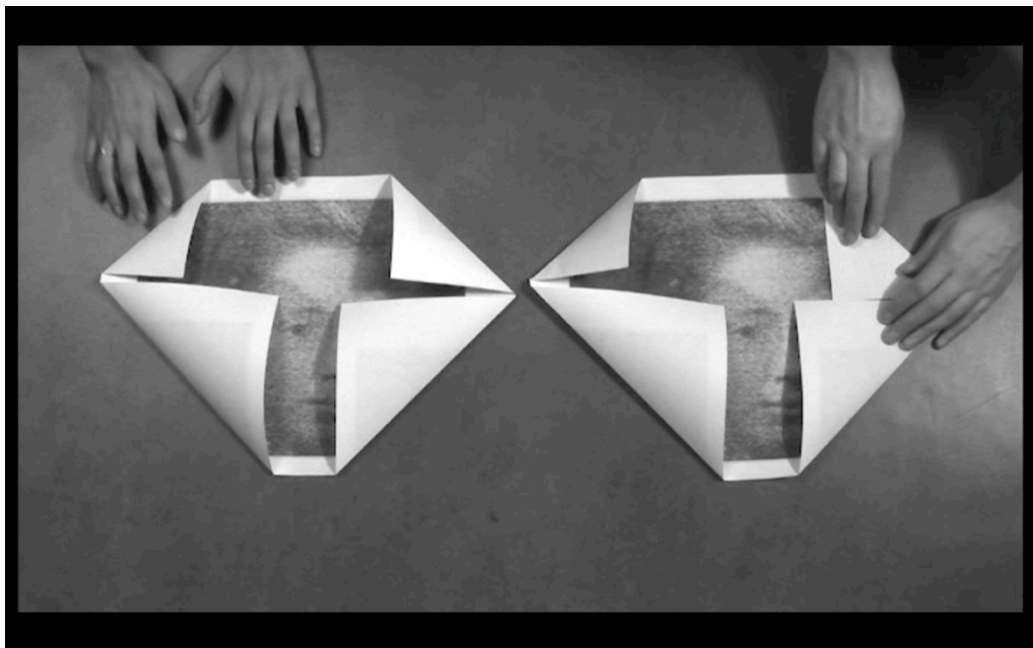
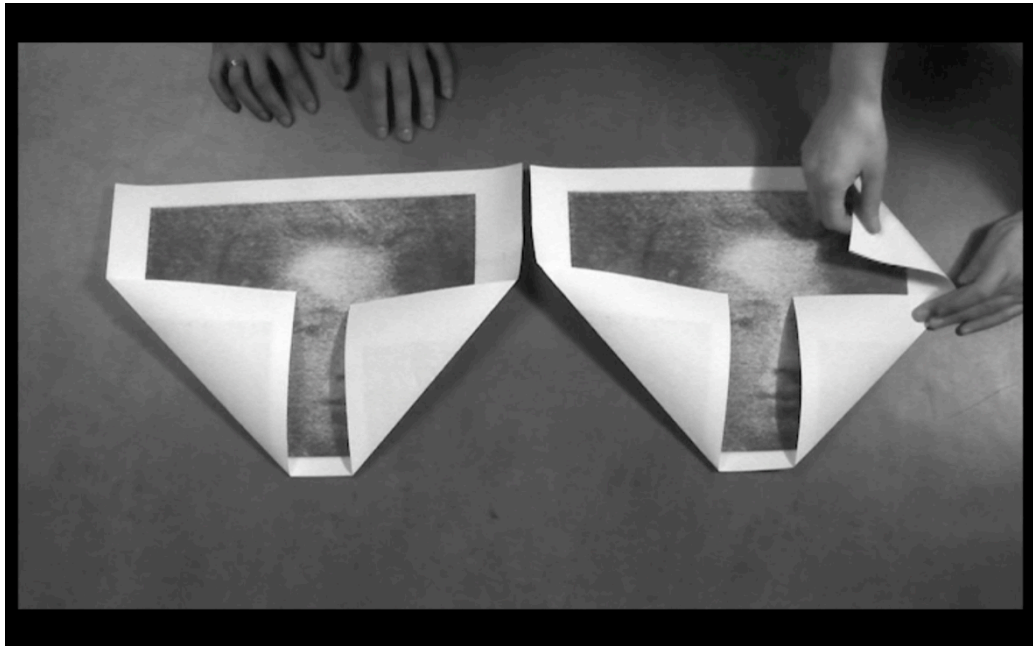


Title: *Care Instructions for Jean*

Media: Stills from Video

Year: 2015

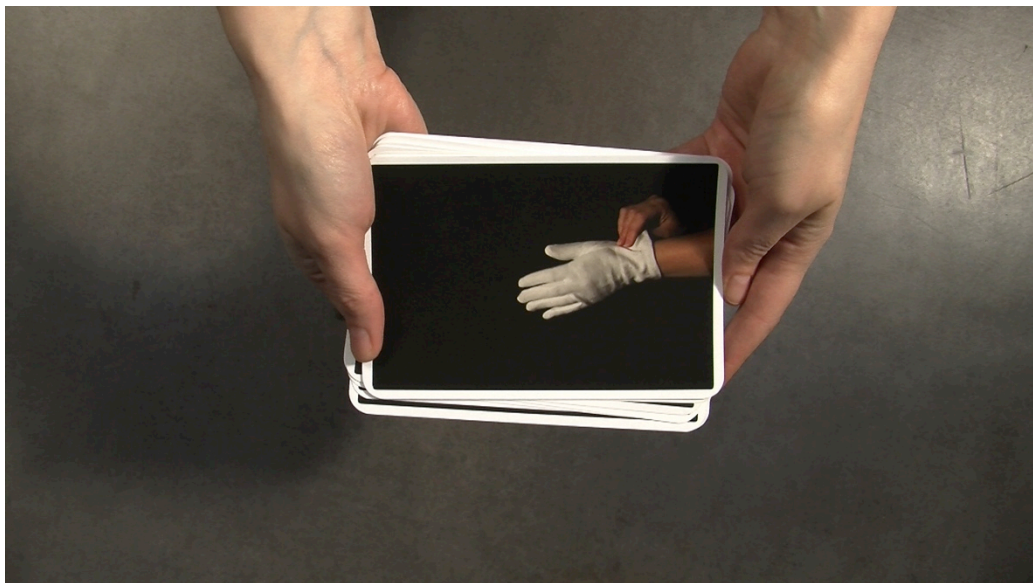
Performers: Nicola Singh and Fiona Larkin



Title: *In The Hands Of Others*

Media: Stills from Video

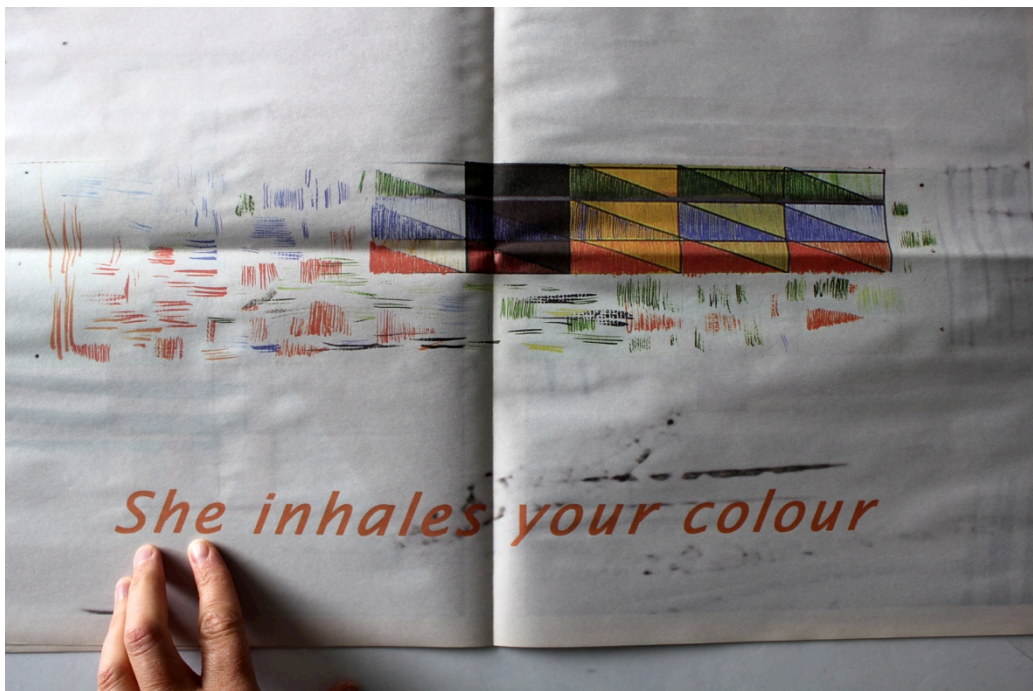
Year: 2015



Title: *Be My Halftone*

Media: Newsprint paper, with colour samples from Paige Keith, Rowan Mastin, Simone Parker, Emily Smith & Gabriella Irving

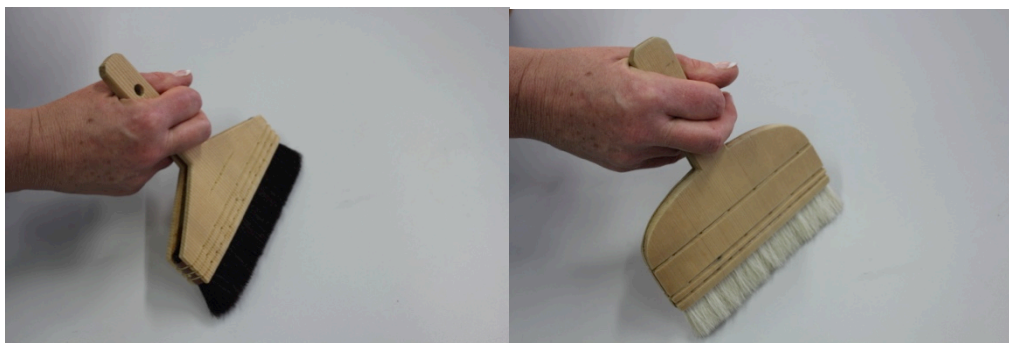
Year: 2015



Title: *Handling* (installation shot below)

Media: C-Print Photograph mounted on board

Year: 2015



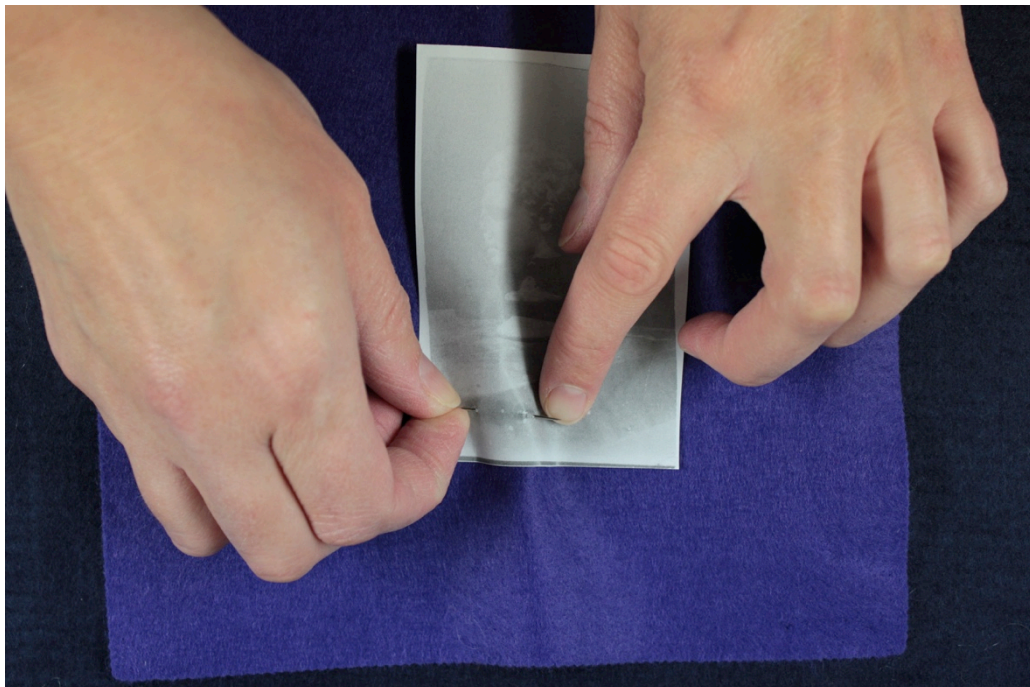
This collection of video works was made in response to working with the archives of Vernon Lee and Clementina Anstruther-Thomson, exploring their ideas on embodied empathic perception. The video piece *Vernon's Right Hand*, 2016 uses images found in the archive.

Drawing on their enquiry into proprioceptive responses to artworks documented in Lee's publication 'Beauty and Ugliness', the dual screen video *My Dearie Dearie*, 2018 shows two performers, Nicola Singh and Julie Crawshaw, looking off screen at an unknown object and moving, gesturing in response. The work explores the hidden intimacy between body and object. This work was also shown as part of a series of screenings at the Hatton Gallery where viewers were asked to respond to my work using blind drawing (see below).

Title: *Vernon's Right Hand*

Media: Video still

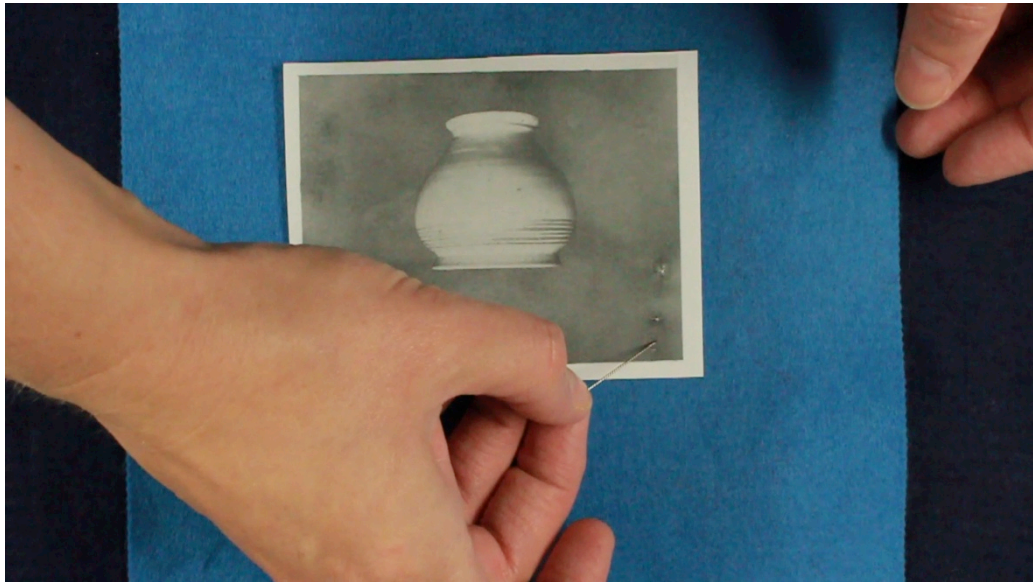
Year: 2016



Title: *Vernon's Right Hand*

Media: Video still

Year: 2016



Title: *My Dearie Dearie*

Media: Video stills

Year: 2018

Performers: Julie Crawshaw & Nicola Singh



Title: *My Dearie Dearie* (screening event as part of 'Rotation Process' by Kate Liston at the Hatton Gallery, Newcastle)

Media: Screening and Live blind drawing event

Year: 2018

Photo credit to Hatton Gallery



Dear Edith,

So here it is, a preface, an opening, something that begins.

Here is the handshake, the point of contact, the encounter, the bringing together. You and me, my hand, your eye. It is a useful way to start, beginning as we do with this connection, your attention to the page and my writing it. It sets out, from the beginning, to forge an attachment.

This is a detail, a gesture of with, an orientation towards, and here on this page, a useful motif that offers a description of the processes at work in this essay.

Yours Sincerely,

Fiona

Introduction

This enquiry seeks to examine particular qualities of attention with regard to contemporary art practice, to explore where and whether the intimate nature of feeling *with* and feeling *into* art might be deemed empathic. Through my own art practice, this research aims to explore affective triggers that allow us, as viewers, to experience a ‘perspective shift’⁶; looking out from the position of another, examining their attention to the objects they encounter in a space. In doing so, I aim to outline the core conviction of this thesis, that empathic attention is folded into our engagement with works of art.

This thesis then, is concerned with the relationship between seeing and feeling with regard to contemporary art. Where feeling and perceiving drives responses that are internally located and affective and where these responses might be seen to be empathic. Current interest in empathy has accelerated since the recent discovery of mirror neurons⁷. This is a neuron that fires, both in response to action and in response to observing others act. It has an imitative quality. Where neuroscience has determined hard evidence of the existence of mirror neurons, this research looks to aesthetics, to phenomenology, directing attention towards the encountered, embodied experience of knowledge, as we will come to see in ensuing chapters. While contemporary debate doesn’t provide us with a clear consensus of what empathy is, there is agreement on one thing. It is a ‘*sui generis*’⁸ a unique sense of looking out from the perspective of another.

⁶ This term is borrowed from Peter Goldie it will be examined further in the thesis where I use it to explore the implications it has on my practice.

⁷ For more information there are numerous sources see Sourya Acharya and Samarth Shukla, ‘Mirror Neurons: Enigma of the Metaphysical Modular Brain’, *Journal of Natural Science, Biology, and Medicine* 3, no. 2 (2012): 118–24, <https://doi.org/10.4103/0976-9668.101878>.

⁸ Translated from the Latin to mean ‘of its own kind’ or unique.

To explore this, I have used a number of practice methods, some idiosyncratic, adapted and evolved over time in the studio. Crucially, a number of these methods have changed in the development of this research, becoming more focused on details, on qualities of attention and how these affect the body. This change is reflected in the course the practice takes, and is demonstrated in the ways I bring ideas and images of the body more directly into the visual frame of my work. Material decisions made in the production of artworks such as using the camera close-up, or choosing to work with second-hand scarves, are subsequently influenced by less tangible methods such as *trying on*, *alongsideness*, *long looking*, and chance encounter. As such practical studio methods are often balanced by more elusive approaches.

These methods, I suggest, are undervalued research paradigms, where setting out to be open and responsive are the framework they assume. Or perhaps it is easier to see that my research operates in terms more familiar to the language of empathy, it is a constant going towards, an inclination and oscillation.

Methodology

The letter preceding my introduction is addressed to Edith Stein (1891-1942), a philosopher who dedicated her doctoral thesis to studying the phenomenology of empathy. Her treatise is a touchstone throughout this thesis and as such she becomes a speculative addressee. In addressing letters to her I ascribe qualities of turning attention toward another, using an intimate or familiar voice signifying the overarching tone for the studio research. Thinking with Edith Stein provides a support in assembling this enquiry and she is therefore an important and frequently recurring figure. Thinking with Stein is also a platform for handling philosophical ideas and language. Fundamentally, my approach is theoretically underpinned by two concepts borrowed from Stein. Her contention that empathy is examined through a close reading of a) the sensed living body (*Leib*) and b) the body of the outer world as seen and recognized by others (*Körper*)⁹.

My original research question tried to define the need for connection, for *leaning outward* that I saw at the heart of my practice, in terms of a radical form of empathy along with empathy as a radical form of engaging with art giving rise to type of participatory experience. Reading Jacques Rancière and Claire Bishop I looked for a reappraisal of my approach to making artwork, one that described the work in terms of connections and affinities with its viewers. Indeed Rancière's attention to the 'montaged'¹⁰ image offers an interpretation that exposes translatable qualities in artworks and encourages dialogue with the audience. While this seemed an interesting theoretical structure, which could be linked to the empathic viewer, I recognized that for my purpose, it lacked the nuance of the sensed experience. In pursuing this approach, I increasingly felt distanced from the work I

⁹ Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, 3rd rev. ed, The Collected Works of Edith Stein, v. 3 (Washington, D.C: ICS Publications, 1989).

¹⁰ Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (London; New York: Verso, 2009).

was making in the studio and it was recognizing this uncomfortable split that drove me to shift my question to its current form; *How to define qualities of attention which explore where the intimate nature of feeling with and feeling into art, might be deemed empathic*. With the shift in the research question the notion of the radical fell to the side, and more acute and relevant qualities such as intimacy, affect, sensation, inclination and attention became central and offered a closer reading of the artwork I was making.

Perspective Shift

Shifting the question was a step in the right direction, but finding a language that best paired with the work I was making in the studio required testing. I sought a wider audience at conferences where a range of disciplines was being discussed. Early in the second year of my research journey at an interdisciplinary conference in Prague, I delivered a paper called 'Seeing The Loop: Examining Empathy through Art Practice'. Discussing my research, exploring critical links and determining how best to frame it within the context of empathy helped in refining my approach.

Key to this research journey was my own reflective experience of an artwork by Albrecht Dürer, a self-portrait titled *The Sick Dürer*, (1509-1521). Examining my own experience of artworks by other artists recurs throughout the writing and making, and indeed the affect of other artworks offers a methodological vantage point through which I am able to think about my own practice. Hence the artworks described in this thesis are works that I have had first hand experience of. Adopting this method I became aware that a process of looking out and looking in was, in a crude sense, fundamentally empathic in that it illustrates what Peter Goldie has termed 'perspective shift'¹¹. This process of shifting from one perspective to another does not run in a smooth, clean line, rather it oscillates; at times

¹¹ Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie, *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, 2014.

where the work is introspective, it is focused on details, trifles even; at other points it is outward-looking and directed towards other people.

Looking out and Looking In

The broad idea of empathy is far-reaching as it intersects with many disciplines from neuroscience to education and ethics. Therefore, I had to be clear which areas had the most relevance to my own art practice. At the start of my PhD I was unaware just how wide-ranging the concept of empathy might be and so my first year was spent trying to follow a line from art practice through to empathy and aesthetics and back into the studio. Phenomenology, with its emphasis on the structures of human experience, the lived body and human relations, advocates close investigation of the perceptions and feelings brought about by empathy, therefore it appeared to best support the approach I was taking in the studio. This focused my research and is how I arrived at Edith Stein's work 'On The Problem of Empathy' which as I have outlined above, became a key text influencing both my studio practice and my writing.

In the early stages I produced an exhibition, *Backstory*, at Catalyst Arts in Belfast. This offered me a chance to engage with ideas of perspective shift and point of view using the gallery as a platform. This was articulated in two ways; first and perhaps most fundamentally I structured the work as an open call to writers, asking them to respond to a photograph I had taken. In response I used their writing and my video camera as a way of orientating and adopting the perspective of another. This influenced the films I made as I attempted to construct my work using their writing as a reference. While this approach offered a satisfyingly open framework, the loose structure also meant that it lacked intimacy, as the relationship with the writers remained distant. With the gallery's permission, I shifted the traditional artist talk to an open discussion with two of the writers

as part of a panel. Here, ideas of the intimacy and interiority of viewing and reading came to the fore and these helped to shape my approach to future projects.

Working alongside others

‘Method is perhaps less about given, handed-down procedures than about approaches that have to be thrashed out, forged again and again on the spot, impromptu in the course of the art practice-research effort.’¹² While my methods weren’t necessarily impromptu, not knowing the people involved or the specifics of their discipline, requires a certain amount of adaptability.

Revising and reflecting on how previous projects are structured motivates reworking, or a different kind of handling of the next body of work. My experience of working with the writers moved me to seek out a more embedded approach for the next project; one where being *with* others and working *alongside* others was a key motivation. In my second year, I began researching the role of art conservators and what I saw as their empathic handling of works of art. I contacted the conservation department and began a loosely termed three months ‘residency’ in their department, attending seminars and conferences, watching over their shoulders as they worked. Driven by an idea that empathy could be an act of substitution, the workings of an imaginative ‘in the shoes of’ experience, I conceived of the role of conservators being a kind of ultimate mimesis. My time working with them proved this to be mistaken, however I recognized that their treatment of objects reflected something more crucial, more intimate, that is their care and attention to the objects they are working with and a particular tacit handling of things. Immersing myself in the world of the conservator it became clear that there is a pattern whereby, in making work I seek out connections, with others, writers, conservators, however this time my approach could best be described by borrowing a term from anthropology, the ‘participant observer’. In

¹² Sarat Maharaj, ‘Know-How and No-How: Stopgap Notes on “Method” in Visual Art as Knowledge Production’, *Art and Research. A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 2, no. 2 (2009), <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n2/pdfs/maharaj.pdf>.

adopting this approach I set out from a position of uncertainty and not knowing, which Martin Herbert suggests ‘might be a sincere starting point, leading toward a greater understanding.’¹³ While Herbert surveys a range of artists’ approaches to a ‘pronounced not knowing’ as a means to deeper engagement with issues, here it is an accepted condition of placing myself amongst the conservators. The exhibition, *In The Hands of Others*, held in the conservation department in Burt Hall in June of that year makes reference to this, not simply in the title but also in the artworks I made; for the limited edition paper print *Be My Halftone* I photographed samples of the conservation students work using them to make digital samples of my own. In their samples, I saw their effort to replicate colours and texture of the work of another; this mirrored my own methods of working. Here, working *alongside* and being *inclined* toward the work of another affected a kind of parallel logic in the work that I made. As such in making my work I am often following or *being led by* others. This methodological construct is linked to Stein’s philosophical idea that empathy is a ‘being led by’ others, and is intrinsic to my approach.

Long Looking and Being Led by

I don’t begin work with an ultimate outcome in mind; it is worked through and developed by experimentation, by adopting *long looking*, by looking over the shoulders of others and responding to what I see. *Long looking* is a term I have used to define a method of working whereby finding details and paying close attention over time produces response and affects. Working with the conservators it became evident that this way of working was also a valuable tool in their practice. Here accretion of time and attention to detail reveal the history of the objects they are working with. Although in spending time in Burt Hall, I had developed links and closer connections by working alongside conservators there was a lingering frustration that the relationship was one-sided, that perhaps, I didn’t

¹³ Martin Herbert and Leah Whitman-Salkin, *The Uncertainty Principle* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014).

give anything back. Two of the pieces made for the exhibition in Burt Hall, the video work *Care Instructions for Jean* and text and sound piece *Care Instructions for Jean II* were made with the assistance of artist Nicola Singh. Working *with* another person closely like this heightened my awareness of the need for familiarity and intimacy in my working relationship with others; embracing this would allow the interiority of the work to come to the fore.

Looking at images of other people, looking at other people working with images and paintings made by others, led to looking at images taken by others, and in my final year I developed a body of work in response to images I found while researching Vernon Lee's archive. Adopting a position of 'being led by others' resulted in my methodological approach mirroring Vernon's. Working with her images and reading her treatise 'Beauty and Ugliness' on 'motor empathy' moved me to pursue a version of my own kinaesthetic approach asking artist Nicola Singh and art anthropologist Julie Crawshaw to respond with gestures to Vernon's objects.

Method in the writing

It will hopefully become apparent that I have embedded the practice within the thesis in such a way that it *unfolds* or reveals through regular attention to specific details in the work. As such artworks are written about from a variety of angles, articulating subtle shifts. Following my approach to working with others the research 'in practice' and 'in writing' becomes clearer through *long looking*. Therefore, how I have approached the research and how I have written about it are intertwined. There are a number of strategies that reveal this connection and attempt to invoke different kinds of attention in the reader. Letter writing is one; I use letters within the written component as a way of engaging a more intimate tone, similarly in the practice, the private letters of Vernon Lee and Kit

Ansthusen Thomson provided the motivation to make *My Dearie Dearie*. Following or echoing Vernon Lee's approach I use samples of auto-ethnographic writing to recount my own empathic encounters with artworks.

Empathy provides direction; it offers us the position of looking out from the perspective of others. To reflect this in the writing I have adopted the perspective of viewing work from the position of the artist making artwork, and the perspective of audience-viewer. This places me in the centre of a triangulated perspective, which, while seemingly complex, is necessary to sketch out the kinds of 'orientations' experienced in empathic viewing. These orientations are fluid and so the writing oscillates, at one time I write as artist maker, and the next as a viewer engaging with the work in front of me. These shifts reflect an intersubjective approach to the writing, where adopting perspective is a fundamentally empathic practice.

Method in material

'I also wanted to write, to make a video that would take root in words. I worked on a first video, *Fifty Minutes*, for three years, and put myself in it more out of convenience, and so, without actually intending it, found myself working figuratively again'¹⁴ Here, Moyra Davey discusses her process of making performance to camera videos as a matter of contingency, driven by a writing process, it feels like familiar territory, indeed she could be describing my approach making the video work for *Backstory*. Her honest appraisal of the unplanned nature of that process is refreshing, but also points to the value of emergent material responses. For Davey it meant a reintroduction of the figure to her work, for me it was the slow retreat of my figure from in front of the camera to behind it.

¹⁴ Moyra. Davey, *Moyra Davey: I'm Your Fan* (London: Camden Arts Centre, 2014). p.29

While the video camera is always present, in my work, there is never just one material approach so it might be easier to say that using a variety of materials is the method of choice. With each body of work, I am influenced or led by an initial image or photograph to pursue certain materials in response. For *Backstory* the camera was turned as if to reflect the idea of 'looking out from' and it was recognizing the significance of this that alerted me to the possibilities of *orientation* as an empathic method. At times, when I am making work the camera is used as an extension of my body, in *Scene Three: Where it is Written* it reflects the interior, secret workings of the person manoeuvring the camera to write a message on a lake. In *In The Hands of Others* and *Vernon's Right Hand*, images are held up at an angle for the benefit of an imagined viewer, or following the language I have developed to describe these subtle shifts, they are *inclined* towards the viewer. My intention is that the camera orientation and movement, or at times the still concentrated gaze of the camera will find a correspondence with our body. As Jennifer Barker notes, 'the film's gesture...demands a reply of some kind from the attentive spectator's body. It evokes a corresponding but not pre-determined, gesture from our bodies.'¹⁵ But it is not just the motion of the camera that provokes this analogous response, the screen itself is a kind of threshold and in my films it is often used as a material that constructs a particular kind of encounter. For the installation of *In the Hands of Others* in Burt Hall, screens were made of paper poised on mechanical easels prompting the viewer to attend to the particularities of screen and its site.

In an effort to explore potential physical responses to my films I asked visitors to a screening of *My Dearie Dearie* at the Hatton Gallery (2018) (see Portfolio of Work p. 26), to make blind drawings, moving both hands in response to the film while not looking at the paper. In this iteration of the work the drawings manifest a core concern for this

¹⁵ Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

research project; these drawings reflect gestures of attention, the gestures of empathic *feeling with* that drive this enquiry.

Thesis Structure

In empathy we are orientated toward and into the other, we adopt their viewpoint as our ‘zero point of orientation’¹⁶ and so each chapter is foregrounded with short auto-ethnographic episodes that describe encounters that I have had with art, during the process of undertaking this investigation. My aim in including these is to situate the reader in a space with objects and images of people and to root the research in the experience of art. Every section is broken into three main parts each of which engage with a pairing of ideas (for example *Objects and Thresholds, Intimacy and Encounter*).

Section 1-*You and Objects*, will establish an overview of the field of enquiry, directing the readers’ attention toward art objects, discussing photographs, events, films and the projection screen. I use this chapter to explore empathic experiences with art objects, both my own and others, and while aspects of my artwork come into focus, this chapter does not discuss my practice at length. In empathic terms, this chapter is used to build a sense of feeling *with* the work and ideas for the reader.

The second Section 2-*You and Me* focuses closely on the body and the intersubjective qualities of empathy. It explores the condition of feeling with and being with, and considers intimacy and gesture as methodological constructs through which we might achieve an empathic sense of feeling into. In this chapter I endeavour to engage in a close

¹⁶ Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*.

reading of my practice, and to examine the affects that empathic attention produces. In doing this I have tried to establish a stronger sense of feeling *into* the work for the reader. The final Section 3 – *You*, is reserved for the conclusion, a back-view, reflecting on what I have gleaned from this research journey and what further questions it assembles.

Each chapter also has a letter to Edith Stein at the outset; structurally, the letters to Edith invoke questions pursued in the chapter that follows them. The tone of familiarity brought about through writing letters will be discussed further in Section 2 Part III *Gesture and the hands of others*.

The current popular understanding of empathy is that it is a means to understand another person¹⁷ rarely is it discussed as a method for understanding or engaging with objects, even less art. However, in the nineteenth century this was not an uncommon proposition and indeed was deemed to be the foundation for human aesthetic response¹⁸. In Section 1 Part II *Objects and Thresholds*, I outline the history of this relationship between art and empathy, looking at the work of Theodore Lipps, Edith Stein and Vernon Lee. Section 1 Part III *Orientations and Inclinations* examines some contemporary theories of simulation considering how these affect our perception of the object before us. The final part of the first section, *Screens and Loops*, examines the use of projection screens and considers how these devices frame and affect our encounter with the image (in my practice and that of others).

Section 2 Part II *Object other and Trying on* introduces the place of the body in my work and pursues an in-depth examination of ideas of embodiment and analogy, using them as instances that explore perspective shift. In Part III *Gesture and the Hands of Others I*

¹⁷ See articles in popular magazines such as <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/empathy> where empathy is defined as the ‘experience of understanding another person's thoughts’

¹⁸ See Gregory Curries essay *Empathy for Objects* for a broader discussion of Lipps’ theories

examine acts of inclination and attention in my practice and reflect on where they bring about qualities of feeling with and into. Part IV *Intimacy and Encounter* explores the idea of detail as a marker of a certain kind of attention, through the close-up in film and video reflecting on Deleuze's notion of the 'affection image'.

Literature Review

While there is little contemporary writing that specifically links contemporary art practice¹⁹ and empathic engagement, 19th Century philosophy and aesthetics gave considerable attention to the role of empathy in understanding our relationship to art, a notion that fell out of favour until very recently. My purpose in the review that follows is to examine some of those earlier texts, in order to explore the potential that, in some respects, these ideas might endure with regards to contemporary art.

In putting this review together, I find myself straddling a number of unfamiliar territories. Handling language that is not my own, that is often knotty and difficult. To support this, I regularly return to two key texts. Edith Stein's 'On the Problem of Empathy' (1916) and Vernon Lees 'Beauty and Ugliness' (1912) not because they are clear and digestible, in fact the opposite might be true of their Victorian phrasing, but because in their thinking, I can establish a space to peer into and out from the lives of these two women. Stein's unusual biography was captivating to me. She studied phenomenology under Edmund Husserl, whose work is seen to be a cornerstone of Continental philosophy. However, being a woman, he opposed her habilitation thesis (a prerequisite to teach in University at the time). Vernon Lee's appeal began at the outset. In order to be accepted in a male dominated world, she felt it necessary to adopt a man's name in order that her work might be taken seriously, this detail made me pursue her biography further. While she achieved critical acclaim as a writer of supernatural fiction, her philosophical work was often undermined by her male peers, in particular 'Beauty and Ugliness' co-authored with her

¹⁹ Daria Martin's book *Mirror Touch Synaesthesia, Thresholds of Empathy with Art*, OUP 2018, is the most significant publication to date. Arriving as it did at the end of my research journey it has been a useful compliment to this research.

partner Clementina Anstruther-Thomson²⁰. I recognize that my decision to engage with their works was in part influenced by a feeling that they needed to be revived.

Empathy and Aesthetics, a historical address

Here I will sketch out a historical context that explores the relationship between empathy and aesthetics along with texts that give focus to a consideration of empathy as a means of addressing and engaging with art.

Theodore Lipps a German Philosopher and aesthetician who coined the term *Einfühlung*, (later translated as empathy), first advanced the theory of empathy²¹. Lipps developed his concept from translating the work of philosopher David Hume and noting his theory on ‘sympathy’, used to illustrate the workings of optical illusions. It is important to note his influence as the originator/instigator of the concept and therefore his considerable influence on a number of the works that have informed my own research, notably that of Edith Stein and Vernon Lee. Lipps’ theory states that the work of art enhances our capacity for empathy in that ‘beauty derives from our sense of being able to identify with an object’.²² While Lipps’ idea of beauty is not of concern to this research, this notion of empathy as a mode or means to identify with an object is key and will be picked up in Section 2 (see *Object other and trying on*).

Another significant idea originating with Lipps is his observation, made in 1903, that empathy is necessary ‘for our aesthetic appreciation of objects. It has to be understood as

²⁰ The reception to Beauty and Ugliness was frosty and they were accused of plagiarizing the work of Bernard Berenson (see Kirsty Buntings essay on Vernon Lee).

²¹ Theodor Lipps, ‘Komik Und Humor: Eine Psychologische-Ästhetische Untersuchung’, accessed 13 May 2014, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/8298>.

²² Williams, Rhys W. from <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T092269>

the primary basis for recognising each other as minded creatures'.²³ If empathy supports awareness of others then it could be inferred that in the acknowledgement of this distinction lies a significant aspect of the empathetic paradigm; a recognition of the gap between self and other. This concept has far reaching implications with regards to psychoanalysis and cognitive behavioural studies – however in the thesis that follows I will restrict the consideration of this idea to reflect on the ways in which empathy, phenomenology and contemporary art practice intersect.

Another early proponent of the idea of empathy as a means to engage with the art object was aesthetician and art historian Wilhelm Worringer who committed his doctoral thesis to the study of the topic, in *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1908) (translated as *Abstraction and Empathy*, 1953).²⁴ His work was concerned with the juncture between abstraction and what he termed the art of 'empathy'. Taking his cue from Theodore Lipps, he considered this art of empathy to be artwork that displayed a 'naturalistic' style. This hypothesis gained support from many artists, in particular early British Modernists and it is suggested that his text, celebrating as it did the geometric abstract form, was the primary stimulus to Vorticism.²⁵ His definitions and distinctions might seem reductive to our contemporary understanding. He defines abstraction as being connected to 'primitive' art, empathy he says, on the other hand exposes a tendency to realism. However, Worringer is keen to make us aware that this is not an imitative tendency. In his argument, our relationship to the realistic style is that of 'objectified self enjoyment'²⁶, and that the artist creates this work in a state of harmony with the world. In contrast he sees the drive to create abstract form as expressing a wholly altered worldview, one that seeks to express insecurity or

²³ Rader, M.M., 1979, *A modern book of esthetics: an anthology*, Thomson Learning; 5Rev Ed edition

²⁴ The book's full title; *Abstraction and empathy: a contribution to the psychology of style*

²⁵ eds. Antliff, M. & Klein, S., 2013, *Vorticism: new perspectives*, Oxford Uni Press, Oxford, New York, p.53.

²⁶ Worringer, W. 1963, *Abstraction and Empathy, a contribution to the psychology of style*, Routledge, London (first ed.1908), p. 14

social anxiety. In recognizing the importance of the sociological dimension in the creation of art this text offered validation to Early German Expressionist seeking to communicate a growing sense of alienation from an increasingly industrialized world. However, it is Worringer's key conclusions that are of most relevance here, that empathy is bound inextricably to the reception of the art object. In his view we see ourselves reflected in the art object.

In promoting his thesis, it seems Worringer and indeed Lipps were at pains to deliver some kind of epistemological approach (though it is not clear that this was their explicit intention). However, it is certain that Worringer was attempting to describe an act of consciousness, a way of engaging with the art object that goes beyond intellectual or material analysis. W. Wolfgang Holdheim writing about Worringer, suggests that 'The term 'phenomenological' seems not to have been at his disposal. But it occasionally happens to the great (and to them alone-the epigones invariably have the opposite problem) that the implications of their thought outstrip their vocabulary.'²⁷ So for the purpose of this thesis, while Worringer's work delivers a distilled version of empathic vision, his focus on the contrast between abstraction and naturalism, limits the potential of empathy as an experience relevant to contemporary art practice. It can be argued that his focus on the differences in styles outweighs and therefore overshadows, what might be the most revelatory of his conclusions, that empathy is a key aspect in the perception and absorption of the art object, a concept that this enquiry seeks to elucidate more fully in the context of contemporary practice.

²⁷ Ibid., p.343

Empathy and a phenomenological perspective

While phenomenology was not within reach of the earlier texts I have mentioned, it has formed a back ground to the written element of this research. Phenomenology is the study of the structures and experience of consciousness that, as Husserl might have it, explores the idea that ‘consciousness is consciousness *of* something transcendent to itself’²⁸ Phenomenology explores empathy as an intuitive and foundational experience. It recognizes that it takes different forms and is experienced on different levels²⁹.

Edith Stein’s ‘On The Problem of Empathy’³⁰ presents an argument restricted to the topic of empathy and phenomenology. To begin she pursues a philosophical reduction with purpose of clarifying the various modes in which empathy is conceived, aesthetic, cognitive, ethical etc. and in doing so attempts to formulate a more exacting elucidation of it via the phenomenological field. Vernon Lee offers an account of proprioceptive approaches to art objects in her book ‘Beauty and Ugliness’³¹. Her approach to aesthetics, influenced by Lipps, explored ‘motor’ responses to works of art and something she called a ‘mimetic connection between perception and motion’.³² In her research experiments with Clementina Anstruther-Thomson she developed her theory of psychological aesthetics, heavily influenced by Lipps. Her method was to record sensation-based responses to specific art objects. ‘Lee took on the role of the research subject and investigator in documenting her own and others’ perceptual and bodily responses to art’³³

This concrete, corporeal attitude to aesthetic understanding is a little limited. However this

²⁸ Matheson Russell, *Husserl: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Continuum’s Guides for the Perplexed (London ; New York, NY: Continuum, 2006). p.18

²⁹ See Stein’s consideration of empathic ‘stages’

³⁰ Stein, Edith, 1989, *On The Problem of Empathy*, ICS Publications, Washington D.C., 3rd rev., ed.

³¹ Vernon Lee and Clementina Anstruther-Thomson, *Beauty & Ugliness: And Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics*, 2012.

³² Lee and Anstruther-Thomson. p. 236

³³ Lanzoni, Susan, *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 45(4), 330–354 Fall 2009

thesis considers Lee's intention, to develop a 'kinaesthetics of art reception that moved the body in a manner both emotional and actual'³⁴ provides a key foundation to understanding the affect of empathic attention. As such I have applied her methods in making the work *My Dearie Dearie* that I will discuss at length in Section 2 pt. IV *Intimacy and Encounter*.

Both Lee and Stein argue for the value of the sensory. Stein's descriptions champion this as a key aspect in understanding our experience of things. In her introduction to Stein, Waltraut Stein (her grand niece) says; 'She begins by maintaining that sensations are among the real constituents of consciousness, which means that they cannot be suspended or doubted any more than the cogito can.' 'They therefore have one foot so to speak in the realm of pure consciousness, the realm of the non-extended in this discussion. On the other hand, sensations are always given at some place in the living body.'³⁵This idea that sensations are doubly given to us, that they straddle the real living body and that they are folded into consciousness, is a key consideration for this thesis and will be returned to in Section 2, *Intimacy and Encounter*.

The crucial conclusion of Stein's thesis throws new light on how we might conceive of the workings of empathy, she states; 'that empathy is not perception, representation nor a neutral positing, but sui generis. It is an experience of being led by the foreign'³⁶ experience'.³⁷ This notion of empathy as a unique foundational experience is where the very act of empathy is a profound and primary experience. Contemporary philosopher and phenomenologist Dan Zahavi who has written extensively about empathy explains that; 'For the phenomenologists, empathy is not simply the having of the mental state (like in contagion), nor is it a question of literally sharing the mental state with some- body

³⁴ Ibid p. 331

³⁵ Stein, Waltraut, Translator's Introduction, Stein, Edith, 1989, *On The Problem of Empathy*, ICS Publications, Washington D.C., 3rd rev., ed. p xviii

³⁶ Stein uses the term 'foreign experience' to denote the experience of others, or other than the self. You will see this term in quoted material from her regularly throughout the thesis. Please note that while it seems outmoded today to speak of the 'foreign experience' her text was written in 1916.

³⁷ Ibid., p.xvii

else’... ‘It is a distinctive form of other-directed intentionality, distinct from both self-awareness and ordinary object-intentionality, which allows foreign experiences to disclose themselves as foreign rather than as own.’³⁸ So here Zahavi clarifies the phenomenological position, that empathy is uniquely the experience of the consciousness of another. Throughout the thesis I have used this notion of the distinctive quality of empathy and examined it through art practice, comparing it with other experiences, such as imagination, to see where they differ.

Empathy, perception and the sensed body

Empathy is uniquely bound up in the act of perception. Gregory Currie and Ian Ravenscroft³⁹ consider it to be an imaginative state whereby we are able to reconstruct the mental states of other people. This is what Peter Goldie refers to as ‘perspective shift’⁴⁰, a term I use throughout the thesis to define an empathic method for engaging with the work, whereby viewers take on the imagined state of the figure within the spatio-temporal framework of the work presented. But this is not to suggest that empathy and perception are one and the same. The altered state of perception that empathy offers is explored by Stein, she says; ‘Perception has its object before it in embodied givenness; empathy does not. But both have their object itself there and meet it directly where it is anchored in the continuity of being.’⁴¹ So empathy is differentiated from perception in that perception responds to something present, we can empathise with things that are not. Though she draws the distinction between perception and empathy she does not deny the associated nature of the two. Stein’s in depth analysis undertakes a detailed consideration of the psychophysical being. Her contention is that it is empathy that allows us to experience and

³⁸ Dan Zahavi, ‘Empathy and Other-Directed Intentionality’, *Topoi* 33, no. 1 (April 2014): 129–42, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-013-9197-4>. p. 138

³⁹ Gregory Currie and Ian Ravenscroft, *Recreative Minds: Imagination in Philosophy and Psychology* (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴⁰ Coplan and Goldie, *Empathy*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19

understand our own nature. This, she argues, is probed through a close reading of the sensed living body (Leib) and the body of the outer world as seen and recognized by others (Körper). It is clear from her text that the experience of empathy takes place in consciousness, thus both beyond and within the 'living body'.⁴² Framing empathy, and examining its affects in the body of the viewer and/or artist, notwithstanding its illusive qualities, its *with* and *into*, are central to this research practice.

Exploring the sensed body beyond Stein's interest I found parallels in the work of another more contemporary phenomenologist. American philosopher and phenomenologist Samuel Todes' doctoral thesis *Body and World*⁴³ provides a broader foundation for understanding perception as a phenomenological experience. His focus is on the body and the object in the material world, as distinct from the social and offers a reading of the intricate structure of the human body in relation to asymmetry, structure and perception. Todes's thesis is deceptively simple; that our bodies bear significant affect on our conscious experience of the world we live in. However, the impact of adopting such a specific point of orientation relative to objects and our experience of them has potential to reform our understanding of the limits of subjectivity. In summary his claim is that 'the human body is not merely a material thing found in the midst of other material things in the world, but that it is also, and moreover thereby, that material thing whose capacity to move itself generates and defines the whole world of human experience in which any material thing, including itself, can be found.'⁴⁴ The impact of these ideas on this research will be looked at in more detail when I look at the Rückenfigur in Section 2 Part II *Object other and Trying on*.

⁴² A note to Stein's final chapter where she addresses the empathy and spiritual persons 'Consciousness as a correlate of the object world is not nature, but spirit.' Ibid., p. 91

⁴³ Todes, Samuel, 2001, *Body and World*, The MIT Press, Massachusetts, London

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 88

Empathy and the substitute

If we consider facets of empathy beyond the moving sensing body, it becomes a kind of parallel to the imaginative experience,⁴⁵ indeed connections can be drawn where empathy is seen as a form of substitution. We are used to hearing empathy described as an ‘in the shoes of’ experience, this is a simple metaphor for such an exchange.

Though the topic is complex, Todes offers many grounded examples that lead us to understand how our perceptual self is interchangeable with our imaginative self. He uses the example of seeing someone from behind and construing from this vantage point whether or not they might be an attractive person. In this instance we have no actual evidence but we have ‘proxy-evidence’ - our imagined version of them.

From this angle we come close to an idea of active spectatorship, percipients that engage and create. Here, I venture, is a phenomenological definition of what it is to be an active spectator; ‘As a *single* human being capable of transforming himself at will from an active percipient into a productive creator of his own imagination, and back again, we are individuals who ‘have’ both our embodied perceptual selves and our disembodied imaginative selves viz., our imagination.’⁴⁶ The illustrated union between the embodied and disembodied bears a striking comparison to the kind of shift in perspective that Worringer (whom I mentioned at the start of this review) named as the empathizing active subject.⁴⁷ As such the empathic viewer is an actively engaged viewer, a viewer that is exploring what I will come to define through this thesis as ‘*with and into*’ of the image before them.

⁴⁵ Edith Stein’s account introduces a closer examination of imagination and its comparative links to empathy in later chapters and through the work (see above).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132

⁴⁷ Holdheim, W. W., 1979, *Wilhelm Worringer and the Polarity of Understanding*, *Boundary* 2, 8, p. 341, ref., Worringer p. 21

The Image and the Empathic Viewer

In the framework of this research this moving, sensing, empathizing body is a body filmed and photographed and often ‘assembled’ with others. As far back as 1908 Wilhelm Worringer considered that the viewer was active and engaged and that ‘the viewer’s collaboration always pertains to empathy’⁴⁸. For Stein empathy is a unique experience triggered and responsive to the experience of the other. It seems pertinent then to consider art that is formed in this context, one that is open to the collaborative, and the other.

If the empathic viewer is a collaborator, they are also an interpreter, assembling and associating and - through this process - entering into what is put in front of them. There are two sides to this relationship of course; the viewer and the artwork. Here I wish to consider artwork that is relational, that explicitly invites the participation of the viewer, draws them into and makes them a part of the work. The participatory or the social turn in contemporary art is well documented, not least by Claire Bishop who in her edited volume ‘Participation’, by now a staple of the art school degree program, examines the three key concerns for the participatory model ‘activation; authorship; community’⁴⁹. In it, Italian semiotician, Umberto Eco in *The Poetics of the Open Work* from 1962⁵⁰ explores the contingent nature of the open-ended artwork. He examines music and literature that has at its heart a sense of the viewer’s role in forming the work, either through collaboration or translation. In defining the open work he suggests that every work of art is open to interpretation and that ‘In fact the form of the work of art gains its aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed and understood.’⁵¹ While this research in practice certainly foregrounds the

⁴⁸ Holdheim, W. W., 1979, Wilhelm Worringer and the Polarity of Understanding, *Boundary* 2, 8, p. 342

⁴⁹ Claire Bishop, *Participation* (London; Cambridge, Mass.: Whitechapel ; MIT Press, 2006). p. 12

⁵⁰ Eco, Umberto, 1962, *The Poetics of The Open Work*, here reprinted in *Participation*, ed. Claire Bishop, 2006, MIT Press Massachusetts, London, p. 20-40

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22

qualities of active viewing in so much as empathy is innately social, it is also determinedly focused on maintaining the place of the image, the photograph, the film. In that respect there is a persistent background framework that positions the concept of image as affective, as an aperture that connects us. As such Roland Barthes notion of *punctum*⁵² in his book *Camera Lucida*, plays a role in how the image is conceived of here. Barthes uses the idea of ‘punctum’ to describe the personal affective qualities an image holds for the viewer. The French Philosopher, Jacques Rancière’s essay ‘The Future of The Image’⁵³ might be seen as a curious companion to Eco’s logic, however at points it offers contemporary revisions to the nature of the open work. Examples of where his discussion mirrors Eco’s are most apparent in his description of the ‘metamorphic image’⁵⁴ and its concern with the ‘active spectator’. Rancière in his close examination of the image, tells us that separating and identifying the sediments of influence and association are key to our contemporary understanding of the image. It seems Rancière adopts this approach in order that we might reframe our appreciation for the mechanisms of understanding the image and its nestedness. However, as I have indicated, while these debates form a background rationale to the thesis, providing emphasis on the active and affective nature of viewing, I will not discuss them in any great detail.

Image, Empathy, Affect

Stein refers to the ‘leib’ or sensed body and Todes the corporeal (embodied perceptual self), clearly in the phenomenological argument outlined above there is a consideration of the physical or the affect of experience on the body. However neither of these arguments is specifically concerned with the relationship between art and the body. Eco explores the modalities and historical contexts where art exists in the social realm, *in becoming*.

⁵² Roland Barthes Howard, Richard, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000).

⁵³ Rancière, Jacques, 2009, *The Future of The Image*, Verso, London, New York.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25

However, this does not address the position of the reader/audience. So there is a gap between theorizing how the object comes to be felt or imagined by a given person and a considered analysis of the viewers' experience of the object. It is through this aperture that my research finds traction. To explore this, I have looked to the work of artist and filmmaker Daria Martin, and writer Jill Bennett both of who unite two key interests of this research by addressing this gap and placing empathy at the centre of a reading of contemporary art practice.

Bennett charts, through a carefully reasoned analysis, the unique nature of visual language in transferring affect. In doing this she explores how visual arts' sensed or affective capacity might contribute to understanding the effects of trauma. She details her intentions as striving to show 'how, by realizing a way of seeing and feeling, this art makes a particular kind of contribution to thought, and to politics specifically: how certain conjunctions of affective and critical operations might constitute the basis for something we can call *empathic vision*'⁵⁵

So what are these certain affective and critical conjunctions and can they be applied more broadly, beyond the trauma image? Bennett's work has resonance with this research particularly when she considers the ways in which artists have deliberately tried to cultivate a visual language, which places the viewer in 'direct engagement with sensation'.⁵⁶ She defines empathy as 'a distinctive combination of affective and intellectual operations, but also by a dynamic oscillation, 'a constant tension of going to and fro'...that process of surrender but also the *catch* that transforms your perception'⁵⁷

This idea of oscillating between two states resonates with Todes' description of the interchangeable qualities of the perceptual and imagined self. That empathy is generated

⁵⁵ Bennett, Jill, 2005, *Empathic Vision: affect, trauma and contemporary art*, Stanford University Press, California.p. 21

⁵⁶ Bennett, Jill, 2005, *Empathic Vision: affect, trauma and contemporary art*, Stanford University Press, California.p. 7

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10 Here the quotation is from Nikos Papastergiadis, 2002

by the freedom to move between these two states seems a key consideration. The artwork Bennett considers then avoids dogma, having the capacity to both move audiences and leave room for doubt.

Moving towards the conclusion of this review artist Daria Martin's book *Mirror Touch Synaesthesia, Thresholds of Empathy and Art*⁵⁸, which gathers text from a cross-disciplinary survey of artists, neuroscientists and philosophers along with first hand responses from synaesthetics themselves to examine a particular form of 'physical empathy'⁵⁹ needs to be mentioned. Martin's work finds particular accord with this thesis not least because its insights are derived from her own film based art practice, but also in a cross over of approach. Within this volume essays from Giuliana Bruno's essay considering the place of the screen as a threshold offers useful reference points for my own screen-based explorations, see Section 1 Part IV *Screens and Loops*, while curator Catherine Wood and Professor Sha Xin Wei's discussion about the experience of encountering art being a 'space of training your perception'⁶⁰, echoes a key consideration within my research whereby attention is conceived of as 'a form of participation'⁶¹.

Finally, and briefly, Jennifer M. Barker's 'The Tactile Eye' widens the phenomenological approach to active spectatorship. While film theory is only tangentially related there are clear parallels with Barker's interests in regard to my video practice, which deepens the argument. Her writing engages with the details of our embodied engagement with film in what she terms 'musculature empathy' and 'sensuous empathy'⁶² exploring the vicarious experience viewers have with the 'film's body'. While Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the encounter and the experience of art as affect, as '*a bloc of sensations*, waiting to be

⁵⁸ Daria Martin, *Mirror-Touch: Thresholds of Empathy with Art* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁵⁹ Martin.

⁶⁰ Martin. p. 277

⁶¹ Martin. p. 277

⁶² Barker, *The Tactile Eye. Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (University of California Press, 2009)

reactivated by a spectator or participant.’ as analysed in Simon O’Sullivan’s work, in particular ‘Objects and Affects’⁶³ with Jorella Andrews has also been influential. Here the affective qualities of art and art objects are championed over the signifying, coded ‘meanings.’ O’Sullivan also looks to Bergson and considers his approach to defining attention as a ‘suspension of normal motor activity’⁶⁴ which for the purpose of this research provides a useful backdrop to my work with Vernon Lee’s ideas of proprioception and an expanded version of spectatorship.

Conclusion

As an introduction to the research I have focused on where empathy and art meet and while this literature survey is by no means exhaustive it illustrates the scope of the research by highlighting key texts. The roots of the research lie in aesthetic philosophy of the 19th Century where ideas of aesthetic resonance were popular. I have used this as a background to exploring the link between empathy and affect in contemporary art practice where empathy, as I conceive of it in this research project, becomes a mode of active attention. While the reach may seem broad, extending from historic to contemporary texts, the purpose of this review is to support a discussion of the artwork undertaken. Crucially, in straddling this gap it exposes a hole to fill, it frames a new approach to our understanding of empathy, positing that empathic attention can be seen both as a method of making artwork and as a means to understand our embodied response to art.

⁶³ Jorella Andrews and Simon O’Sullivan, *Objects and Affects* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013).

⁶⁴ Andrews and O’Sullivan.

Section 1

You and Objects

You enter the space through a large creaking metal door. It is December and yet colder inside than out, your fingers feel the pinch and so you push them inside your pockets. You are met with a wall full of names, some of whom you recognize as local writers, you pick up a leaflet and a map of the space. Inside, the space is lit with projection screens, so far you can see at least three, on the closest one, there is the figure of a woman with her back to you. You take a seat in front of the screen and watch for a time, following the repeated action of the figure as she lifts a scarf off her head, then another and another. To your right a scarf of similar colour, pattern and quality is draped, hanging from the wall. You feel an urge to try it on, mimic the screen, and blanket yourself against this cold space. Beyond the scarf, on the wall you see a small framed photograph, it appears to be of the woman in the video, although you can't be sure. You become aware that the screen you are looking at is on legs and after a time your attention is drawn to the screen behind it. It is filled with the image of a large expanse of water, you stand and walk over to it, as you do a duck crosses the screen slowly and deliberately. In the corner of the space you notice a framed photograph on the wall, beside it a book. You walk over to take a closer look. You are not sure but it seems to be the same woman, only on closer inspection she seems older, her shoulders more hunched, waiting.

Above I describe entering Catalyst Art Gallery, Belfast, on the occasion of my exhibition *Backstory* (2013), a date which also marks the outset of the research journey pursued in this thesis. The imagined visitor encounters a number of things in this snapshot, a list of writer's names, a photograph, a series of overlapping screens with the figure of woman on one and a lake on another, video on a loop and a scarf. The orchestration of these artworks in the space, offers a particular kind of focus to the ensuing thesis. The screens are layered, the objects in the space are not all visible at once. For the imagined viewer above, some aspects of the exhibition come into sharp focus, some sit to the periphery. Fundamentally, this short text above offers you, the reader, an orientation both within the exhibition described and for the structure of the text that follows here. It positions the reader in a space, looking out from the perspective of another, examining their attention to the objects they encounter. In doing so it echoes the core conviction of this thesis that empathic attention is folded into our engagement with works of art.

In the following Section - *You and Objects*, you will be introduced to a number of ideas concerned with articulating empathic connections to art objects. Both historic, tracing the origin of the word empathy and its entanglement with aesthetics, and through discussing art works that have been made in response to the questions posed by this enquiry. To do that I examine artworks and the devices used to install art works, that engage the experience of empathy as described in phenomenological accounts. Section 1 Part II *Objects and thresholds* introduces the history of empathy and aesthetics looking at the diverging approaches of Theodore Lipps and Vernon Lee and considers where the art object might act as a bridge to others. In Section 1 Part III *Orientations and Inclinations* I look at current thinking around empathic engagement through simulation and perception

with reference to Edith Stein, Gregory Currie and Dan Zahavi and its relevance to art objects, particularly with regard to video works and the use of point of view. Section 1 Part IV *Screens and Loops* extends these ideas to embrace the screen object (by which I mean projection screens). The chapter leaves us with the question of whether in this instance empathy might be seen as a loop reflecting Edith Stein's assertion that empathy allows for a fuller understanding not only of the other but of our own nature.

This section - *You and Objects*, should be read as a guided encounter with various objects and various ideas of empathic vision. Here, feeling, perceiving and experiencing the art object, reflect empathic qualities. However, as with any empathic experience there is no settling down, there is oscillation, there is the one within the other, within the one within the other. You will encounter a number of characters, artists, philosophers and writers. The chapter opens with a letter to one of these characters, philosopher Edith Stein.

Section 1

Part I

Dear Edith 1(How Can I Know This Object?)

An effort to define empathic art practices

Dear Edith,

It seems that the very idea of definition holds a problem. Definition is not porous or forgiving, it is not open or uncertain. It is certainty bounded by language.

So this letter begins with a self-conscious exercise in failure.

How might I begin to define where empathy resides in the work? Is it, as Lipps would have it, in some magical optical effort on behalf of the object? Is it 'being formed by me, by my inner activity'⁶⁵? Or does it reside in the other, the viewer that I call on to perform what Peter Goldie terms a 'perspective shift'⁶⁶? Or is it in less perceptible places, in the call to engage, the need for intersubjective experience and the interstices that exist between me the artist, and those I choose to follow and observe.

Perhaps I should begin with what is most plain, most apparent, by describing the moment when it first occurred to me, the affect of an artwork on my 'self', on my inner activity. In the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, 2005 at an Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) exhibition I came upon a small sketch. A self-portrait of the artist, a half torso, titled; 'Self Portrait of the sick Dürer', (1512-13) it sits somewhere between drawing and diagram, letter and palimpsest. Dürer gazes side long at the viewer, returns my gaze, his modest figure stands with a half twist and his left hand is held behind his back in a gesture to expose. With his

⁶⁵ Lipps, 'Komik Und Humor: Eine Psychologische-Ästhetische Untersuchung'.

⁶⁶ Coplan and Goldie, *Empathy*.

right hand he points to his lower abdomen and there circled is a painted yellow mark, the point of his pain. In the top right hand corner he has written these words in German to his physician; “ There where the yellow spot is and the finger points, there it hurts me” .⁶⁷ Somewhere between the gentle vulnerability and simplicity of the image, the delicacy of the line and translating these words it hit me - this image of this half man, his effort to translate this internal hurt and to map it, to bind it with pen and watercolour to make it manifest, hit me.

My focused shifted, from my position as audience to something more proximal, akin to a familial response, not simply compassion or sympathy. I became aware that my hand had shifted and held my corresponding side, an act of mimesis perhaps, but these are just the mechanics. In some way my senses were following his, exploring his, not his hurt, but his effort to explain his hurt - the problem of translation.

‘The artist assembles all possible modes of signification to refer to, and specify, his pain: language, in the inscription’...’bodily symptom in the yellow spot portrayed on likeness’s side; pictorial mimesis, in the self-portrait proper; gesture, in the index finger that points to the trouble; and diagrammatic mark, in the circle that delimit the hurt. In these multiple signs, we sense not so much the efficacy of the deictic in Dürer’s art as its inadequacy for articulating what ails him. For the hurt itself, that experience toward which all representations refer, remains quintessentially accessible only to the body in pain.’⁶⁸

So as Koerner (see above) would have it, this is an impossible task, even Dürer, the master printer, can find no facsimile for his pain. As you, Edith, suggest I can ‘never get

⁶⁷ Koerner, Joseph Leo, *The Moment of Self Portraiture in German Renaissance Art*, p. 177

⁶⁸ Koerner, Joseph p. 177

an “orientation” where the pain itself is primordially given⁶⁹. However, I can grasp at the effort to translate it, to make it known. Is it, therefore, simply an experience of reflection? Or a test in translation? Or am I coming closer to this half figure, somehow feeling how he feels?

What could close a 500-year gap? How do I begin to explore this causal relationship? What is it that allows me to move between here and now and then and he? What affords this intersubjective thought? Is it between us (Dürer and I)? Or is it between me and this object, this image? It might be said that, at times ‘we often feel at one with our objects’,⁷⁰ however it seems clear to me that this sense is not oneness, it lacks that kind of ease. Nor is it some kind of sublimation, I have not become this object, and it is not my object. I did not create it, nor do not hold it in my hands; it sits behind protective glass, dimly lit, and therefore I have no corporeal connection. It is not the thing that I embody, it is the sensation it describes or perhaps produces. Perhaps it is closer to what J.J. Charlesworth infers when writing about Mark Leckey’s work. He says it is less about a desire for the object and more about a desire to be the object, ‘flirting with the possibility of becoming other to oneself’⁷¹. This encounter moves beyond the perception of this object before me and into the body that draws, into something like a fictive state. And then, just as quickly, it moves back again.

I am aware of my response my orientation toward and into, and conversely of myself. Bennett talks of the imitatio, those who flagellate in order to draw themselves closer to Christ⁷². I have no such compunction as I stand here, yet there is a movement to imitate, which is as Bennett describes, the affect of feeling rather than seeing. However, the

⁶⁹ Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, p. 7.

⁷⁰ Sherry Turkle, ed., *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*, 1. paperback edition (Cambridge, Mass. London, England: MIT Press, 2011).

⁷¹ J.J. Charlesworth, ‘Mark Leckey, by J.J. Charlesworth / Art Review’, accessed 11 December 2014, http://artreview.com/features/summer_2014_feature_mark_leckey/.

⁷² Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2005), p.36.

*'affective detail' is not 'the wound', at least not the manifest one. Here in front of this image, the wound, metaphorically speaking, is his effort to translate his pain. Or is it the futility of this translation? Or perhaps it is the impossibly latent nature of this experience that produces the affect. Deleuze says that, for Proust 'truth is never the product of a prior disposition but the result of a violence in thought. The explicit and conventional significations are never profound; the only profound meaning is the one that is enveloped, implicated in an external sign.'*⁷³ *Though whether this experience has the character of truth is unclear to me. However, perhaps the truth of the experience, of this affect, is all that I really need to consider.*

*What is this Edith, this sense, and this experience? And how will I recognize it if it is 'enveloped' in another? I have moved from definition into illustration but still I am not certain of this sense. Can phenomenology describe it in terms that might give it a place, map it with a yellow bounded circle to show where this sensation is given? Is it enough to know that this experience is unique, and accept that it has 'the character of doubt, conjecture, or possibility, but never the character of being.'*⁷⁴

Yours Sincerely,

Fiona

⁷³ Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, p. 9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9

Section 1

Part II

Objects and thresholds

She moves into the space, slowing in the dark, shuffling a little. Behind her is a wall, no a screen of sorts, running her fingers over the surface it feels warm, like felt.

Here I want to introduce some divergent approaches to empathy through looking more closely at Lipps and Lee to understand how they approached empathy to objects. I also want to discuss my ideas of *feeling with* and *feeling into* in more detail and address how they help shape empathic attention with particular regard for the photographic object.

‘Never the character of being’⁷⁵

Edith Stein’s assertion that empathy never has the character of being⁷⁶ where being is a wholly embodied state, brings our attention to a profound and unequivocal quality of empathy, it is allusive and referential; it is *not* being. It is somehow folded *into* being, where folding offers a kind of topological complexity and a focus towards the inner world. It might be *being* reflected; the intersubjective sense of an emotional state in another that mirrors something we know we have experienced before. Or it might be *being* projected; a version of the self transferred upon another and so changed in form. However, in following her argument it is more likely that Stein was referring to empathy as a unique state, an alternative state of being, where a kind of transcendence into the interior world of the other is possible. For Stein it was a deeply attentive way of thinking about the other, as

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.9

⁷⁶ Here Stein is referring to being as a wholly embodied state.

such it exists as an extended experience of being, enfolded and hidden from view it oscillates between our body and the body of the other, it acts as an extension of our feelings of embodiment. Its chimeric quality and depth means that it is hidden and often folded into other states.

In summary, Stein's concept provides us with an approach to empathy where a holistic approach to 'being-in-empathy' offers us an experience that hovers just beyond the body. The concepts of reflection and projection will be elaborated upon further in the thesis and in Section 2 Part II *Object other and Trying On*, will focus more closely on mirroring. Here, in the section that follows, I will address encounters with artworks that help to elucidate empathy's hidden qualities.

Feel with Feel Into

In the preceding letter to Edith, I detail an experience of an object, a drawing, which brought about a profound awareness of the affect of an artwork on both my physical and mental state. The affect might have been brought to bear by the quality of line, the frailty of the paper it was drawn on, the fading yellow, the text that attempts to name the source of pain or all of the above. Whichever combination, what remains unclear is whether 'empathy' originates with the maker of the object, or with the object or with the viewer. For example, on viewing the Dürer drawing I had at first a feeling of sympathy, of being beside - perhaps owing to my own experiences as an artist. We can call this experience feeling *with*. When my hand moved my sense of *being with* shifted to something deeper; a quality whereby I have the sense of looking out from the perspective of the figure before me, which for the purpose of my argument we can call a state of *feeling into*, or empathy. These qualities of with and into are threaded throughout this thesis, and used as a way of

describing the perspective shift necessary to distinguish *sympathic* feeling from *empathic* feeling.

This Dürer drawing also offers a space for consideration of a set of possible relationships. To begin there is the relationship I felt to the material vulnerability, then to the sense of the fragility of Dürer's condition, and finally to his failed attempt to make his pain, a fundamentally obscure thing, translatable. In considering how this set of possible relationships and affects are constituted, it is worthwhile looking more closely at the thinking⁷⁷ around empathy and the object. Below, I examine how the object becomes a bridge to thinking and *feeling with* rather than simply seeing, and clarify where *feeling with* evolves and becomes *feeling into*.

'Material things, for Levi-Strauss, were goods-to-think-with and following the pun in French, they were good-to-think-with as well.'⁷⁸ For the purpose of this research it is worthwhile reflecting on the status of the object as something that extends beyond Strauss's thinking-with and becomes something to feel with, and potentially something to *feel into*. This distinction between thinking with and *feeling with* is important. It is not to say that thinking with does not produce affect, clearly it does, but the focus of this thesis is on the border where thinking and seeing encourage the sense of *feeling with* and on occasion *feeling into*.

As set out in the introduction there is an important distinction here between *with* and *into*. Throughout the thesis I use these words *with* and *into* as a way of describing a shift from an experience of sympathy to one of empathy. I will argue that in my practice making artworks often arises-out-of and brings-about a sense of *with*, and sometimes feeling *into* follows. We can distinguish semantically: *with*, suggests corresponding, accompanying,

⁷⁷ Here I am referring to the work of Edith Stein and Gregory Currie in particular.

⁷⁸ Turkle, *Evocative Objects*, p. 4.

alongside. However, as stated above, *feeling with* moves us closer to a definition of sympathy; where sympathy proposes a feeling of compassion for another. For example, as I recounted earlier, seeing the Dürer drawing moved-me-to-look-closer, I felt an affinity. This sense of affinity or *with*, might have simulative qualities or even a sense of feelings transferred to us, which could be described as compassion or fellow feeling. However, Stein clarifies ‘It is certain that as we are saturated by such “transferred” feelings, we live in them and thus ourselves. This prevents our turning toward or submerging ourselves in the foreign experience, which is the attitude characteristic of empathy’⁷⁹. So here Stein illustrates an acute difference between sympathy and empathy. In the following section I will look at how I engage with the photographic object to examine empathy, not simply as transference of feeling, but as an experience that offers a deeper sense of being immersed in the other’s experience. Empathy brings us closer to *into*.

Into, proposes direction toward or immersion in. Looking at the etymological roots of empathy offers more clarity. Following the origins of the word, empathy from the German *Einfühlung*; ‘The German term *Einfühlung* repeats the Greek compound: *Ein* is a prefix meaning “in” and a movement of penetration, immersion, or introduction from the outside to the inside (*hinein*) – although it can also allude to “one”, unity, unification, or fusion of two in one- and *Fühlung* from *Fühlen*, to feel, means feeling.”⁸⁰ So etymologically speaking, empathy is a type of cognition that offers a penetrating sense of entering *into*, a type of becoming. Thus, *feeling into* is a far more complex and layered experience than sharing a feeling or relating to the feelings of another.

⁷⁹ Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*.

⁸⁰ Hans Rainer Sepp and Lester E. Embree, eds., *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, Contributions to Phenomenology, v. 59 (Dordrecht ; New York: Springer, 2010). Pinotti, Andrea ‘Empathy’, p. 93

The Photograph as Threshold

Looking at my practice for qualities of this layered experience, it is certain that the qualities of thinking and feeling are not held in separate hands. In the practice of making artwork⁸¹ I often find photographs or images to which I experience a point of connection, an opening that launches a whole set of responses. Here, I want to explore that connection, the power the photograph has to move me. In my practice photographs are held, folded, pinned, reprinted, animated and reimagined. It may be that I find the photo object itself lacking, or want to peel back the layers and find something ‘more’ behind. A photograph can initiate a profound feeling of being alongside for me and on occasion that sense of *into*, discussed above. As such, engaging with the photo object becomes a driving force in directing this practice led research.

‘In this glum desert, suddenly a specific photograph reaches me; it animates me, and I animate it.’⁸² For years a photograph of a woman with her back turned facing a lake, that I had taken while on a residency, sat on shelves, pin boards and notebooks in and out of boxes, carried on a variety of studio moves. This image had an everyday quality to it. The quotidian nature of it appealed to me but it took me six years to decide what to do with it. Six years to feel familiar enough to make work about and with it, to feel my way into the image. The photograph I refer to provided the basis for the project *Backstory*. While it may seem inconsequential – artist’s studios are often full of images, notes, texts that form a kind of background noise; I feel however that this *long looking* offered an opportunity for a particular kind of familiarizing. This might be seen as a way of making myself at home with, and hence finding a way *into* the image, into its detail. Lyotard calls for patience, ‘a kind of meditative state that allows for, produces an opening for, an

⁸¹ Making here refers broadly to a studio practice where making is a bringing together of ideas in material form, sometimes filming, sometimes creating objects.

⁸² Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.20.

experience of the event understood as affect'⁸³ Being with the image for this long might be seen to be practicing patience, it certainly allowed for a particular experience of the image, a kind of familial feeling. It seems to me that time and patience allowed the sense of *feeling into* to take place. Perhaps this familiarising, which I am calling *long looking*, is actually a type of attention. As I conceive of it, it is a way of engaging that accrues experience of the photograph. *Long looking* is a key method for me. Long looking allows for affects to develop and build.

With enfolds into

As I have argued above, accretion of time, through *long looking* and *feeling with*, becomes a way of settling into, growing into, and a sort of germination of ideas. It strikes me that if we are with something for long enough it dwells, by that I mean it lives *with* us. It is my contention then that, in turn, if we absorb the image empathically it lives *in* us, it occupies us in the original sense of the word, and it seizes our attention.

This approach of *long looking*, also runs counter to our everyday experience of an image-saturated world in which images are swiped, animated, captured and deleted at a pace.

This is not an argument for *long looking*, being with or feeling with as a means to access some nostalgic past, but as a valid approach to bringing things into our present, to forming a counter cultural habit. Kris Cohen in his essay on Sharon Hayes's *Love Addresses* considers this to be the broken genre; 'People live constantly within the breakup of familiar forms; forms of speech, interaction and encounter that no longer seem to work or that don't work in the same way. Products (experiences, services, objects) are purchased, lived with, then go out of date, leaving us amidst the rubble of their broken remains.'⁸⁴ I

⁸³ O'Sullivan and Andrews and O'Sullivan, *Objects and Affects*. p. 14

⁸⁴ Kris Cohen, 'Our Broken Genres: Sharon Hayes's *Love Addresses* • 38 - Spring 2015 • Afterall', accessed 27 April 2018, https://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.38/our-broken-genres_sharon-hayes_s-love-addresses.

would add that our attention is also often broken, reduced to 280 characters. The idea of *long looking* becomes therefore exceptional and in my conception, a kind of redress. I will argue throughout this thesis that empathic response requires a particular kind of attention, which calls for a form of *long looking*. If this is the case then it operates in a way that might be seen as a form of repair, of bringing things back together.

So what do we mean when we say attention? Simone Weil in her essay *Attention and Will* suggests attention is a 'method for understanding images, symbols, etc. Not to try to interpret them, but to look at them till the light suddenly dawns.'⁸⁵ Here then, the sense of *feeling with* is a precursor, a bearer. If it is the precursor, then this places the photograph at the juncture to feeling into, it becomes the aperture. I would assert that in my practice there is always an object or image that acts as a threshold, something that initiates a train of thought and desire to make. In this case it is the photograph, through it I am connected to a space beyond the present. This begs a question if there is threshold to cross over, where does it lead? Is it a becoming of sorts? The photograph as threshold here, offers a particular kind of experience, a perspective shift, out of the present into the image.

With Pathema With Pathos

The photograph is not simply representation, I suggest, it carries with it sensation, affect. 'When *pathema* holds sway, the artist will no longer be Master of the Universe. He or she will be instead an attentive observer, a willing participant in, perhaps even a servant of, a system larger than the artist's individual, personal, particular needs.'⁸⁶ *Pathema* for Thompson in his discussion of the photograph, describes as 'acquiescence to what is

⁸⁵ Simone Weil and Siân Miles, *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2005).

⁸⁶ Jerry L Thompson, *Why Photography Matters*. (Place of publication not identified: Mit Press, 2016). p. 14

seen'⁸⁷ inferring passivity. In my conception while the experience may be immanent rather than explicit, being an 'attentive observer' demands active alertness.

Thompson talks of pathema and Barthes of pathos, 'I stopped, keeping with me, like a treasure, my desire or my grief; the anticipated essence of the Photograph could not, in my mind, be separated from the "pathos" of which, from first glance, it consists'⁸⁸ So for Barthes the 'pathos' is an intrinsic essential element, it is folded into the photograph. Like Barthes this affective quality the photograph carries is a cornerstone of my practice. In developing my work, the starting point is often a key image, which might be called a foundational image. Situating my research in empathic attention phrases like 'attention to detail' and 'If we observe carefully' become folded into my methodology. However, it is worth distinguishing attention more clearly, attention is more holistic than looking, it is sensation, it is physical. As I mentioned earlier if the photograph is the threshold which allows *feeling into* to take place then it is a threshold to a particular kind of affect, one that takes place in the body. I will now argue that, as a viewer, and in my case as a viewer and artist, our active attention to the photograph can cause a shift in perspective.

Henri Bergson defines attention as an 'adaptation of the body'; 'What is attention? In one point of view the essential effect of attention is to render perception more intense, and to spread out its details; regarded in its content, it would resolve itself into a certain magnifying of the intellectual state. But, on the other hand, consciousness testifies to an irreducible difference of form between this increase of intensity and that which is owing to a higher power of the external stimulus: it seems indeed to come from within, and to indicate a certain attitude adopted by the intellect.'⁸⁹ Therefore attentive observation is actively adopting an attitude; attention becomes a demeanour, a sensibility. In the context

⁸⁷ Thompson.

⁸⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*. p. 21

⁸⁹ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 1988). p. 120-121

of my research I would argue that where attention meets the photograph as a threshold, it opens as a space beyond the image, a space where ‘perspective shift’ *into* the image, is possible.

Approach the Threshold

I have argued above that in my practice, attention to the photograph can produce affect, an affect that is felt in the body and that allows for a shift *into* the image. Here I want to examine the texts of Theodore Lipps and Vernon Lee for details of how it is they claim that this shift into the object occurs. Both of these philosophers provide distinct arguments. Lipps rejected the kind of physical or ‘motor’ affect of empathy that Lee championed, however it is my contention that their work need not be seen in opposition, and that, in fact bringing these two approaches together is necessary in creating a layered understanding of empathy.

Lipps suggests that our engagement with objects requires a certain amount of self-projection. ‘While an aesthetic encounter with an object is a case of experiencing aesthetic qualities within ourselves, this self is an objectified self, a self which is ‘ideal’ but also ‘real’’. This would suggest that our aesthetic engagement is bound up with finding a kind of analogous ‘ideal’ self in the object of our attention. Where the photograph is a portrait of another person, it is easier to see how this kind of transference might occur, for example in *Backstory*, the photograph I described above, it was possible to ‘project’ into the image through a form of mirroring. So I might venture, that mirroring as an aspect of projection *into* is possible when we are faced with figurative works.

Contemporary philosopher Gregory Currie examines Lipps’ theories and reflects on our empathic engagement with objects. He uses this example; ‘his concept of empathy correspondingly involved an act of personal projection wherein we feel the dynamic

properties of the object – an architectural column, say- as our own’⁹⁰ So Lipps’s theory proposed that through empathic projection a kind of union between viewer and object was achieved, in the example given above it seems that the form of the architectural column precipitated this projection.

In his studies on the psychology of aesthetic response Lipps argued that the object of our attention brought us closer to an idealized version of ourselves, suggesting that when we viewed an art object we projected an ideal version of ourselves on to the object, thus aiding our aesthetic appreciation. Where his theory assumes the art object to have particular qualities of form, for example of balance, of symmetry etc. his argument might today, be seen as limited. However, Lipps had accounted for this, with a caveat in that the object only ever ‘becomes’ object through our encounter and deliberate reflection. His argument, while unresolved,⁹¹ is interesting as it suggests that our full aesthetic attention demands an empathic approach to the object, thereby linking attention and empathy. If we follow this approach we can establish that empathy and attention become bound or folded together in the object before us, one needing the other.

While Lipps favoured an approach to empathy that was focused on our ability to imaginatively project ourselves, writer and philosopher Vernon Lee addressed empathy to objects in a more holistic manner. Lee’s approach to empathy compliments Bergson’s notion of attention being an adaptation of the body. She considered how our body might almost ‘become’ (in our minds eye) the object of our attention. In her book, ‘Beauty and Ugliness’ she comments; ‘We refer to the fact that we all of us reproduce through our gesture, not merely the gestures of other creatures, but the forms, the lines of directions, the pressures and upliftings of inanimate objects’.⁹² It is this idea of our gestures imitating

⁹⁰ Ibid p. 84

⁹¹ For example Lipps refused to take account of bodily responses.

⁹² Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, *Beauty & Ugliness*.

or reproducing the object before us that led Vernon to consider the object affected a ‘kinaesthetic’ empathy. Her work examined in detail the responses of Anstruther-Thomson and others to art objects, for example ‘Then my body becomes motionless, there is a pause in breathing, a sort of internal tension and stupor. After that comes a sort of tendency to imitate the gesture and expression of the face of the statue looked at.’⁹³ Using these subjective accounts she reflects how ‘motor imitation’⁹⁴ in the viewer accounts for perception of form. So both Lee and Lipps use ideas of self projection, and it seems to me that while Lee’s version might seem eccentric her wealth of first hand accounts prove a particular physical response can occur. Her findings offer a basis for thinking about empathic responses to art objects, where the affects of viewing art occur in and through the body. This approach has particular relevance to my practice in that it offers a basis for thinking about how the subjective embodied experience of the object can be a marker of empathic engagement.

With the threshold, with others

Working with Vernon’s research and archive I became fascinated by photographs she took of objects to support her research. It seems for me that these photographs offered some kind of connection to her, through her objects; in short they were the threshold to engaging with her ideas. If the object is the threshold, does *long looking* and being with the object, directing attention toward the object bring about the empathic ‘Heinin’ that penetrating sense of oneness, the *into*, referred to above? While Lee’s understanding of such has been largely overlooked⁹⁵, Lipps’ theories were adopted by some most influentially, phenomenologist Edmund Husserl. For Husserl these ideas of the role that

⁹³ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson.

⁹⁴ Susan Lanzoni, ‘Practicing Psychology in the Art Gallery: Vernon Lee’s Aesthetics of Empathy’, *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 45, no. 4 (June 2009): 330–54, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jhbs.20395>.

⁹⁵ See Susan Lanzoni *Practicing Psychology in the Art Gallery: Vernon Lee’s aesthetics of empathy* for more in depth look re evaluating the significance of Lee’s approach.

empathy plays a role in his theories on intersubjectivity or being with others. Indeed, he saw our ability to apprehend the world around us as being inextricably tied to our relation with and understanding of others. 'Husserl maintains that the constitution of an object as something really transcendent and truly Objective requires that it be an object *for others* as well as for me.'⁹⁶ In that sense our apprehension of the object, be it sensation based or imaginative is fundamentally bound up in our connection to others; by extension my engagement with Vernon's photographs provided a sensation of connection to her. The fact that others perceive an object gives us a bearing on the independent existence of the object before us. Russell offers this useful example to illustrate Husserl's argument; 'if I were to see a strange phenomenon in the night sky, I might not be sure whether to regard it as a sighting of something real or as some form of hallucination.'⁹⁷ he goes on to say that we need the confirmation of others to constitute what is objectively before us.

This research in practice, sits somewhere in the gap between Lipps, Lee and Husserl. For the purpose of this argument, if we extend Lipps' ideas to embrace Husserl's then the object 'becomes' through a sense of communal reflection, or perhaps *feeling with others*. Or to put it another way the threshold that the object presents is crossed through a sense of feeling with. So encountering Lee's photographs provided me with a sense of *feeling with* her. Here the ideas are driven by phenomenological and aesthetic interests reflected in the writing but also at work in my studio practice, where engaging with the life and history of the phenomenologists I've chosen to read has become a productive encounter, a method for making artworks *with* others. The research moves between the writing and the studio, harnessing details from each, following the empathic method of oscillating between the two.

⁹⁶ Russell, Matheson Husserl a Guide for the Perplexed p. 162

⁹⁷ Ibid p. 164

The threshold is the body

Vernon Lee took a particular approach to how we conceive of art objects, one that concentrated on physical responses, something we might refer to today as proprioception. I feel that Lee's embodied aesthetics, or 'anthropomorphic aesthetics' as she termed them, bear revisiting as in her work with its focus on embodied subjective accounts, she overcomes a Cartesian division, characteristic of her contemporaries, thus making her work relevant and compelling. In 'Beauty and Ugliness' she offers some provocation to the idea of affect and physiological response in the face of art works. 'The perceiving body and the shape of the object were coordinated to such a degree that Lee and Anstruther-Thomson⁹⁸ did not find that bodily adjustments were a reaction to the form of the object, but more strikingly constituted the perception of form'⁹⁹. For Lee our physiological reflexes flesh out an embodied understanding of the object before us. They move our thinking into our flesh and bones and our bones in turn absorb and reflect our feeling. Perhaps this comes close to explaining my response to the Dürer drawing I discussed earlier? Where I suggested that *My hand moves to reflect Dürer's pain*, Vernon might propose that my hand moved as a mode of physical perception, in her interpretation mirroring Dürer's drawing offered an embodied insight.

Danish artist Joachim Koester discusses his work '*To navigate, in a genuine way, in the unknown necessitates an attitude of daring, but not one of recklessness (movements generated from the Magical Passes of Carlos Castaneda)*' from 2009 in terms that Lee would recognize. The work focuses on the exercises developed by Castaneda as a way to access spiritual awareness. Koester talks about this work, a silent film which uses a performer to repeatedly enact some of Castanedas movements, saying 'What really

⁹⁸ It is interesting that Lee used herself and several others in conducting these experiments but found Anstruther-Thomson to have a heightened sensitivity to physical responses.

⁹⁹ Lanzoni, S. p. 342

interests me is a certain knowledge that resides in the body and which is on the borderline of words...that means we can sense things and know things that we really can't express.'¹⁰⁰ Lee found expression for these sensed 'things' through her close engagement with her collaborator, Kit Anstruther-Thomson. The intimacy of their 'introspective experiment'¹⁰¹ allowed for a heedful approach to bodily sensations. Here Lee reflects on this; 'It was only as a result of intimacy with Kit Anstruther-Thomson that I became aware that, much as I had written about works of art, I did not really know them when they were in front of me: did not know a copy from a masterpiece. I did not know what I liked or disliked; still less why I did either'¹⁰² In fact they had a particular way of bracketing those who held this sensibility as 'motor types'¹⁰³. It may be that their approach, far from being idiosyncratic or eccentric, was prescient. Today, neuroscientists look to a more subjective approach to exploring brain activities, relying on first person reports.¹⁰⁴ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's method of observing and noting their own physical and emotional responses reflects a particular relationship with art objects, one that oscillates between the object before them and their own internal responses.

Steven Connor in his lecture 'Feeling Things'¹⁰⁵ provides a further focus for our entanglement with objects saying that to be a subject in the world is to be 'exposed, susceptible, up against things'¹⁰⁶. His lecture outlines an engagement with ordinary objects that give rise to our thinking and *feeling with*. 'But I do occasion the world, I provide an aperture of opportunity for the things of the world to come into focus as objects. I provide the potential for the world to come into being through my impotential, my possibility of stepping out beyond myself towards the things-in-themselves, that lie unreachably but

¹⁰⁰ Koester, Joachim, A Dark Sea of Awareness, Louisiana Museum, www.vimeo.com/132798783

¹⁰¹ From Beauty and Ugliness, V. Lee p. 236

¹⁰² Vernon Lee, 'Introduction', in Clementina Anstruther-Thomson, Art and Man: Essays and Fragments (London: John Lane/Bodley Head, 1924), p. 29.

¹⁰³ From Beauty and Ugliness, V. Lee p.24.

¹⁰⁴ See Daria Martin 'A New Neuroaesthetics' in Mirror Touch Synaesthesia. P.6.

¹⁰⁵ <http://stevenconnor.com/feelingthings.html> Lecture given at 'Objects of Emotion', Wellcome Collection, London, 16th June 2012

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

enlargingly at the other end of the line I cast out into the world.¹⁰⁷ Here Connor proposes that our engagement with things is a kind of reaching out. Lee's embodied aesthetics suggest that our perception of art objects is twofold; it requires us to reach out and reach in, through introspective observation. Connor's description of our engagement with objects as being like casting a line out into the world is only part of the story, for Lee the line is cast out and returned in our bodily responses. This is reflected in my experience of taking photographs of strangers, such as the *Backstory* image described above, and feeling a growing sense of its impact upon me. As such it provides an argument for my filmed response to the image *Scene One: Her Translation* (discussed in greater detail in Section 1 Part IV Screens *and Loops*). In this artwork I create a performance to camera piece using my own body adopting the posture and pose of the figure in the photograph, I imagine myself to be her. Sitting on the bench looking out at a lake that bears a resemblance to the one in the original image I wondered about her posture, whether her small shoulders were hunched. In this way the image affected me and made its way under my skin. I also felt a certain sense of sharing this simple experience with the stranger in the image.

Empathy has an inexplicable quality, an enigmatic element. The art object as a bridge to thinking and feeling is constituted *with* others (perhaps unwittingly). This does not mean we all share the same feelings or response but that the empathic *feeling with* is present, though perhaps not in a form we are familiar with. We do not recognise an 'in the shoes of' experience as being something that art objects typically provide; however, if Lee's experiments suggest anything it is that looking at art produces a measurable, palpable affect. With Husserl and Connor we can gather that the affect is felt through communal engagement. It seems then that looking at art objects is a threshold to a sort of testing ground for experiencing shared perception.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

Feeling With and *My Dearie Dearie*

Lee's archive photographs of a chair, a jar, a plaster head and a pot prompted a reaction and so I began working with her images, making short gestural pieces. In responding to her work I also wanted to adopt and adapt some of her 'kinaesthetic' methods. I planned a short film working with two performers and approached artist Nicola Singh and art anthropologist Julie Crawshaw asking them to work with me to make a two screen film piece (see also Portfolio of Work p 25 - for introduction to this in full). The work produced *My Dearie Dearie* is discussed at various points throughout this thesis. Here, I want to focus on a screening of the work as a way of examining one aspect, that is- audience response and *feeling with*.

In April 2018 a screening of my film work *My Dearie Dearie* at the Hatton Gallery provided an exploration of these ideas of *feeling with*. The screening was nested in an event curated by artist Kate Liston who in turn was influenced by the work of abstract artist, painter and filmmaker Ella Bergman Michel. Michel was interested in ideas of traces and feeling after that bear a parallel logic to my own research. I felt it was an interesting pairing then to show my films, which were influenced by Vernon Lee alongside Michel's.

For this event I chose to edit what had been a multi-screen work into a single screen. I was also interested in engendering a kind of proprioceptive response on the part of the audience by encouraging them to mirror what Julie and Nicola were doing on screen through a dual handed 'blind' drawing (that is not to look at the paper) the movement on screen. Two things struck me as particular to this experience. The first was the sound of the pencils, all moving synchronously with Julie and Nicola's movements: the affect being that we (the audience) moved when the performers on screen did. Being with all of these

people and hearing them draw and consequently move *with* me had a curious impact, a sense of *feeling with* grew in this moving together, drawing together, it framed a connection. The second affect that I hadn't anticipated were the shared characteristics of the blind drawings (see Figure 1 below). It was easy to distinguish a drawing of Julie from one of Nicola. The sense that we saw some of the same things, and reflected these in our marks, increased the feeling that being alongside and drawing alongside, captured the nature *feeling with* and the shared characteristics of the drawings reflected this.



Figure 1: Blind drawings from *My Dearie Dearie* screening in 'Rotation Process' event at the Hatton Gallery, 2018

Section 1

Part III

Orientations and Inclinations

In this chapter I am looking, in more detail at the qualities of attention required in viewing artwork. Here, I consider the significance of orientation in empathic viewing and following on from ideas explored in the previous chapter, examine this as an aspect of feeling *into*. The chapter also weighs the relevance of current philosophical ideas of empathy as a simulative act and to explore this I will consider how simulation functions as a form of perception. To do this I will reflect on my video work *Vernon's Right Hand* - where the gestures I enact indicate qualities beyond simulation.

Attention is Orientation

In *Objects and Thresholds*, I discussed Lee's and Anstruther Thomson's exploration of the 'motor' affect of empathy, here I want to look in more details at these accounts of the physiology of the observer which suggest a very particular analogy between the object and the observer. Viewing a round jar Thomson notes: 'Meanwhile the jar's equal sides bring both lungs into equal play; the curve outwards of the jar's two sides is simultaneously followed by an *inspiration* as the eyes move up to the jar's widest point.'¹⁰⁸ While the specifics of this kind of bodily attention to the object might seem a little eccentric there is a correlation that can be made with a current popular theory, that empathy has a basis in

¹⁰⁸ Lanzoni, 'Practicing Psychology in the Art Gallery', 342.

simulation, of which contemporary philosopher, Gregory Currie is perhaps the best-known proponent.

In his essay *Empathy for Objects* Currie turns to cognitive and neural reasoning, reflecting on the recent discovery of mirror neurons¹⁰⁹. While the science of the cognitive processes are beyond the reach of this thesis, it is useful to note that it resonates with the idea of empathy being a kind of orientation *towards*, reflected in a simulative reaction in the brains response.¹¹⁰ Currie notes that the imaginative leap made by people asked to ‘describe the handedness¹¹¹ of a visual display’ can be traced as, he says ‘they, seem to answer by ‘mentally rotating’ their own hands’¹¹² and that this simulative process takes just as long as the real one. Reading his description of this simulation-in-mind process will feel familiar to any artist who has experienced the life drawing class. Something between observing and putting pencil to paper allows for a kind of translation in mind to the hand. Indeed if you cannot see the object before you but *have* seen it and therefore hold it in your minds eye, as in blind drawing¹¹³, you rely on this simulative response of the figure to help guide your hand.

The screening of *My Dearie Dearie* in the Hatton Gallery, described in the preceding chapter made use of this translation in mind. Blind drawings were created by the audience and in doing so participants laid bare this simulation process to some degree. Though the drawings are all individual there are certain particular gestural similarities that indicate whether the drawing corresponds to Nicola or to Julie. This suggests that the translation of movement that occurred was not just from screen to paper but from hand to hand, the hand on the screen to the hand holding the pencil. Artist Maggie Hambling reflects on this idea

¹⁰⁹ Mirror Neurons: neurons in the brain that fire in response to observing actions by others. These neurons seem to echo the behavior they respond to, hence the name.

¹¹⁰ For further information on cognitive processes and empathy see;

¹¹¹ Handedness, here Currie seems to be referring to the look, feel and order of the objects

¹¹² Gregory Currie, ‘Empathy for Objects’, *Empathy Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014),

¹¹³ A process where students are asked to draw an object before them with their eyes shut.

of a connection being made between the body of the observer and the body in front of you

‘I think it is the most intimate thing that an artist does, it is the response of the whole of you but using your eyes’’You are desperately trying to make some marks with whatever you are using, and say something about that living person in front of you.’¹¹⁴

Hambling’s observation clarifies that our body is fully invested when our attention is attuned in drawing. We can accept then, that in turning our attention to the object before us, there is an orientation that occurs not just in sight, but in mind. Bergson talks of attention being an adaptation, orientation is perhaps more specific, directional. This directed attention occurs certainly in the process of making art, and I have accounted for some of it, in Section 1 Pt. II *Objects and Thresholds*, in my reflections on long looking in the studio. However, it seems it also occurs, perhaps not to the same degree, or in the same manner, in the minds and bodies of viewers perceiving the work. This notion of orientating thought is pertinent as empathic perception relies on the ability to orientate our thoughts not just towards, but *through* the eyes of another. Dan Zahavi clarifies this referring to Husserl saying, ‘It is consequently important to emphasize that the other, rather than being given to me simply as a nucleus of experiences, is given as a centre of orientation, as a perspective on the world.’¹¹⁵ So orientating towards or turning attention towards might be akin to the ‘with’ experience I discussed in the previous section. However, looking out from within is a deeper more profound affect of empathic orientation.

¹¹⁴ Maggie Hambling discuss her work and practice on BBC iPlayer Making their Mark: Six Artists on Drawing, first shown Aug 1990.

¹¹⁵ Zahavi, Dan Empathy and Other Directed Intentionality, p. 137

Orientation into and out from

Currie's essay goes on to give an account of the empathic experience of art. He uses the example of an audience viewing gestural paintings¹¹⁶, where the audience reported an imagined simulation of the movements of the maker. Can this account for the intensity of emotion felt when my hand moved in response to the Dürer drawing? Here Currie's description seems to be more closely connected to the mechanisms of the making process. Viewers respond by an 'in-kind' mirrored gesture, unlike Vernon Lee whose approach takes into account the whole body, breath, internal organs etc. It does however reflect a more prosaic understanding of empathy, where the viewer places themselves in the shoes of the artist at work and in doing so imagines how the work was physically brought about. However, I feel it passes over the unique quality that empathy offers, that allusive feeling that impacted so intensely when viewing the Dürer work, the sense not simply of imagining but of *feeling into*.

From Currie's perspective, through the object a kind of empathy with the maker is produced and not with the formal or affective elements of the artwork. However, Currie's argument embraces the emotional realm, he suggests that simulation can occur on physical or emotional levels and that these processes (emotional or bodily) triggered in response to an object, may not constitute aesthetic experience in their own right but may contribute to the overall visual experience. This seems to chime with some of Lipps' theories on 'inner imitation' as a necessary component of empathic engagement. Lipps was certainly not interested in the physiological responses which he denounced as inferior calling them the 'cult of bodily sensations'¹¹⁷ but in the face of recent scientific discoveries like mirror neurons, even Lipps might not be able to discount their impact. Indeed, Vernon Lee's

¹¹⁶ Currie uses an example of viewers asked to respond to Jackson Pollock drip paintings.

¹¹⁷ Lanzoni, S. p. 344

experiments do not seem so far fetched in the light of Currie's analysis where the physiological contributes to a certain state of perception.

Inclination is with

So while Currie argues that simulation is a contributing component of empathic perception, it seems that the point of reference or return is always to the maker. The object itself is merely a way through; in this light the object becomes a threshold to the other. Orientation offers us direction; it is a perspective map of sorts. But to arrive at this we need to find ourselves *inclined*. Inclination is folded into empathic orientation. To find ourselves orientated *towards* and maybe even *into* we need first to adopt a disposition, we need to be inclined. My inclination to Vernon, the thing that drew me to her, her life, her approach to research began with a detail about her life, that her private name was Violet Paget. The notion that identity was mutable, experimental or orchestrated for a public (at that time biased public¹¹⁸) audience seemed fascinating. I wanted to know more. I travelled to Oxford to access an archive of correspondence sent between Kit and Vernon. The letters are held in a special collection at Sommerville College, Oxford and contain over 250 letters between Kit and Vernon spanning the years 1893-1913. The letters consisted of details about travels, people they met and intimate trivia about having a cough and needing a felt coat. In Kit's letters I found an account of a gallery visit. Combing through accounts of her life, of their love, in these letters, made me *lean in* further. The particularities of their communications made their way into my work; in materials like the use of felt, in titles drawn from their term of endearment 'My Dearie Dearie'. However, it was the discovery of photographs of objects used by the pair in their research that brought a sense of being alongside Vernon to life. These photographs became the foundational images that engaged my attention and shaped the work.

¹¹⁸ She adopted the masculine sounding pseudonym Vernon Lee for publishing her writing.

Pinning and Provisionality

In my video work *Vernon's Right Hand* (see Portfolio of Work p. 23) we see a close-up view of hands engaged in pinning an image to a felt board. When I first encountered the images from Vernon's archive in an article by Susan Lanzoni¹¹⁹ I was moved to pursue the source and found that the images were held at Colby College archive. Three images exist in the archive, each one a black and white shot of an object; a chair, a ceramic pot and a sculpture of a head. They were emailed to me from the Librarian at the archive. As I printed them I noticed each one bore the mark of having been pinned to something. This small detail, a pin hole into and out of the image, felt to me like an invocation. I had to re-pin the images. Re-pin, retrace, re-enact, reproduce. To re indicates repetition, it is to revisit, it is also to regard, to consider. To re is to show inclination.

In re-pinning I had a sense that this was more than a re-enactment. It was inclination in action. This action was an embodiment, it evoked Vernon bodily. It was the closest I would get to being in her shoes, being in her pinning, and it brought into sharp focus the 'Penetrating sense of oneness' in the definition of empathy. In carrying out this action I became preoccupied with the idea that she might have been left or right handed. This action brought about a sense that I was in commune, the very sense of becoming through being with her photographs.

The gesture, though 'simulative' in its first instantiation, moved to something more intrinsic through repetition. Each time my hand became more practiced and more deft and would execute the right pressure or direction in the pin, the more the sense of becoming

¹¹⁹ Lanzoni, 'Practicing Psychology in the Art Gallery'.

grew. This tiny articulation developed a sense of joining her, being with her in activity and in doing so developing tacit knowledge of her. The photograph becomes an agent in directing me towards her.

The account of empathy as a simulative process seems a little limiting if we consider the pinning as simulative alone, we have a kind of mimic. Without inclination and repetition this might be where the re-enactment ends, in an act, a performance. Simulation suggests a referential process where we are grasping at something not present. Here, simulation refers us back to the maker of the object, revealing her efforts through this pin mark. For my work with Vernon's images, the pinhole in the photographs brought me back to Vernon, to her handling of and attention to these objects. It brought me to the midst of her gesture even if only for that moment. Carrying out this simple gesture then seemed a detail worth focusing on. I made a small felt board and placed her images on it, using a copy stand to film myself in close-up. I recorded the pinning, practicing and repeating the action and turning the images to the camera so as they are orientated for an imagined viewer. Attempting to reproduce her action, moving the pin in just the right way so as to pierce the holes correctly, to follow her articulation provided a crystal clear moment, a sense of joining her in that instant. That pinning something is a provisional action, something we use to hold two pieces of material until a more permanent fixture is applied, seems an appropriate metaphor. I was *with* Vernon in that action, through that object, for only a moment, oscillating in and out of her attention to this photograph.

Simulation and perception

In Vernon's pinning gesture then I felt she was expressing a sense of attention and care, while also investing these particular objects with importance. While the phenomenological argument pursued by Scheler, Stein and Zahavi is less concerned with empathic responses

to objects it does offer an approach to considering the significance of the body; ‘experiences are not internal, they are not hidden in the head, but rather expressed in bodily gestures and actions. When I see a foreign face, I *see* it as friendly or angry, etc.; that is, the very face expresses these emotions, I don’t have to infer their existence. Moreover, bodily behaviour is meaningful, it is intentional, and as such it is neither internal nor external, but rather beyond this artificial distinction.’¹²⁰ Therefore, through a simulative action with Vernon’s objects, I was directed to her body in her handling, and tangentially through this to her attention, expressed in a pinhole, to this object.

The phenomenological argument above is referring to other minds, in Zahavi’s conception it does not hold for our perception of objects, Zahavi again; ‘For the very same reason we should realize that the body of the other differs radically from inanimate objects, and that our perception of this body is quite unlike our ordinary perception of objects.’¹²¹ But I would argue a special case, perhaps certain objects, such as Vernon’s photographs, carry affect, we perceive them differently, as Lee would have us believe. For my part, engaging with Vernon’s images afforded a particular response, one that allowed a connection to her through the remnants of her gesture. The pinning gesture itself is a gesture of provisionality, of testing out, trying on, but also one of attachment.

Currie addresses the discord in the two phenomenological arguments noting that Zahavi ‘rejects accounts of empathy in terms of simulation, and favours a perceptual account’. However, Currie is clear that he does not see the simulative approach to empathy as being irresolvable with a perception based approach; he suggests that ‘simulative activity feeds directly into visual perception’.¹²² This was certainly my experience of working with Vernon’s images. Zahavi’s argument doesn’t engage with our perception of objects, even

¹²⁰ Zahavi, *Beyond Empathy* p. 153

¹²¹ *Ibid* Zahvi *Beyond Empathy* p. 153

¹²² Currie

less so artwork and so it seems plausible that there is a correlation between a mirroring process that helps to orientate us toward the object before us and empathic responses to objects.

While Curries' simulative approach is limited, his suggestion is persuasive; that these processes of simulating and perceiving can coexist and inflect understanding and engagement with objects. So while the argument for a simulation based empathic encounter doesn't cover the feelings I experienced on viewing the Dürer, drawing on his argument helps to demonstrate the qualities of affect and inflection that empathy affords the viewer, and in my case the artist.

Seeing into and feeling into

Edith Stein distinguishes empathy from perception saying that 'Perception has its object before it in embodied givenness; empathy does not. But both have their object itself there and meet it directly where it is anchored in the continuity of being.'¹²³

The distinction is useful in that it directs us to the *givenness* of a perceived object and the elusive nature of an empathically given object. For example, I might well perceive the emotions of another, be aware of their bodily cues (smiling with happiness etc.) without feeling those emotions given to me and furthermore without feeling how it is they are given to the person experiencing them. However, empathic perception of others requires our orientation towards the other. And if we see and perceive and are *inclined* to them we are getting closer to empathic engagement.

¹²³ Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*. p. 19

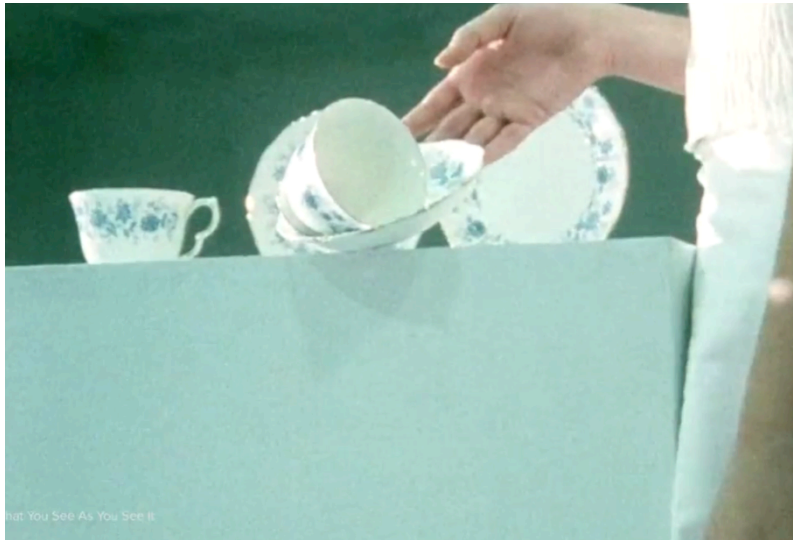


Figure 2: *Be The First To See What You See As You See It* , Runa Islam, 16mm film still (2004)

In Venice in the summer of 2005, I stood sweating and desperate for a cool breeze in front of Runa Islam's 'Be the First to See What You See As You See it' (see Figure 2 above). The film depicts a woman in a stage-like set, standing amongst porcelain objects, such as teapots and cups, that she moves between and occasionally stops in front of to examine the object in detail. With 49 artists in the Arsenale competing for attention it seems significant that the one that caught mine was an image of a woman engaged in the act of slow motion looking. Perhaps I was looking for a moment of pause, or perhaps I was looking for some kind of mirror.

The woman in the image appears to be looking not just at the tea service but also through the handle of the teapot, out of the film at me. 'But what then, precisely, are we "seeing"?' An actress exploring the properties of a plate? A teapot that suggests itself as a china echo of empire, with all the baggage of power and politics and possible perspectives that that entails? The object of a film, a thing of flickering light and sound? The objects of the body that sees and its mechanical equivalents that sometimes "see" on our behalf? All of these

things. For ultimately, it would seem, what we are being invited to see here is ourselves seeing.’¹²⁴ Here Owen points to how the film frames the triangulation of perception, exploring it as a complex sensory mode. Through it we see that the subject’s engagement with the objects and the camera implicate the viewer.

Islam, in conversation with Tine Fischer, considers how the viewer is brought into her work; ‘T.F.: I personally like the way you work with aesthetic distance and emotional engagement at the same time. How do you see these very opposite filmic strategies in relation to one another?’ In her reply Islam says that ‘the two mechanisms are not actually opposites. If the third-person camera angle can be considered as an aesthetic distance and a first-person point of view is one that engages both visually and emotionally, I suppose they are apposite. The two techniques can co-exist within deconstruction, *décadrage*, and disjuncture as they do in my works. The alternate points of view explored in ‘Tuin’ or ‘Director’s Cut’ (Fool for love) establish empathetic bonds with the subjects concerned. The shifts, changes and discontinuity, break these bonds and leave ‘gaps’. I think it’s these gaps that charge the works with an emotional response.’¹²⁵

The female subject in the film *Be the First to See What You See As You See It* appears to examine objects of the tea service with close scrutiny, as though looking for something, a flaw maybe. As she looks we are drawn into her looking; her attention holds ours. The film moves gently, with the subject considering objects slowly which allows the objects to take on particular significance, the teapot becomes more than just a teapot, and the handle of the cup takes on an anthropomorphic quality. And then, there is a change in pace and she begins to tinker, rattling the lid of the teapot, it quivers. Now, using the edge of her hand she pushes a cup and saucer off the tables’ edge, it smashes. The sound and relative

¹²⁴ Janet Owen, ‘Hammer Projects: Runa Islam - Hammer Museum’, The Hammer Museum, accessed 8 May 2018, <https://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/2005/hammer-projects-runa-islam/>.

¹²⁵ Runa Islam and Orientation.UK.dk, eds., *Runa Islam: Moving Pictures*; [Published in *Connection with ORIENTATIONUK.Dk September - Oktober 2002*] (Copenhagen: Pork Salad Press, 2002).

shock of this gesture provide a pivotal encounter. The film shifts emphasis and it becomes less about looking and more about a larger sensory encounter. Deleuze in 'Proust and Signs' says; 'It may happen that a sensuous quality gives us a strange joy at the same time that it transmits a kind of imperative. Thus experienced, the quality no longer appears as a property of the object that now possesses it, but as the sign of an altogether different object that we must try to decipher, at the cost of an effort that always risks failure. It is as if the quality enveloped, imprisoned the soul of an object other than the one it now designates.'¹²⁶ With the smash of the cup we no longer perceive the film's subject to be coolly observing and scrutinizing but to be involved in a kind of transgression, looking becomes touching and eventually smashing. The sense of her seeing and observing is charged and becomes an active directional force. This conception of seeing as an active and orientating force, can be linked to my analysis of my work *Vernon's Right Hand* earlier in this chapter. In my video, it was the hole in the photograph that drove an embodied response, for Islam's work it is the smash of the cup.

Inclinations and Point of View

Following the line of thought above about the force of seeing, I want to look more closely at how the affect of point of view and the gaze in *Be the First to See What You See As You See It* operates to capture attention. Furthermore, I want to consider how this shift in orientation impacts our body, creating the condition for empathic connection. The simple act of smashing the cup transforms our attention to the subject, and to the film. Jill Bennett refers to writer Nikos Papastergiadis who says that 'empathy is about that process of surrender...but also the *catch* that transforms your perception.'¹²⁷ The smashing plate wakens our attention, it is the 'catch'. The slow motion camera registers the fall of the

¹²⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and signs the complete text* (London; New York: Continuum, 2008), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10495175>.

¹²⁷ Bennett, *Empathic Vision*. p. 10

plate frame by frame, and in doing so we are drawn into the drama of looking itself. It alerts us to the mechanics of the camera; the devices for seeing that are at work. This awareness directs us to the meta-discourse at work, here the viewer is driven to be active and engaged, being the 'first to see' as the title suggests is active perception. 'Concerned with 'seeing' as both a visual faculty and a perceptual act, Islam neatly forges the steel of her frames from an analysis of the technology we have invented to most closely approximate human visual mechanisms—an analysis, that is, of the stuff of film itself.'¹²⁸ The transformation in the smash of the plate or cup brings our awareness then to the camera, and as such draws us, sensorially, into the film. From outside to inside, the gaze flips. In this sense then, the gaze of the character is not seen as threatening or objectifying but as involved in a process of seeing and being seen. Barker suggests that this is enfolded into the nature of intersubjectivity as Merleau-Ponty would have it; 'His philosophy on the gaze suggested that when two subjects look at one another, they alternate between the roles of seer and seen.'¹²⁹ For my part, I had the oscillating sense of being in the film, of my hand smashing the cup, of looking out through the film to the crowds and then again, the constant nudge and shove of the trail of art pilgrims in the heat of the space, drawing my attention back to my surroundings.

Jill Bennett, whose work on contemporary art, trauma and empathy, at times resonates with this thesis, suggests that we should ask the following question when encountering works of art, not what does it mean but 'How does it work? - how does it put insides and outsides into contact in order to establish a basis for empathy?'¹³⁰ So how does the 'catch' in Runa Islam's film work, is it simply an affective trigger? Its slow motion, frame-by-frame detail and resounding audio bring awareness to our ears and it structures our seeing so that seeing becomes conscious, our body is engaged. Barker argues for a kind of

¹²⁸ Owen, 'Hammer Projects'.

¹²⁹ Barker, *The Tactile Eye*. p. 93

¹³⁰ Bennett, *Empathic Vision*. p. 45

muscular empathy between the viewer and the film; ‘This empathy between film and viewer isn’t simply a matter of the viewer sharing a character’s physical location by means of point-of-view shots and first person narration, for example. Our bodies orient and dispose themselves toward the body of the film itself, because we and the film make sense of space by moving through it muscularly in similar ways and with similar attitudes.’¹³¹ The particularities of the camera in directing us, its aptitude as a device for orientating, and inclining viewers, both in body and mind is not new. We crane our necks, and lean in, as does the camera. We inhabit spatial and temporal zones as can the camera. This mimetic quality and its ability to alter our perspective is key. It sets up a relationship, it brings us to the ‘with’ of the film as object. Barker describes it as a palpable sense of connection; ‘the film and viewer are in a relation of muscular empathy that is an oscillation between difference and similarity, proximity and distance.’¹³²

The possibilities for exploring connection *with* and *into* film, through the use of point of view and orientating cameras, is a recurring subject for me. For the project *Backstory*, (2013), I produced a number of videos engaging with two connected elements. Firstly, the image I had taken of a stranger in a park sitting on a bench by a lake. The second was the body of subsequent writing, stories, scripts and poems produced by a group of writers who, through open invitation, responded to the image. These two elements filled out a version (or many possible versions) of the stranger in the image. For my part, I wanted to combine the sense of immersion in the image I felt in seeing it anew through the narratives of the writers. Their written reflections had the quality of taking a snapshot, each one a short narrative that reflects some imagined aspect of the life of the person in front of the lens. But beyond this there was an emotive quality, the sense of an imagined private world being addressed. In doing this it seems that many of the writers adopt a narrative mode familiar to filmmaking, the point of view. The point of view shot is often

¹³¹ Barker, *The Tactile Eye*. p. 75

¹³² Ibid

referred to as the subjective camera. The 'subjective' quality achieved chimes with the intimate qualities echoed in the writing. When we reflect, this idea of point of view is what empathic orientation is about – adopting, as your vantage point, the perspective of another, looking out from within.

In two of the films *Scene Two: She Is Camera* and *Scene Three: Where It Is Written* (see Portfolio of Work pp. 15 and 16) I explored this idea of the point of view shot, orientating the camera toward the lake like the stranger in the image. In doing so, I imagined the camera as a kind of mechanical other. In *Scene Three: Where It Is Written* I used it to 'write' or to trace text on the surface of the lake. Here, the intention was for the video work to respond to the writer's ability to adopt a perspective but also to make object the idea of perspective taking, to find its shape and make visual their practice. Perhaps it could be said that the work diverges, and that the camera might be seen as an unreliable narrator. Both of the films play on the notion of 'in camera' being a secreted place; a vaulted room. In doing so they reflect the interiority or other-dimensional quality in the writing, a sense of private space not easily read, an oscillating sense of going to and fro, with and into. As such the work might be seen as elliptical in that there is no discernable narrative, rather there is the sense of a circular narrative, a loop. This reflects the oscillating nature of empathy that Barker referred to earlier in this section, the sense of going toward and coming back, of 'proximity and distance'. In *Backstory*, the writer's story telling acts as a layer that brings to life the voice of the silent figure in the image and offers her kaleidoscopic potential. Working with their stories acts as an expanded collage where through invitation the viewer-writers added texture and colour to my foundational image. Artist Thomas Hirschhorn says: 'Collages possess the power to implicate the other immediately', perhaps in *Backstory* involving the writers brings a variety of points of view and voices to bear on an otherwise silent image. This layering of voices becomes a

type of collage. The following texts are samples of quotes from the writers involved in developing *Backstory*.

Jason O'Rourke: *See how quiet it is here; how well trimmed, clean, ordered, and neat it is. Right now, as I sit here and survey the picture I feel as if I could lift a corner and peel it back like a child's adhesive sticker, to reveal the cogs, motors, and wiring that keep the machine going under there.*

*It is too peaceful here.*¹³³

Jan Carson: *The future was hard on lonely people.*

*The future required two hands to open. Many lonely people had lost arms and legs in the war. Some lonely people had both hands busy, juggling careers and cats and dogs and dead parents and bouts of minor depression.*¹³⁴

Ceartha Morgan: *M: They think I'm doting. And grieving. Think its sent me mad. I'm not doting. I know you're not here.*¹³⁵

Reading the quotes above it is clear that though each of the writers had a unique approach to telling this woman's story there is a shared atmospheric quality, a sense of grief or malaise. In this we see that the image communicates something unique and that through inclining and adopting a point of view these writers found themselves *with* and perhaps *into* the image.

¹³³ From Jason O'Rourke, produced in response to a call out for writers for *Backstory*, Catalyst Arts Belfast, Dec 2013.

¹³⁴ From Jan Carson produced in response to a call out for writers for *Backstory*, Catalyst Arts Belfast, Dec 2013.

¹³⁵ From Ceartha Morgan produced in response to a call out for writers for *Backstory*, Catalyst Arts Belfast, Dec 2013.



Figure 3: *Backstory* call out poster, Catalyst Arts Belfast, 2013

Section 1

Part IV

Screens and Loops

Screens, Membranes and mirrors

In the preceding section I examine the qualities of attention, inclination and orientation towards objects, found in response to the photograph in Vernon Lee's archive, or the attention of the audience who made drawings in response to my work *My Dearie Dearie*. However, for the most part the work I make involves an object regularly overlooked in that it is seen as a necessary function of video as material. However, the screen is as much a part of the work as the images it holds and in this section that follows I will explore its affect.

There is a slippery space between the object and the screen-as-object¹³⁶. The screen *as an object* might not be the object we are most attentive to. In fact, the screen for most viewers is an almost invisible device. The screen is often seen as a mutable thing, not intrinsic to the artwork itself or actively undefined. The universal nature of the lightweight mobile projector means that works can easily be projected at different scales and on differing surfaces. The moving image artwork is not necessarily tied to a specific format. However, where artists engage with the screen as material they call attention to its properties, its mode of production and in doing so to our spectatorship.

Irish artist Bea McMahon, for her installation *(in the) visible state*, 2008, projected onto mirror screens coated in buttermilk to make the screen an opaque reflecting thing which

¹³⁶ While the use of the word screen is ubiquitous, phone screen etc., here I am focusing on the projection screen as opposed to TV screen or other screening device.

blurred and obscured the image and text, sometimes making it harder to read. Maeve Connolly writing about her work suggests that ‘This strategy draws attention to the materiality of the installation and to the role of *reflection* in the creation of a video projection.’¹³⁷ Kerry Tribe’s work *Standardized Patient* 2017, uses an angled screen to divide a room projecting on both sides. Leading the audiences viewing experience like this and dividing attention between two screens played a crucial conceptual role. ‘The encounter format, too, suggests that these performers inhabit a dual headspace—holding conversations while mentally tracking checklist items to be submitted afterward—an inversion of roles in which the “patients” are now the evaluators.’¹³⁸

These screen-as-objects call attention to the device for seeing; they frame and inflect our viewing experience. In the two examples given above there is an attempt to draw the viewer into the frame, into the act of looking. This is not passive observation it is seeing with reflection. This approach is significant when considering the methods I have used in developing work over the course of this research. In particular, the work as it is installed for *Backstory* and *In The Hands Of* (see Portfolio of Work p. 17 and p. 18). In *Backstory* layering screens, and having them on stands or on the floor, suggests that there is an effort to interject, to direct our attention to this device and its physicality. However, inevitably our attention is driven by the moving image that it holds. For the project *In The Hands Of Others* I approached this idea of the screen as a threshold differently and allowed each screen to occupy a separate space. The screens were smaller, bespoke wooden constructions made with stretched paper. Once images were projected on to them it created a membrane like effect, calling attention to the surface, to the capacity of projection screen to seem skin like. Like thresholds, membranes are intended to be crossed. Here they are used to pursue ideas of the skin of the screen as a physical, material

¹³⁷ Maeve Connolly, *The Place of Artists’ Cinema: Space, Site and Screen* (Bristol: Intellect, 2009). p. 202

¹³⁸ Tanya Zimbardo, *Kerry Tribe New Work*, SFMOMA exhibition brochure, 2017

empathic device. Guiliana Bruno, in her essay on screens, empathy and materiality agrees that screens are a device for crossing. She acknowledges that screens have the ability to transport the viewer; 'In this capacity as aperture, the resilient surface does not merely divide but also enables a passage – the channelling of empathy- which finally becomes a potential for crossing borders.'¹³⁹ The material decisions I made expose an effort to engage with a certain construction, a politics of looking where surfaces carry subtle suggestive links to empathy. In this light by withdrawing from the cinematic, the emphasis of the encounter shifts. Here the screens are engaged in a discrete dialogue; they are near, smaller in scale. In doing so, I propose a politics of looking where looking is coming in contact with and being near, where things are projected at eye level on screens that are not much bigger than the width span of our out stretched arms.

While my work is predominantly made in digital video, Barker makes an interesting analogous relation between the skin of the film and that of the viewer saying it is a kind of musculature empathy; 'We mark our position in relation to space by such things as shoulders and hips, whereas the film's "frame" is marked off by the edges of the celluloid strip, viewfinder, screen, and theatre. Still, despite the differences, we and the film both present ourselves to the world by moving through it'¹⁴⁰ Here I might venture, the skin might not be 16mm film, but it is the surface of the screen.

Spaces for being with

Moving through the world and moving through the gallery provide artists with a specific set of questions when installing work on screens in galleries. While the role of the cinematic is not what is at stake here the social space of the cinema provides a backdrop to how I have chosen to construct viewing spaces in my work. Indeed, perhaps the fact that

¹³⁹ Guiliana Bruno in Martin, *Mirror-Touch*. p. 107

¹⁴⁰ Barker, *The Tactile Eye*. p. 77

there is no seating provided suggests that I am working counter to the cinematic tradition. My videos *In the Hands Of* and *Care Instructions for Jean* (see Portfolio of work p. 19 and 20) were exhibited in Burt Hall, a listed building with a very particular architecture. As I mentioned I built bespoke screens from paper, which were displayed in small adjoining rooms. I was preoccupied with how the two video pieces might be viewed as discrete but interconnected works. Having two spaces beside each other became a format for considering the movement of people between the rooms. The size and scale of the rooms became another factor in designing the screens. I chose to keep the screens at eye level and small in scale, so that the projected figures on screen were approximately life size, thereby making a relation to the viewer. These decisions, to maintain a deliberate relation to the body of the viewer, were made in order to enhance the possibilities for intimate viewing spaces. The screens were built to be back projected so that others passing through a projector beam do not interrupt viewing. However, the rooms and passage of audience between them emphasise the fact that viewing the moving image is a distinctly social experience. Maeve Connolly, writing about artists' cinema calls this form of spectatorship a 'form of public intimacy',¹⁴¹

The spectator in the gallery is often active, mobile, moving through the space. In this sense the space of the artist-made projected image can be entirely different to that of the cinematic tradition (whether or not the work is engaged in a consideration of the cinematic is not what is at stake here). It engenders a sense of being with, it offers a sense of alonsideness. Bruno suggests that our connection to these kinds of projection spaces invoke a particular form of empathy; 'Empathy is thus a form of 'transport' – a psychic passage set in motion not simply with physical beings, but also with material space,

¹⁴¹ Connolly, *The Place of Artists' Cinema*.

including such things as the surface of the earth, settings and locales, forms and formations, tints and tones, hues and shapes.’¹⁴²

Artist Matthew Buckingham considers that in his work the space of the projection screen, due to its material conditions, implies a social space. ‘In my work, I’ve been interested in opening the viewing experience to a different social dimension. I’ve tried to complicate the viewing process by using the space, particularizing the space, so that the viewer sees herself not only in relation to the piece but also in relation to other viewers’¹⁴³. To put it in terms familiar to this thesis our viewing experience is folded into our experience of being *with* others.

The Same World Differently Seen

‘The perceived world and the and the world given empathically are the same world differently seen’¹⁴⁴ Stein contends that empathic understanding shapes our perception therefore inflects our apprehension of the things in the world. The quote above also clarifies that while our understanding shifts, it does not alter beyond recognition, empathic perception is a kind of aperture.

The installation of *Backstory* makes use of, what I am calling here, a stratified or layered perspective. As the video screens for *Scene One: Her Translation* and *Scene Two: She is Camera* stand at an angle, one in front of the other, it is difficult to view all the works at once. The effect is that the work unfolds in the space, each part acting upon the other, interrupting it in the space, inflecting it, adding to it. As a consequence of this layered installation method a three-fold attention is demanded of the viewer; to the gap between

¹⁴² Martin, *Mirror-Touch*.

¹⁴³ ‘Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art Author(s): Malcolm Turvey, Hal Foster, Chrissie Iles, George Baker, Matthew Buckingham, Anthony McCall’, *October* 10 (2003): 71–96.

¹⁴⁴ Stein, E. p. 64

the video and the foundational photographic image, for the scarf that dominates both images and for the woman wearing the scarf. In the first screen we encounter, the figure and the scene in the original photograph are reproduced. In the second screen it is as if we stepped into the original photograph and moved closer to the lake, beyond the figure that dominates the previous screen. Lipps wrote of the impulse in viewers towards a kind of 'inner imitation'. He felt this simulative process was a part of empathically grasping the object before us. Imitation is certainly a method of attempting to conjure an experience of what is before us. So here the effort to step into the image explores that simulative impulse and makes of it the artwork itself.

While there are simulative processes used in making these artworks, they are harnessed in order to affect a specific orientated attention in the viewer; an orientation into the details of the image with the use of the scarf, beyond the edges of the stilled photographic moment, through the use of moving image. Behind the first screen is another, *Scene two: She Is Camera*, again the video is looped but this time the only figure we see is that of a duck slowly making its way across the lake. The staging of the screens plays on an idea of a pulled out perspective, spatialising the lake view seen in the foundational image. It mocks up the sense of entering into and offers us a staged experience of the view seen by the stranger in the headscarf. Staging and simulating are loosely related terms, if we consider staging as in to perform and to simulate as in make a likeness of, both suggest an imitative impulse. There is however a kind of uncertainty at play in the staging of the scenes in *Backstory*, these are not exact copies, nor proxies. The swimming duck that we see is inverted and so the swimming duck is a reflection of itself. The unsettling of the mirrored image is as important as the effort to mirror. It reflects on Steins assertion of the same world 'differently seen'. If the object, in this case the photograph is a threshold, then it is so in the original sense of the word, taken from the Old English meaning 'a point of entry', offering the viewer a point from which to enter and engage with the photograph. It

also refers to *thresh* or tread, as parallel with the simulated version of this stranger is the sense that we may be treading on, or misrepresenting the stranger. Looking at this from an empathic perspective, perhaps this is not a display of true empathy but something like empathy. Perhaps it is an indication of empathy, where empathy is explored as a simulated experience, as a means of looking. Here, the empathic inclination to become other through mimesis or mimicry is tested. Or perhaps it engages with empathy as inclination, an oscillating sense, moving into and out of the object.

Phenomenologists like Stein and Husserl have explored the idea of empathic stages. The unfixed nature of empathy lends itself to multidimensional expressions. Simulation might not be seen as empathy proper in phenomenological terms but as discussed in the previous chapter, it could be translated as an early stage in empathically apprehending the other. For example, I might first become aware that someone close to me is experiencing loneliness, having realised this I might bring myself to simulate how this feels for me and only then imagine how they feel experiencing this emotion. Zahavi explores Stein's theory of empathic stages saying: 'I might have a vague and relatively empty understanding of the other's experience. But then if I try to better understand it, if I try to explicate its character, I will no longer face the others experiential state as an object. Rather, its intentionality will pull me along, and I will turn towards its intentional object.'¹⁴⁵

Following Currie's theory the simulation or imitative gesture of the artist or the viewer does not display empathy in itself, but it offers this point of entry as a nudge to perception. So it seems, at least as far as Currie is concerned, that there is an argument for empathic engagement with objects that arouses imitative responses in the viewer, which in turn aid a change in perception. It might also be construed that the work explores the affective emotional qualities present in the foundational image.

¹⁴⁵ Zahavi, 'Empathy and Other-Directed Intentionality', p. 136.

Layers and Loops

‘Therefore, empathy is not a reaching outward. It is a loop. Because there isn’t any separation any more between what you are and what you see.’¹⁴⁶ Chris Kraus’s poetic assertion draws our attention to a problem with a kind of empathic identification, that we might just meet our self, coming back. While this might seem beyond the phenomenological definition of empathy outlined above and leaning more towards solipsism, if we consider Lipps’s notion of projecting an ‘ideal’ self it is worth exploring.

In addressing the artwork, I have made during this enquiry it might be useful to begin by identifying the impetus for it. This underpinning is significant as the locus of the work is predominantly focused on a stranger, a group of strangers or objects and effects belonging to another person. That the work begins from an external object, or person, suggests a particular kind of emphasis. From the start the work is inclined; it leans or projects out and then circles back, from outside to inside to outside to inside.

In *Backstory* the external object was a photograph. In the first video, a performance to camera work, *Scene One: Her Translation*, through the repeated gesture of donning and removing headscarves we see an almost mirror image of the woman in the foundational image. However certain elements are accentuated in the video. The act of donning the headscarf is repeated as if caught in an unending loop, putting scarf over scarf over scarf. The video itself, installed, is played on a returning loop, though there is a discernable beginning and end. The strategy of looping video is commonly used as an exhibition method or as a way of temporally displacing the viewer. It dissolves accepted narrative paths and plays with chronology. Birnbaum comments on the effect of loops suggesting

¹⁴⁶ Chris Kraus, *Aliens & Anorexia*, Semiotext(e) Native Agents Series (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2013). p. 150

they offer the artist a way to control and ‘stall’ time; ‘Loops, circularity, and rotation are modes of visualization, modes of (in)stalling time.’¹⁴⁷

Here it behaves as if to add flesh to the stilled bones of the original photograph. Moreover, it appears to express dissatisfaction with the photographic objects’ indexical qualities whilst harnessing its power to make impressions. Bellour says ‘before a photograph, you always close your eyes, more or less: the time it takes (theoretically infinite, above all repeatable) to produce the ‘supplement’ necessary for the spectator to enter into the image.’¹⁴⁸ The video work explores these ‘supplements’ as postscripts, additions, to the foundational image. It seems that if the artist closes her eyes as Bellour suggests, then in entering the image she sees a looped impression. The video manifests and invests the still image with a circular narrative, extending its temporal limits. It is more than ‘feeling with’, it is a literal stepping into and here in this recorded act of simulation we see simulative empathy at work in the method. If this is an empathic act, then it isn’t one that displays any direct understanding. It might be best described as *orientating* feeling and attention towards the foundational image by avoiding any resolution. Here we circle back to the idea of loop, the original photograph sets a speculative practice into being, imagining what is beyond its borders only to deliver us back to the photograph itself. Is it an exercise in reflecting reflection, a leaning out, a way of engaging in myth making and story-telling as a means to expose potential narratives fused within the light sensitive layers of emulsion?

¹⁴⁷ Daniel Birnbaum and April Elizabeth Lamm, *Daniel Birnbaum: Chronology*, Lukas & Sternberg, New York 13 (New York, NY: Lukas & Sternberg, 2005). p. 136

¹⁴⁸ Raymond Bellour in David Campany, ed., *The Cinematic*, Documents of Contemporary Art (London: Whitechapel, 2007).

YKCITSDNUORA/AROUNDSTICKY

Dear Edith

I am wondering about empathy and porosity the leaky edges of things, the very leaky edges of me. In front of me is a large object, a piece of wooden signage, back to front. As long as I am tall it is smooth and crafted, built to withstand a few knocks, a student party perhaps. I sit here hiding behind the laptop but it shouts at me in its bold Eurostile:

KCITSDNUORA.

Its rearward pleading keeps calling me away from my work and each time I look up I am faced with its mirror face, KCITSDNUORA. I'll refocus and think again, what was it? Yes, leaking, porosity, edges and thresholds. I pick up a pencil and jot it down on a post it note...the impossibility of finding discreet spaces to write to you has made this an imperative.

Beside me a mock plywood house illuminates its occupants with an overhead lamp. It is lined either side with couches upholstered in a tweed blue, it has a cool contemporary feel. It feigns privacy but its sides are open and so, it unwittingly creates a stage. I am drawn to watch. There are three occupants all focused on a screen, they don't seem to know each other, but appear to have an urgent need to be there, so close and intense is their screen attention. From where I sit I can watch without being seen and I study their stranger discomfort. Each person trying to maintain a c o r r e c t d i s t a n c e. The girl on the left fumbles in her bag and then apologises, embarrassed that her hand knocked the edge of his laptop screen; he nods and says something gruff, dismissive, that I didn't catch. I feel a pinch at his reproach and notice her reddening cheeks. I want to reach out and draw a curtain for her. I look away again.

My skin, ears, eyes are pricked by constant awareness, by the sheer necessity of other people.

I have looked for too long.

I feel touched out.

Touched?

KCITSDNUORA. The cool painted plywood wraps itself around that last/first letter and in a whisper; I call out the phoneme 'kkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkk'.

The sound, hard and bouncy is interrupted/complimented by the slow click click click of the boot heels of the tall woman in white and black, biting the middle finger on her left hand and tilting her head as she approaches the sign, click click click, clickkkkk.

She passes it without stopping, unstuck, it doesn't call to her. KCITSDNUORA

Beside me, on stage, the three occupants have settled again into their carefully maintained distance. Tap tap tap on keyboards, they are busy, effective, performing well. I wonder about their edges, perhaps they are sticky, not leaky like mine. Perhaps they leak and stick like a wound. Perhaps they stick and leak like a resinous tree, or perhaps they are smooth, assured and crafted, slick, like their plywood stage. KCITSDNUORA doesn't leak or stick, its smooth, clean, painted ply edges secrete nothing, encased in a low cool shine. Yet, despite the hermetic seal, it calls me, KCITSDNUORA imploring me. And I am drawn, drawn to its cool low perfection, the clean closed edges.

After looking a long while I imagine reaching out and running my hand slowly along the careful curve of the C. 'The 'outer' and 'bodily perceived' living body is given as the same'¹⁴⁹ your 'leib' Edith. I feel and see this smooth long curve, right Edith? Or perhaps this is precisely the problem with perception and porosity, all my senses are leaking into each other. I see feel, hear feel... Edges are sticky, edges are tricky, or at least knowing where one starts and another ends. Sticky thresholds to another, sticking to each other.

I return to my work. Focused on the screen for a time I can just about shut out the world around and give my attention to this text. The title is beautiful in its deceptive simplicity; 'Part III, Having A Body'¹⁵⁰. From this point of crystalline candour, it departs, and for a time I am following, I am with it, savouring each letter. Then this; 'Microperceptions or representatives of the world are these little folds that unravel in every direction, folds in folds, over folds, following folds, like one of Hantaï's paintings, or one of Clerambault's toxic hallucinations.'¹⁵¹ Folds in folds, my skin prickles with that sentence, prickles,

¹⁴⁹ Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*.p.44

¹⁵⁰ G. Deleuze, 'The Fold' Leibniz and the Baroque, (Athlone Press, London, 1993).

¹⁵¹ Ibid p. 86

pricklings; these 'tiny perceptions'¹⁵². I look down and pull back the sleeve of my shirt to see the goose bumps, the hairs standing. I notice the lights outside coming on. It is getting late.

And so I put down my laptop and move towards KCITSDNUORA. I climb on top of it; lying across its undulating surface wondering if my leaky porous edges and KCITSDNUORA might fuse, stick together. Lying there I let my hand drop down over the edge of the K, curl my knees up to rest on the R, and fall asleep.

When I wake the tap tap tapping has stopped there is no click click of heels and the lights are low. I have been asleep now for a few hours. I climb down and notice the small stage is empty. I step into it. I have found a quiet place to write to you now but can think of nothing to say.

Yours,

Fiona

¹⁵² Ibid p. 87

Section 2

You and me

*You picked up a paper on the way in and now you are standing reading, head bent, shoulders dropped. The narrative seems to be about sitting in a library. Looking up you see two female figures, one is prone while the other leans over her. You feel slightly caught off guard but lean in closer for a better look. As you do, you sense that someone is looking over your shoulder, reading your paper.*¹⁵³

This chapter, Section 2 - You And Me, focuses our attention on the body and intersubjectivity, in doing so it looks at how this is handled in my practice and that of other artists. Part II *Object other and trying on* explores fiction and trying on along with the role of the Rückenfigur and mirroring in engaging perspective shift. Here, I also examine ideas of introspection and feeling into with particular regard to my work *My Dearie Dearie*. In Part III *Gesture and the hands of others* I consider the sometimes hidden affects of gestures both of and toward the body. In Part IV *Intimacy and encounter* reflects on the affect of detail and attention in the work, to the qualities of the close-up body in film and how 'working with' becomes a significant structural element in creating work.

¹⁵³ See *Be My Halftone* in Portfolio of Work p. 21

Section 2

Part I

Dear Edith 2 (you and me)

Dear Edith,

I thought I might try to relate to you the character of the work that I make, something of its formal or perhaps informal qualities. I don't know exactly how these visual things should take shape in language so I hope you will allow me a little flexibility; there are things that are untranslatable here on this page, things you need to feel, to experience. To begin, making work puts me into contact with others. It frames bodies and focuses on the gestures of others. It would seem that I seek out connection, find ways to engage others, talk to others, observe others, and perhaps in this instance write to others. At the outset, the motivations for this method of working were a little unclear to me, did I lack confidence, was I suspicious of the artist as preponderant maker? Or might it be that I am more disposed to the idea of the ensemble? To working with and alongside? Is it that making with and working with offers a very particular space, like holding your thumb and forefinger millimetres apart and feeling the slow growing heat that connects.

'In the experience of the body of another, I discover a certain analogue to myself and my bodily experience.'¹⁵⁴ This 'analogue' that Husserl proposes a certain context emerges, something that affects and alters our actions. However, this 'analogue' is not a mirror, not a reflection but rather something that offers a sense of between. You would agree wouldn't you Edith, that the place between two people is a context worthy of consideration? Your dedication to the exploration of intersubjectivity more than testifies to this. I think then, that we have to say this space is often where and why the work exists.

¹⁵⁴ Russell, *Husserl*, p. 174.

It might be our motivations are similar, you and I. You sought to describe it in your writings, through understanding our psycho-physical nature, how and where these sensations are given in our minds and bodies. I explore it in practice, in making art.

When we work together or alongside there is a sense that each subject is individual but bounded by the actions of others just as some of my work is dependent upon relationships working, permissions being given, responses being made. Finding a structure, an 'orientated insertion'¹⁵⁵ that others are happy to work within isn't always straightforward. Perhaps working with others is a gesture that sits, nested amongst other gestures in the work. When it works there is a sense that the encounter carries with it an intimate quality, a feeling of into.

In developing my artworks, I do not have a script or a score, rather one emerges through working with others. So what is the 'certain context' that emerges between the artist and those I work with? Between the viewer and the work? Between you and me? A working relationship? A written response? The subject of a film? A tense discussion? A letter to long dead philosopher?

Yours,

Fiona

¹⁵⁵ Umberto Eco in Bishop, *Participation*.

Section 2

Part II

Object other and Trying on

There, on the screen in front of her, a pair of hands, slowly deliberately moving through what looks like a deck of cards. On the cards another pair of hands move, frame by frame, putting on a set of pristine white gloves. It has an instructive quality, like a How To video, or like it is asking her to perform a task. On the last frame the hands hold the cards steady for a time and then move out of view, it fades to black.

This chapter sets out from the image of the body. The body, parts of the body and our engagement with it in the practice, is fundamental. Whether that is a direct encounter with the body in the work or obliquely mediated through related objects. Empathy is a unique experience and phenomenologists maintain that it is a 'sui generis'. As such they are not in favour of the simulative approaches, where simulation is not seen as empathy in the real sense but as a process that 'provides an understanding'¹⁵⁶ or an introduction to the experience of another. However, within the frame of the experience of art (in the gallery for example) there is a space for a bracketed experience, where a range of affects including a sense of mirroring, of trying on, which are simulative in nature, create a possibility for intersubjective experience.

¹⁵⁶ Susan L. Feagin *Empathizing as Simulating*, in Coplan and Goldie, *Empathy*. p. 149

‘A child went forth everyday/and the first object he look’d upon/that object he became’¹⁵⁷

Whitman’s becoming object seems fluid, however the idea of becoming object might also seem far fetched or at least harder to reach than the idea of becoming an other. Mimicry and fantasy seem at first, the only possible way to enact this kind of becoming. However, empathy offers another sort of approach to this intersubjective, intercorporeal state, one that, within the framework of my practice, involves simulation, projection and perspective taking.

Fiction and trying on

Below I will address the idea that fiction and ‘trying on’ of ideas in the work sets out an experience not simply of fantasy but of incarnating¹⁵⁸, in that it materializes and ‘fleshes out’ in the visceral sense, the figure in the work. ‘But, more than this, I am drawn inexorably to the possibility that the subject is not the only emancipatory proposition: the possibility for becoming a thing that feels, and thus for a new exchange between things. Things; a set that includes both people and art objects.’¹⁵⁹

Intersubjectivity and art

Intersubjectivity holds the promise of escaping the confines of subjective experience, of being able to relate to and grasp an awareness of our being with others. For Husserl ‘‘intersubjective experience’ is that manner of experiencing the world in which one’s experience is mediated by an awareness of others’ experience of the same.’¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

¹⁵⁸ Here I am using the term incarnation not in the Christian transcendental sense but as noun, from past participle stem of Latin *incarnare* "to make flesh,"

¹⁵⁹ Linda Stupart: ‘Against Critical Distance: Chris Kraus and the Empathetic Exchange of Objects from Travis Jeppesen, ‘You Must Make Your Death Public - a Collection of Texts and Media on the Work of Chris Kraus’, n.d., 136.

¹⁶⁰ Russell, *Husserl*. p. 163

The possibility for embracing our social self through the common, the shared experience of art, has roots in artists' practice from the 1960's in the work of artists such as Martha Rosler, Gordon Matta-Clark, Adrian Piper to name a few. However, here the focus is turned to a niche, quality of intersubjectivity, perhaps not the big gesture participative works that Bourriaud and Bishop are concerned with. Rather than consider the social reach of an artwork, here the subtle qualities of affect are what is at stake. The work is focussed on the nature of what is between one body and a screen or one body and another. Artist and writer Simon O'Sullivan considers the shift in focus from the relational, he says; 'art is involved in a different kind of production of subjectivity from the typical. Indeed, the active production of subjectivity – our processual self- creation – is in general an aesthetic business.'¹⁶¹ Here 'trying on' becomes a model for intersubjective experimentation, a kind of provocation for the viewer, one that seeks to impart a shift in perspective.

Fiction, Pattern and perspective shift

As a provocation to the idea of simulation (trying on) then, and as a method of altering perspective I explored the idea that titles of artworks can set a series of questions in motion for the viewer. Doing this points to the link between the text and the image (or the material) and as such elicits a set of possibilities for the viewer. In the installation of *Backstory* one of the pieces titled *We Are Hardwired Pattern Finders*, a pile of folded posters set on the ground, recalls in its title that simulation or replication may in fact be an instinctive state. The title is intended to point to the object itself, a poster of a patterned scarf, but also to the notion that pattern or imitation is innate. 'Human infants are the most imitative creatures in the world'¹⁶² Pattern also suggests familiarity, the idea of 'patterns

¹⁶¹ Stephen Zepke and Simon O'Sullivan, *Deleuze and Contemporary Art* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9780748638376.001.0001>.

¹⁶² From Decety and Meltzoff, *Empathy, Imitation and the Social Brain*, in Coplan and Goldie, *Empathy*. p. 58

of behaviour' refers to something expected, recognisable or known. Alternatively, it may be about scanning for likeness as some element of familiarity. In this instance, the title was intended to draw out the motif of pattern as a form of mirroring and as such to reflect on the original impulse I had to make this body of work. That is, to use mirroring or simulation as a device to explore the potential for perspective shift.

In developing the work however, I wondered if simulation as a prompt to perspective shift is not the starting point? My concern about analogy and sameness grew and so I looked for some kind of rupture. Simulation relies heavily on a sort of analogous state, being like something and becoming like something might need to set out from some shared feature. Though the notion of becoming is knotty it is worth considering the potential links; in simulating we have an effort to resemble, an effort to become something. However, simulation never quite reaches the transformation that becoming proposes, and in making this work I wanted to produce more than mere resemblances, images that have no affect. I was searching for something that provided a shift, a move into the image and beyond its borders. Deleuze and Guattari's conception of becoming runs counter to the imitative or simulative argument. For them, becoming is 'generative of a new way of being that is a function of influences rather than resemblances. The process is one of removing the element from its original functions and bringing about new ones.'¹⁶³ This notion of a generative process reflects my decision to open the work up to others. In doing so it also provided the kind of break or rupture that the work needed. As such I took a step back from authoring or directing the work. I used an assemblage of voices to form the perspective shift in the work.

To do this, writers were invited to respond, through an open call, to an image of a woman with her back to us wearing a headscarf (see Portfolio of Work p. 11). Here I am

¹⁶³ <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue5/poke/glossary.html>

addressing this work from a different angle than discussed previously, one that considers how the writers' approach to this image affected my own. It struck me as curious how, in many of the writers' responses, they ascribed similar characteristics to the figure, determining her age by the choice of patterned scarf. For the most part they described in their writing an older or elderly woman. The 'likeness' might be seen as situational where the writers who responded to the image identified with the scarf as an object that conjures up a particular era, particular memories or affects. The scarf, because of its outmodedness, has a certain nostalgia that acts as a prompt. Their writing then, became more about a kind of incarnation than a simulation. By writing about her, or some imagined aspect of her life they were bringing 'her' closer for us.

According to the novelist Margaret Atwood fiction is a trying out, she says 'It allows you to try out, without actually having to do it.'¹⁶⁴ In this work fiction moves from trying out to trying on, it moves from testing ideas on paper to embodying them in objects and videos, in performance to camera. Here, I will argue that in developing these fictions the writers were not simply imitating, that is to say describing what they saw, they were inclined. Both imitation and simulation connote a kind of feigning, but incarnation reaches deeper and brings us closer to manifesting or embodiment. Imitation and simulation have a role to play in producing this affect, this incarnate figure. In imitating we carry the notion of following, in simulation we have the desire to create, to model something on something else. Both of these impulses, following and modelling, bring us closer to the object or figure in this image, in this case the photograph in *Backstory*. They offer us a sort of 'trying on'. Each story becomes a temporary shift into the image. By inviting the writers to respond I handed over a certain amount of control, asking them to direct the work. This signalled a shift in my approach to making work, opening work up to other authors. The inclusion of a number of voices also allowed for a more multifaceted/ layered

¹⁶⁴ 'Margaret Atwood - The Handmaid's Tale, Bookclub - BBC Radio 4', BBC, accessed 7 June 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0b4zf0w>. 10m16s 'And what does fiction allow you to do? It allows you to try out, without actually having to do it.'

response to the image. This layering or not settling down on one Backstory narrative or another provides the reader with a gap, one that allows for a kind of empathic oscillation, with, into and out of the image. We try on one version of the stranger in the image and perhaps, finding it wanting, move to the next. 'We might note here Bergson's ideas on fiction, or what he calls fabulation. The latter can, again, produce a gap, for those who choose to hear, between the fixed habits and rituals of society which in itself allows for what Deleuze calls 'creative emotion' to arise'.¹⁶⁵

Trying on as a gesture

'One of the ways I'd kept photography alive for myself was through writing. The word could redeem a failed picture, text could invigorate and give new direction to a stalled practice.'¹⁶⁶ Davey's quote points to particular quality of the relationship between the photograph and writing that they can vivify and inflect.

For my part on receiving these texts I was clear that I did not want to behave as editor in response. I couldn't/didn't want to respond to each text individually, instead I focused on how these fictions became objects. That is to say, how the writing filled out the backstory of the photograph. The individual storylines opened a new potential direction and as such it was impossible to follow them all at once. In this way their narratives became a mode of exploring potentiality, of 'trying on' and thus embodying and animating the image. To materialise this idea, the notion of trying on became the central gesture¹⁶⁷ in creating the work. As such I would argue that trying on as a gesture, brings us closer to the feeling of empathic oscillation, where we move into and out of the object before us. Here, this gesture is recorded as a performance to camera in the video *Scene One: Her*

¹⁶⁵ Zepke and O'Sullivan, *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*.

¹⁶⁶ Davey, *Moyra Davey*. p. 32

¹⁶⁷ More on gesture in the work in Section 2 *Gesture and the Hands of Others* p. 140-

*Translation*¹⁶⁸. Presented to the viewer then, is the figure of a woman with her back to us, trying on scarf after scarf (see *Backstory Scene One: Her Translation* Portfolio of Work p. 14).

Sensed body and Trying On

Philosopher Max Scheler questioned the simulative approach saying: ‘How can the argument from analogy explain that we can empathise with creatures whose bodies in no way resemble our own, say a suffering bird or fish?’¹⁶⁹ Whether Scheler’s example describes a sympathetic or empathic attitude is arguable, however his argument suggests that analogous states are not necessarily a prerequisite of empathic feeling. The example is indeed pertinent when considering the question of empathy and the object, for where is the parallel between body and object? For Zahavi they are poles apart, he states that ‘the body of the other differs radically from inanimate objects, and that our perception of this body is quite unlike our ordinary perception of objects’¹⁷⁰ Perhaps Scheler’s example might suggest that there is an a priori exception then when it comes to regarding the body. While phenomenologists disagree¹⁷¹ within my practice analogy opens up a certain connection between my body and the body of another, through mirroring, orientating, and following. To clarify, I am not suggesting that simply because we have a body, that we encounter the body of others as given to us with any particular fluency. After all, we feel our body to be a layered and unique thing in the world and *we* are folded into it in embodiment. I am arguing that encountering the body, in the space of the artwork discussed, has the potential to draw us into a kind of pairing. Perhaps it is the nature of this encounter that produces the affect, an encounter is not simply seeing and recognising an object or film etc. holds

¹⁶⁸ To view the video Scene One: Her Translation go to <https://vimeo.com/110081368>

¹⁶⁹ Zahavi, Dan p. 152

¹⁷⁰ Zahavi, Dan, p. 153

¹⁷¹ See Currie’s argument for a simulative approach G.P. Currie and Eds. A.Coplan & P. Goldie, ‘Empathy for Objects’, in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 82–95.

an image of the body, an encounter is a particular kind of felt exchange. Simon O'Sullivan clarifies 'With a genuine encounter however the contrary is the case. Our typical ways of being in the world are challenged, our systems of knowledge disrupted. We are forced to thought. The encounter then operates as a rupture in our habitual modes of being and thus in our habitual subjectivities. It produces a cut, a crack.'¹⁷²

¹⁷² Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond Representation* (Houndmills [etc.: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).

I see Dürer's effort to translate his pain and my hand moves to where it hurts.

Introspection and feeling into

Analogy does confer an advantage; through it we can simulate the experiences of another. I see an outward expression of pain and I can infer how that might feel. Though I can never get a handle on the site of that pain, I can draw from my own sense data. We can refer to our bodily sensations and experiences as a method of accessing analogous or simulative understanding. In Scheler's and indeed Stein's or Zahavi's argument this does not constitute empathic understanding proper, but here, and within the framework of art practice, I consider that perhaps it offers a form of 'trying on' that brings us closer to empathy. My contention is that, through engaging with the body in the artworks discussed below we can fine-tune a kind of empathic attention. Art becomes a testing ground, a space for exploration of and inclination towards a particular kind of attention to the other. If we start from a point of inclination to, a position of with, perhaps we can move to a sense of feeling into.

'In Guattari's terminology, we access 'new universes of reference' through interacting and experimenting with new and different 'materials of expression',¹⁷³. In *My Dearie Dearie* the 'material of expression' is the body and exploring its proprioceptive responses to a number of objects from Vernon's archive. Though reflecting on comments from Nicola afterwards, her performing the work might be said to explore other more internal qualities. She said; "I think the intensity was about trying to find and then connect with the chair - to study it, appreciate it, soak it up etc. to find it in myself. I was trying to pop the image of the chair off the page and be with it in an imagined and felt sense. If that makes sense? In my memory, I feel like I was doing a kind of looking at (the thing) and then a looking

¹⁷³ Zepke and O'Sullivan, *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*.p. 12

in (at myself/in myself) to find and feel through my response”¹⁷⁴ Her comments reflect a sense of feeling with (‘be with it in an imagined felt sense’) and into looking in (‘at myself/in myself’) the chair.

This in turn suggests that her exploration of the chair provoked an introspective quality or indeed interoceptivity as a sensed response. It may be that she has an ability, more than most, to reflect on these senses as Vernon Lee noted some people were ‘motor types’ or had a heightened ability to consider the affect of an object on the body and the senses. However, it may also be that these are the ‘new universes of reference’ that engaging with artworks set forth.

The Threshold is the Body II

In the previous chapter I wrote of empathy and the object, where the object presents as a threshold to experiencing empathic connection and in turn where the body acts as a threshold to sensing and experiencing the object¹⁷⁵. Where the object presented *is* the body how does this inflect our empathic engagement? In the body of the other we have a certain kind of access through our own sensing experience. Are we more or less attuned? More or less attentive? More or less with and into?

Leaning Into the gap and turning away (The Rückenfigur)

When faced with the foundational image in *Backstory* then I am not simply facing an abstract thing, it is no ordinary thing. The thing we are engaging with is unique among things, it is a body. A particular kind of body, a body with its back turned facing away, a

¹⁷⁴ Email conversation with Nicola Singh, March 2018.

¹⁷⁵ See Ch1 PtII ‘Approach the threshold’, ‘The threshold is the body’

Rückenfigur¹⁷⁶, much like those employed in Romantic paintings¹⁷⁷. The body of the other seen in part and not whole leaves a gap. The Rückenfigur is a fragment. The incomplete nature of the figure provokes our interest, our need to know more. It acts as a prompt for the imagination or as Deleuze might have it, it allows for the ‘creative emotion’¹⁷⁸ to arise. Examining this through the lens of the phenomenology of imagination and its link to perception might give a reading of how the Rückenfigur operates. In perception we have the given thing, the image before us, but it is not whole and so prompts our imagination to engage with the possible thing, forming imaginative ‘proxy evidence’¹⁷⁹ as Samuel Todes suggests. In doing so we have a going toward, an inclination that moves our imagination into the image before us. Todes’ reading of the imagination as proffering ‘proxy evidence’ prompts the question: Is imaginative engagement acting as a *substitute* for the limitations of the image in the work? If so does it come closer to a kind of sublimation than an empathic act?

Or perhaps there is another way to look at this kind of imaginative leap that the body of the Rückenfigur provokes. Does this kind of engagement offer us a way to ‘flirt with the possibility of becoming other’¹⁸⁰ as Mark Leckey would have it. Flirting with, trying on, oscillating, all become methods for exploring how empathic attention might function in the work. Perhaps then the Rückenfigur as a fragmented image creates, in the surrealist sense, a grotesque body of sorts. We fill it with our own projections and flirtations, we try it on and what we are left with is a collage, an assemblage. Is this sort of ‘becoming’ simply a flight of fantasy rather than a true empathic experience of becoming or intersubjectivity? Where empathy holds the perspective of the other as its centre of orientation, fantasy can move freely. For example, in fantasy we can meet representations

¹⁷⁶ Rückenfigur, usually considered to be an image of a person seen from behind, often contemplating a view.

¹⁷⁷ For example in the work of German Romantic painter Casper David Friedrich’s *Wanderer above the Sea Fog* (1818),

¹⁷⁸ see Deleuze 1988a: 111; Bergson 1935: 209–65)

¹⁷⁹ Samuel Todes, *Body and World* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001).

¹⁸⁰ Charlesworth, ‘Mark Leckey, by J.J. Charlesworth / Art Review’.

of ourselves. It does, however, offer us an example of where making work that leans in or is inclined towards the body of another produces these imaginative gaps and also generates a possibility for perspective taking.

Moving with, Mirroring and ‘being for me’ (*My Dearie Dearie*)

In the section above, I detail accounts of inclination toward and explore our analogous relation to the body of others in the work. Vernon Lee’s embodied aesthetics offers a particular approach to objects, often paintings or sculpture with figurative elements. She encouraged introspective reflection on our bodily sensations as a way of recording response to the object before us. Along with Scottish artist Clementina Anstruther-Thomson (Kit) they devised a kinaesthetic ‘motor’ aesthetics, taking into account not simply involuntary movement, such as the breath and eye movements but more deliberate movement. ‘Perceiving form was not just about the body’s passive response, however, but active movement as well. In order to see a statue properly, one had to shift the body: ‘when we adjust our muscles in imitation of the tenseness or slackness of the statue’s attitude, the statue immediately becomes a reality to us’¹⁸¹ In this example moving *with* and around the sculpture offers a particular type of embodied perception of form.

‘Husserl speaks of how the other is given in his ‘being-for-me’ (*für-mich-sein*) in empathy, and how that counts as a form of perception.’¹⁸² In his conception the subject *needs* others to determine what is objectively real, ‘he saw our capacity to constitute the world as intimately tied up with our being in relation to other people’¹⁸³ While being for and feeling with are distinct I think they have parallels, in that both require an awareness of oneself in relation to others.

¹⁸¹ Lanzoni, ‘Practicing Psychology in the Art Gallery’. p. 249 Here quoting Lee (Lee & Anstruther-Thomson, 1897, p. 677).

¹⁸² Zahavi, ‘Empathy and Other-Directed Intentionality’. p. 135

¹⁸³ Russell, *Husserl*. p. 162

Echoing Vernon and Kit's research in my work *My Dearie Dearie* places in me into the condition of being with, with their archives, with their ideas. However, my being with might not be literal, my feeling with was built over time and grew out of a sense that I was 'with' Vernon and Kit through their letters and writing. Through building my own visual language from the words and images they produced, the resulting artwork considers ideas of the connection between object and body, which Vernon Lee set out to explore in her treatise *Beauty and Ugliness*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the work began when I visited an archive of their letters in Oxford. Much like the writer's stories for *Backstory* fleshed out the figure in the photograph, reading Vernon and Kit's letters, seeing their handwriting, generated a developing sense of closeness to them. They were no longer 'characters', historical abstracts, but people who felt the cold, who missed each other.¹⁸⁴ Reading the letters also reflected how their intimate relationship was not simply a footnote in the research they developed together but that their 'being for' each other was elemental to producing richness and nuance in their exchange. Their 'being for' each other, exposed in the letters through intimate details, generated a tangible sense of my 'being with' them. This moved me to pursue a process of making that manifested some of their ideas in video.

While mirroring was important on one level, in that I wanted to reimagine specific approaches from their research process, I was not interested in exacting reconstructions. A reconstruction felt too much like representing or illustrating. I wanted to create something generative, an artwork that responded to their ideas but became something new. When developing the video work, this idea of being for each other seemed key. Being for Kit and Vernon. Being for those that I engage in a process of making, in this case asking people to perform to camera. As such it was important then that I worked with someone

¹⁸⁴ In the letters Kit talks of needing a new winter coat, of being ill and missing Vernon.

who I felt connection with and so I worked with friends, using the already existing connection to build the work.

In *My Dearie Dearie* we find the experience of the body exists in folds. Firstly, there is the experience for the performers. Kit and Vernon's process of looking at and recording bodily sensation in the gallery was transposed to the studio and recorded on camera (not in a note book as Kit would have recorded hers). In making the work Nicola and Julie were asked to use bodily response and gesture to react to objects. Following the performers experience the viewer then accesses the work through engaging with the movements of two bodies, Nicola and Julie's. 'In the experience of the body of another, I discover a certain analogue to myself and my bodily experience. This is clearly not an analogy in the usual sense. Indeed, Husserl finds it necessary to qualify this expression with the counterbalancing metaphor of 'mirroring'.¹⁸⁵

Having recorded their performed responses, I realised significant parallels existed between these and those I had read about in Kit's notes. It is not that this mirroring across the ages validates the response, and certainly this is not the intention, but it resounds and amplifies the depth of their research. It places my work as a kind of echo of theirs and in doing so it brings about the potential of further echoes or responses from viewers. 'Rather than looking to a transcendent horizon, or positioning art as taking us to 'another place' (or promising to take us there), we might then understand art practice as simply being involved in the actualization of some of this potential that surrounds us here and now.'¹⁸⁶

So perhaps this method of 'being led by' provides the potential for a particular kind of encounter, both for the performers and artist and also for the viewer, one that places us 'with' Kit and Vernon.

¹⁸⁵ Russell, *Husserl*. p. 174

¹⁸⁶ Zepke and O'Sullivan, *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*.

Pairing bodies and shared experience (Nicola and Kit)

The similarity between Kit's response to the chair and Nicola's was significant. Below I will consider how this reflects a leaning into, a mirroring that engages with the idea of empathic attention.

N. Singh: "I remember the feeling of trying to relate my imagined sense of the chairs scale, density, texture etc. into the physical/somatic sense of my own body. I wanted to push my shoulder blades right back, to feel how it felt to get rigid/sturdy but also to sag into the support of the chair - maybe key words are cradled, proud, alert, symmetry. I remember thinking about the joins in the chair - like between the arms and set and legs etc. I thought through the joins in my body and the transitions in my movement when I was trying to capture the flow of the chair joins. In general, I was definitely feeling myself doing it rather than seeing myself doing it. Also, I think my bodily responses sat somewhere between trying to understand the chair (materiality/energetically) and myself in it/alongside it"¹⁸⁷

Here a quote from Clementina Anstruther-Thomson (Kit) observing the same chair offers a parallel, a pairing; 'In one experiment, Anstruther-Thomson minutely described the perception of a chair, with curved arms, a square seat and back, and leaf-like ornaments at the top. She reported her eye movements, breathing patterns, feelings of pressure, tension and balance in a prolonged contemplation of the chair and its parts. For instance, her eyes, in following the lines of the chair, were pulled apart in a way similar to the way that the chest was felt to pull apart. There were alterations in the equilibrium of parts of the body; the feet were pressed hard against the ground, involuntarily imitating the front legs of the chair; there were shifts in balance, and with the recognition of the height of the chair,

¹⁸⁷ Email conversation with Nicola Singh, March 2015

there was an accompanying upward stretch of the body',¹⁸⁸

In the quotes above we have an insight into how both Kit and Nicola felt their body respond to the image of a chair. As such we gain access to an experience that is normally hidden from view. The responses they describe are not responses to other bodies but to other objects. It is through filming these responses in the studio, that the body becomes available to viewers to engage with. I would argue that a chair, or a scarf, or a pin is a very particular kind of object with which to engage. It is an object for and of the body, and as a consequence the body is inferred. Connecting to these particular kinds of objects draws an indexical, experiential line that leads us back to the body.

Objects for and of the body

It is worthwhile to now examine the relationship between the objects I use in the work and the body; the scarf, the pin, the chair. Lipps proposes the object is always 'being formed by me', Zahavi extends this argument saying; 'It is not possible simply to insert intersubjectivity somewhere within an already established ontology; rather, the three regions 'self', 'others' and 'world' belong together; they reciprocally illuminate one another, and can only be understood in their interconnection.'¹⁸⁹ So for Zahavi objects exist in the 'world' realm and while we perceive them as being very different from the bodies of others they have a fundamental connection to our bodies. This is particularly true where the object is *for* the body. If we consider for example, the figure in the video *Scene One: Her Translation*, the central object is the woman's scarf. It functions as both guise and description for the shape of the head. Equally the pin in the video work *Vernon's Right Hand* serves as a driving the central 'catch', between the hand and the photograph.

¹⁸⁸ Lanzoni, 'Practicing Psychology in the Art Gallery'. Lee & Anstruther-Thomson; 1897, p. 548

¹⁸⁹ Zahavi, Dan p. 151

‘According to Heidegger, the type of entities we first and foremost encounter in our daily life are not natural objects such as oaks and cod, but artefacts or pieces of equipment, such as chairs, forks, shirts, soap, protractors, etc. And it is a fundamental feature of these entities that they all contain references to other persons.’¹⁹⁰ Tools, like art objects where the process of production is also sometimes inferred¹⁹¹, place us in contact with a sense of other, much like the pinning in *Vernon’s Right Hand* produced a sense of feeling with Vernon. The art object is surely an exaggerated version of such, as evinced in the art object is the sense of the author/other. Can the audience ever experience art without considering the author-other? The art object places the viewer in a special relation with its object-ness, its having been made-ness. Through this it invites a certain attachment, a reading, a translation.

This in turn addresses a sense of self, or self in relation to other. For Sherry Turkle this is not just the consequence of viewing art but the essential aim of artwork is ‘to be evocative objects, soliciting us to be their subjects, and, in turn, the author of their meanings at least for a while.’¹⁹² Turkle’s conception drives the idea of the active attentive viewer further. Here the object encounter produces a viewer-as-author. Intersubjectivity seems to be at the centre of the empathic aesthetic experience. It drives our interest and therefore attention toward and into the object before us. It asks us to consider how it was made and by whom and how we might make meaning with it. However here (and for the purpose of this research) it is useful to return to Stein, who bridges this gap, bringing together both physical and mental being in her notion of the *leib*, the living, sensing body. Edith Stein says: ‘Furthermore, this psycho-physical individual only becomes aware of its living body

¹⁹⁰ Zahavi, Dan p. 154

¹⁹¹ In general, when we encounter art works we consider that art has an author.

¹⁹² Jones, Caroline A. in Turkle, Sherry p 242

as a physical body like others when it empathically realizes that its own zero point of orientation is a spatial point among many.’¹⁹³

Alongsideness and the second hand (Synthetics and Intersubjectivity)

‘It is also possible for me to meet myself in the realm of fantasy... to meet my mirror image. This reminds us, for example, of the experience Goethe relates in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. One evening he was coming from Sesenheim after saying good-bye to Friederike, and he met himself on the way in his future form.’¹⁹⁴

Exploring the idea of being ‘among many’ sits at the heart of my motivations for making artwork, occasionally this looks like a fantastical attempt to mirror someone else, or it might be seen as trying on or ‘flirting’ with the possibility of becoming another. At times the methods for addressing this are reflected more succinctly in material choices. Added to this is the scouring of second hand shops for particular items, denim jackets for a project I made in 2012 called *Wolfs Den* (see Figure 4 below), T-Shirts branded with city titles (for a project called *Anywhere But Here* (2012- on-going), and brown nylon flower patterned scarves for *Backstory*. Gathering the scarves meant months of finding and buying scarves of a similar era, poking about in clothing bins in second hand shops, the smell and nylon feel revealing scraps of their history. The texture was important, the scarves had to feel a little synthetic. Synthetic; a synthesis of then and now, of them and me, the etymology brings about certain notion of connection, one thing made to connect to another, it is ‘placed together’, man made, made up, something in its very fibre brings about a fiction. I might have commissioned a replica, a series of precise imitations, but instead I needed to find old approximations, something close to but not exact. Like Todes suggests, a kind of imaginative proxy, a stand-in. The connection might seem oblique; it

¹⁹³ Stein, Edith, 1989, *On The Problem of Empathy*, ICS Publications, Washington D.C., 3rd rev.,

¹⁹⁴ Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*.p 10 Here Stein is reflecting on the difference between empathy and fantasy.

functions to highlight an inclination in the work rather than a direct link. Collecting these objects that belonged to someone else brought about a sense of being alongside others, through the object. Someone else's body, someone else's smell.



Figure 4: *Wolfs Den*, C-Print photograph, 2012

Section 2

Part III

Gesture and the hands of others (is gesture the object?)

You pick up a small newspaper, it opens on the central pages. They are bare save for an image of a hand painted colour sample and the words 'She Inhales Your Colour', you wonder about sniffing the pages but embarrassed at the thought, you skip to the next page. In dull green and blue it states, 'I Am Inclined'.¹⁹⁵

In the project *In the Hands of Others*, I worked with art conservators considering their engagement with the art objects they attend. To do so, I adopted a method of quiet observation, watching over the shoulders of the conservators, seeing how they care for and work with art objects (paintings and works on paper) in order to repair or at least preserve the object. The method reflects Stein's assertion that to experience empathy is akin to being 'led by the foreign experience'¹⁹⁶ so I allow myself to be led by the conservator's approach. In a seminar on her work and research delivered by artist Imogen Sidworthy¹⁹⁷ she proposed 'alongsideness' as a particular method used by French educator Fernand Deligny, who developed a radical education programme and understanding of how to 'live with' autistic children.

¹⁹⁵ See Portfolio of Work *Be My Halftone & I AM INCLINED*, p. 21

¹⁹⁶ Stein, Edith, 1989, *On The Problem of Empathy*, ICS Publications, Washington D.C., 3rd rev., ed. p.xvii

¹⁹⁷ Imogen Sidworthy delivered a seminar to Northumbria post grad students in Nov 2014 where she spoke about a recent project...

Though the application and motivation for this are vastly different to my own, this methodology chimes with my approach to research in the conservators' area and indeed beyond into other areas of my art practice¹⁹⁸. The quiet observation and occasional interaction were far from what we might consider 'participatory', in that I did not look for them to insert something specific, either materially or conceptually into the work. However, as I outlined in my methodology section, I felt I was engaging with them beyond just coolly observing. There was activity in my observing. I talked with them about their work, attended their seminars, took part in a workshop, listened to their lectures, observed their methods and spent time there. In describing this approach it clearly shares characteristics with the anthropological method of the 'participant observer'¹⁹⁹. Research methods which anthropologist Tim Ingold describes as being more of an 'ontological commitment' than a process of data collection. This approach allows for a more intimate engagement, the sense that though you are outside of the group you are not set apart, you are actively engaged, and through this connected. It could also be said that spending this time with the conservators was a methodological choice, a gesture of connection.

Inclination is the gesture

Sometimes a gesture is invisible, but folded into a way of working. 'He claimed that his gesture manual had another application, being "so ordered to serve for privy cyphers for any secret information"'.²⁰⁰ In the previous chapter I discussed 'trying on' as a gesture or action that brought about the sense of oscillation. It is made visible in the practice, filmed in a performance to camera. However, not all gestures are as visible or evidenced by the

¹⁹⁸ see My Dearie Dearie in Portfolio of Work. P.25

¹⁹⁹ Time Ingold in his talk at CCA Glasgow in Feb 2018 describes the participant observation as a process of spending time 'with people you want to work with, learn from them, write lots of notes and so on so you get really deep into that particular way of life' <https://soundcloud.com/cca-glasgow/tim-ingold-search-and-search-again-on-the-meaning-of-research-in-art>

²⁰⁰ Dillon, Brian p. 26

resulting artworks in this way. There are gestures that are nested in the practice, implicit but also fundamental. In developing work alongside the conservators then, there is the sense that my working practices were subtly changed. The work leans out, similar to a tropism, a plant that reaches toward the light, it grows towards the conservators' ways of working. It is more than being influenced, though there is clearly affect operating here. Looking closely at the etymology of the word influence, I can get closer to describing the kind affect formed in working 'alongside'. It could be said there is a sense of emanation, of things leaking out from their way of working, into my own. However, clearly the affect is only leaking in one direction, towards my working practice. Perhaps then if we consider influence in this way, as a force that exerts direction, a word that better describes the affect of being with and around the conservators working practices is inclination. In Section 1 - *Orientations and Inclinations* pt. II²⁰¹ I considered how inclination can be folded into empathic orientation. Here inclination is a gesture. I am inclined, I lean in closer toward their ways of working, to a closer understanding of their practice, I am inclined to know more and in leaning I am myself bearing gesture. 'With pure inclination (*in-clinare*) I am taken to the very midst of leaning and bending (*clinare*) and what I see here is, yet again, the gesture of a gesture.'²⁰² Following from Lomax's description of 'pure inclination' we can see that the practice of working alongside carries a set of intrinsic qualities that produce particular gestures. Being alongside alters how we behave, affects our being. Being alongside empathically has further bearing.

Paper, collage and with

Observing the conservators tending to paper, gluing, wrapping and testing it had a bearing on my material decisions. I worked with paper- filming, folding and printing on it. I chose to work with newsprint, antithetical with respect to conservation, but a paper that carries

²⁰¹ See *Orientations and Inclinations* Chapter 1 part 2.

²⁰² Yves Lomax, *Pure Means* chapter 2: Consideration, p. 35

time on its surface like no other, blushing in the sun and yellowing. For me the relationship with time that the conservators engaged in, needed to imprint somewhere in the work. Newsprint carries affect on its surface, 'the brittle sounds of pages being turned and folded, (they) empathize with their thinning bulk'.²⁰³ Reflecting on this quality, I produced a limited run folded newspaper document titled; *Be My Halftone*. The paper was a collage of sorts, using colour samples from the conservator's portfolios. The colour samples demonstrate the conservator's dexterity at inclining towards another, they mix a palette of pigments specific to the painting they are retouching. 'In retouching, conservators tend to mix colour using as few pigments as physically possible. The laws of colour mixing mean that hue, saturation and value are increasingly diminished the more pigments are mixed together - basically things start to get murky as you mix. It's one of the things that you can't really learn without doing it a hundred times. Colour mixing and retouching are very much tacit learning.'²⁰⁴

Significant to my research was the way these samples reveal the conservators' ability as imitator, as adopting the colours and marks of another. The samples are a trying on of sorts; they reflect the close-up, deep observation of the conservator as they try to emulate the marks and tones of another. Looked at it from this angle it seems that they are inclined too, bent over their canvases, dissecting details, they lean toward the original author of the work and to the object before them, making matching marks. It is not a complete mirroring process; rather they want to infill, drawing close to the original but without attempting to mask the difference. As such they are engaged in an almost invisible process of collage, where their marks will be added to those of another. Collage necessitates assembling, collating and bringing together different parts; as such it seems a fundamentally relational practice.

²⁰³ from Index Cards in Moyra Davey et al., eds., *Speaker Receiver - Moyra Davey: This Publ... in Conjunction with Her Exhibition 'Speaker Receiver', Kunsthalle Basel, June 17 - Aug. 29, 2010* (Berlin: Sternberg Pr, 2010).

²⁰⁴Dr Richard Mulholland art conservator, explaining the process of colour mixing and samples via email 2018.

For *In the Hands of Others* the connections are laid out in the pages of a collaged newsprint paper document titled; *Be My Halftone* (see Portfolio of Work p. 21) using colour samples from conservation students, Paige Keith, Rowan Mastin, Simone Parker, Emily Smith & Gabriella Irving. The title is a nod towards the process of making colour samples, all of which attempt a process of near but not exact replication. It also addresses the reader, petitioning them to come closer, to lean in. The halftone is a reprographic process that infers a simulative quality where the image is made of dots that, seen from afar, appear whole. It is a process where marks made close together or alongside generate a complete picture. The halftone itself gestures towards simulation. In the paper, I juxtaposed my words with their samples, sampled their samples, folded it and made it something to be picked up and read.

From working in Burt Hall I found the conservators approach to their damaged objects most affecting, they care for them, attend to them. To conserve is to put yourself in the service of, to guard and protect. The filmed action in *Care Instructions for Jean* reflects on methods I observed the conservators using. In accessing the Sims archive at Burt Hall²⁰⁵ I became aware of a practice of folding images on paper into paper. This appeared to me as a particular gesture of care, the images are wrapped ‘blanketed’ even to protect them from harm.

As such the gesture of folding the paper in *Care Instructions for Jean* is not about some kind of origami, which might suggest function or design, but more about both the activity of folding and folding the image *into* itself. Significantly, it does not produce a particular recognisable object, focussing instead on the gesture of folding rather than what might be created or produced by it. This folding gesture becomes the object of attention, not the

²⁰⁵ The Charles Sims archive held at Burt Hall

resulting shape/configuration. Here the folding activity preserves and maintains the gaze of the figure in the image²⁰⁶, and in turn, holds our attention.



Figure 5: 'Fifty Minutes' by Moyra Davey, Still from video, 2006

Reading gestures and an audience of one

'From this mass of paper strewn all over the sunlit floor, she began to conjure up an image of it all coming together, the parts knitting themselves into a web or net capable of holding her in a sort of blissful suspension.'²⁰⁷ Moyra Davey in her essay 'The Problem of Reading' connects reading to a process of collage. In her video *Fifty Minutes* (2006), Davey moves from room to room narrating an 'autofiction' that reflects on various daily effects, from the contents of her fridge to her engagement with psychoanalysis. All the while her voice droning and flat, talks through a text. Her work, described as 'gestural

²⁰⁶ The image used is of 'Jean Abercromby Mrs Morison of Haddo' by Allan Ramsay, and is taken from an image of the painting mid-way through the conservation process

²⁰⁷ Moyra Davey et al., *The Problem of Reading* (Montpelier, Vt: Vermont College, 2003). p. 41

poetry²⁰⁸, exudes a sense of interiority and creates an atmosphere of intimacy. As she talks, her son bounces energetically on the bed behind her, we see her floor strewn with unwashed clothes. When she does address the camera directly she is up close, this feels personal. We feel she is making work to be read and encountered by an audience of one. In *Fifty Minutes* at times she appears to be addressing the page, maybe even talking to herself, the notional audience folded in, collapsed almost, on itself. Perhaps this is no surprise when the title and timing of the piece reflect that most particular experience of the psychoanalyst's couch. Watching it then, I am reminded of the experience of hearing the words you read in your head, the feeling of being folded into reading. It was curious then to me, to find that the occasional stumble in her narration were a fact of the method by which she makes the work. Though it appears to be a narration of her life, she calls the work an 'autofiction'. To record it on camera, she writes a script, reads the words and occasionally attempts to recite them. Her tripping over words, from time to time, seems to point to the fact that it is a 'performed reading'.

Unlike the conceptualist approach, for example Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs*, 1965²⁰⁹ where text might be used to challenge the coded language of the image, Davey sees photography and writing as a process of assembling and pairing. In the press release for an exhibition she curated with Zoe Leonard she says; 'the affiliations here could best be described as symbiotic. (Symbiosis: the intimate living together of two dissimilar organisms in a mutually beneficial relationship.) Many of the assembled works propose an interchangeability or fluency between image and text that seems at once to anticipate (in the case of the older works) and to respond to (for those more recent) today's proliferating

²⁰⁸ Chris Kraus 'Description over Plot' <http://murrayguy.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Chris-Kraus-Description-over-Plot-2010.pdf>

²⁰⁹

https://www.moma.org/collection/works/81435?artist_id=3228&locale=en&page=1&sov_referrer=artist

digital interfaces, in which images are increasingly embedded within texts, and texts inscribed within the spaces of an image.²¹⁰

Like Davey performing reading for the camera, reading in a gallery space is both a common experience, titles and biographies often inform and direct us, and also a self-conscious one. We read in the space where people come to look. The text in my work *Be My Halftone*, a paper that I made for the exhibition in Burt Hall, doesn't proffer information, or deliver interpretations. In making such elliptical references as; '*Be my halftone, be my proxy, I am inclined, she inhales your colour*' (See Portfolio of work p. 21), what am I asking of the viewer? Using these words, this language I am gesturing to something that does, rather than something that says, calling, urging the reader, 'be my'. Moving between my, I and she, reflects an active, slippery, subject, it highlights the *into* and *with* of working alongside. It is also a gesture toward the reader that perhaps, looks from one angle like an effort to engage them. Connecting with the viewer ('she inhales your colour') attempting to draw them into this narrative. It shapes the viewer, creates a disposition, certain physicality, one of leaning into.

As such the work is not involved in a complex play of semiotics but exists as an active gesture connecting the viewer to a certain kind of self-reflexive space. 'In relation to aesthetics and affects, this function might be summed up as the making visible of the invisible, the making perceptible of the imperceptible or, as Deleuze and Guattari would say, the harnessing of forces.'²¹¹

²¹⁰ From VISION IS ELASTIC. THOUGHT IS ELASTIC, curated by Moyra Davey and Zoe Leonard, 2011
http://murrayguy.com/exhibitions/2011/?post_type=exhibitions#vision-is-elastic-thought-is-elastic-2011

²¹¹ Andrews and O'Sullivan, *Objects and Affects*. p. 20

The letter as a gesture

Throughout this thesis reading and writing letters play a central role. The letter is used as a method, as a gesture, as an indicator of tone. But as letters inform other aspects of my studio practice, namely the letters between Kit and Vernon in *My Dearie Dearie* it is worthwhile considering them more closely. In the context of this thesis, what do they bring into being? From the outset they produce a voice that offers a certain kind of intimacy. A tone that allows the autobiographical to speak out and be heard, but at the level of a whisper. The informal letter is domestic in scale. It holds the attention of one to one and as such, in the context of this written thesis, it allows for an engagement with Edith Stein and ideas encountered in her phenomenological treatise 'On the Problem of Empathy' that is closer to something familial.

Letter writing has another perhaps more crucial function. It is orientated towards a particular person. It is directed to *someone*. The connection made is personal, intimate. When Sylvia Plath's mother Aurelia Schober Plath, published Sylvia's letters in 'Letters Home' she mentions the dialogic nature of the letters saying 'Sylvia fused parts of my life with her from time to time'²¹². So letters by their very nature drive us into an intimate space, the space between two people. In doing so they set out a central concern for this thesis, to explore this space through a practice of making art.

The letter poses a set of relations that ask us to drop our guard, that invite us to move into that private room, to sit in the chair and hear the voice of the letter writer in our head as we read. It is not concerned with whether or not the writer is an 'author', the letter writer is not precious, nor anxious about the 'value' of their product, they write to be heard, to communicate, that is the point. Yves Lomax writes: 'a private letter writer may well have

²¹² Letters Home, Sylvia Plath ed. Aurelia Schober Plath, p. 3.

a signatory but it does not have an author'²¹³, she goes on to explain that for the letter writer to be made an author 'the author function has to happen and that only happens under certain conditions. Now, if the author function were to take place she would become the subject of a construction.'²¹⁴ So the letters function in an attempt to avoid being made subject to any sort of cultural construction, they move away from the anxiety of academic rigor and philosophical debate into something looser, something more like a conversation. In avoiding this cultural construction, they attempt to invoke the more intimate qualities of intersubjectivity, of being with and being for, and hopefully here, the letter also appeals to a particular kind of attention from the reader.

Gestures of Attention

Handling artwork, for those in the business of caring for it, requires a special kind of attention. White gloves are a marker of care and denote perhaps a kind of reverence for the object being handled. Putting the gloves on to examine the Sims archive²¹⁵ at Burt Hall, I became instantly aware that this was a rarefied interaction, one where the sweat and dust of my skin was unwelcome or even harmful. The strange sensation of coming into contact with the drawings and note books in the archive, holding them, handling them but not physically feeling them exposes the enigma of the empathic condition, of what Stein calls the *leib*. I am at once with and into but I have no real physical bearing on or access to the object in my hands. In empathy my hands are not your hands but they adopt your orientation. Stein says 'What makes the connection between sensation and bodily perception particularly intimate is the fact that sensations are given at the living body to the living body as senser.'²¹⁶ The gloves mean that sensations are at a remove, just

²¹³ Lomax Pure Means p 14

²¹⁴ Lomax ibid

²¹⁵ The conservation department at Northumbria holds an archive of works on paper of English painter Charles Sims RA (1873-1928).

²¹⁶ Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, 44.

beyond my fingertips and so the quality of the holding them in my hands is just out of reach. I felt this could be rich ground for making work.

Following this experience, I made a series of photographs in the studio, a frame-by-frame record of my performing the act of donning a pair of white gloves (See *In The Hands Of Others*, Portfolio of Work p. 20). Reflecting on the empathic experience of being once removed from the subject we are empathizing with, or to put it another way ‘orientated into’ but not physically inhabiting, I re-filmed these photographs being held and orientated/turned them toward the camera almost creating a *mise en abyme*, or copy of the image within itself. In doing so I felt there was a shift for the viewer, that this recursive quality might call on the viewer to project themselves further into the image. My process recalls a lesser known work of feminist artist Valie Export. Her work ‘Ontological Leap, arm’ from 1974, (see Figure 6 below), where Export ‘holds’ her own hand in an image, collaging the body with a photo of a similar gesture, was in my frame of reference for this work. Contrary to a lot of her provocative high profile performance works, this set of photographs has a very different feel. Removed from the cinematic scale, images sit on rugs or in homes. However, they still achieve her aim of claiming ‘A position in the space. The view is split thus resulting in a shift of perspective, a rupture in perspective.’²¹⁷

This suggestion that the split view, here achieved through a kind of collage, affects a ‘rupture in perspective’ draws parallels with the notion of perspective shift discussed in the previous section *Object Other and Trying On*. Following this ‘rupture in perspective’ then, there is the expectation of something new. I would argue that this shift in perspective calls forth a new kind of attention, that here I am referring to as *empathic attention*, attention- *into*.

²¹⁷ Quote from Valie Export’s website; <http://www.valieexport.at/en/valie-exports-home/>

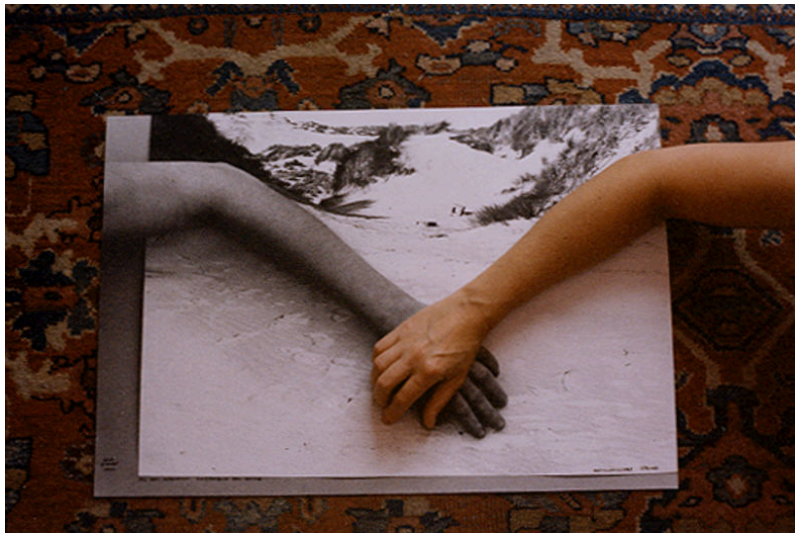


Figure 6: *Ontological Leap, arm*, by Valie Export, Photograph, 1974

Section 2

Part IV

Intimacy and encounter

Detailed Encounters

Is intimacy in detail? Is intimacy in the tactile? Is intimate in attention?

‘Roland Barthes: ‘Il ne faut pas viser la chose.’ Write about the thing that is to the side’²¹⁸

Moyra Davey’s translation belies her method. Where Barthes’ quote suggests we should not aim to write about that which is in front of us, she chooses to focus on what is alongside - on the detail, the ‘girl with the aqua nail polish’ the ‘woman in the fuchsia hoodie’²¹⁹. The banal, overlooked, details of life, make up the stuff of Moyra Davey’s photographs. Her images refuse clear definition, they are not one thing, not photo, not letter, but a folded *photoletter* addressed, stamped, sent and finally unfolded to reveal the image in full. Davey’s photos captivate us with their supposed simplicity, books on a shelf, a subway station, domestic detritus on the fridge, dust on the floor. There is nothing spectacular here, she avoids spectacle, carefully picking her way across terrain of the easily ignored. Each of her photoletters or ‘mailed photo pieces’, is marked by the tape used to keep it folded in an abstract circle. These curious marks and the folds on the paper set these photos apart. They are not the lush glossy surfaces we have come to expect from contemporary photography exhibitions. The surface is disturbed by the folds and marked by the stamp. We encounter them on the gallery wall but they might just as well be folded on a shelf, lined up among books and family photo albums.

²¹⁸ Davey, *Moyra Davey*. p. 37

²¹⁹ Davey.

For the viewer, we are invited to delve into the work with the particular attention of a reader engrossed in a novel, missing the stop on the metro. In a piece from 2011 ‘Subway Writers’ (see Figure 7 below) we feel a sense of the recursive, the images all contain an image of someone writing on the metro, we in turn read the image, and address their inward focus and in doing so mimic what we see. We lean into the image. It was this subtle quality of mirroring that drew me to this quiet work. As Miwon Kwon writes: ‘Davey’s works remind us of ‘slow time,’ the cyclical and durational experience of our daily existence that is the site of magic and drudgery, identity and history. . . not the truth of reality but what is true of a life lived attentively.’ Details and attention, they make a tender pair.



Figure 7: *Subway Writers*, by Moyra Davey 2011, C-prints, postage, tape, ink

Davey, writing on Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*, remarks on his interest in biography which he examines for details; ‘such as the fluctuations of weather and other “petty details of daily life: schedules, habits, meals, lodging, clothing.” Speculating on why he finds himself drawn in by these passages, Barthes proposes that it is because factual details, unlike someone’s “insipid moral musings,” retain their immediacy and relevance to our lives. Recorded in an almost unconscious manner, these passages allow

us to insert our-selves into the scene, to feel interpolated by the text, perhaps a little in the way we are hooked by the *punctum* of a photograph' ²²⁰ So here encountering the detail allows for a shift *into* the narrative. Davey calls it a feeling of being 'interpolated', a sense of being between, where the details help us to become a part of what is before us. This approach bears a close connection in my attitude to generating work.

Attention in detail

In following and observing I have concentrated on details, the gloved hands of conservators, the pinhole in Vernon's photos. This approach, this detailed observation, chimes with the conservators, looking for clues that might unlock the history of the material. This method of concentrating on details has parallels in art historical research. The Morelli method suggests one should 'concentrate on minor details, especially those least significant in the style typical of the painter's own school: earlobes, fingernails, shapes of fingers and toes.'²²¹ For Morelli, an art historian, this was a way to determine the true author of a painting, where the artist's unconscious mark making revealed their identity.

For my part, the 'clues' I sought were the markers of a kind of attention. To make the work I focused on hands and gestures, enigmatic indicators of attention. If the gesture is an indexical means, then in conservation it indicates a tacit understanding of material. Attention to the tackiness of glue, to the feedback from a brush, to the slight colouration on the papers edge, to the stroke of the pencil. In art conservation paintings are treated with cotton buds and wrapped in tissue; the very fibre of the paper is yielded to. The kinds of knowledge and attention required of the conservator are multi-layered. The

²²⁰ Davey et al., *The Problem of Reading* p. 25

²²¹ Ginzburg, Carlo, and Anna Davin. "Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method." *History Workshop*, no. 9 (1980): 5-36. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4288283>.

conservators' approach addresses the ground between the analytical and the intuitive, where they attempt to simulate the conditions of the objects material nature while also sensitively addressing the needs of the object in order to maintain it.

Care attention and intimacy

The conservators' special relation to the object they are working on demonstrates a certain kind of empathy, one that seems awake to the needs of the object. Their approach is to care for these objects, observing closely and responding, fostering them. By this I mean that they treat the object as one would a suffering body. Materials usually reserved for the most sensitive body, cotton buds, are used as a matter of course. Brushes act as guides, channelling a type of bodily feedback allowing the texture of the material below to translate to the conservator a tacit quality, an embodied understanding. The brush is held in a particular fashion that might appear awkward at first, however with one finger behind a more acute translation of texture can be felt. In the previous section: *Object Other and Trying On* I spoke of the attention to objects for and of the body. Here, for conservators, we have an object with none of these qualities (a drawing, a painting) however there is a connective tissue through this object to the body of the maker/artist. Is it this link to the other that affords the attention, the sense that they are 'care taking' the work of another?

The details and minutia of their approach seem crucial to understanding how they care for and feel into the very fibre of their objects in their care. Attention to detail seems an appropriate maxim. Responding to this I wondered how I could reflect this attention in making work? As such the work focuses on tracing the connection between the hand of the artist who made the original work and the hand of the conservator, now trusted with its preservation. There is intimacy in this relationship, bound by the shared object.

In making artwork related to conservation, I used a trope perhaps most familiar to narrative film; the close-up. In cinema the close-up provides intimacy to our viewing experience. Fittingly, the close-up is synonymous with both the forensic and the emotive, stolen glances, long embraces etc. reflecting the dual concerns of the conservator. The close-up mirrors our looking in, our leaning in and as such takes our view into the image before us.

Close-up or 'The Affection Image'²²²

The close-up does not simply offer us more detail but it takes us closer to, it minimises the distance between us, and the details of what is on screen. 'The close-up is not an enlargement and, if it implies a change of dimension, this is an absolute change: a mutation of movement, which ceases to be translation in order to become expression.'²²³ For Deleuze the close-up or the 'Affection Image' was a radical shift in the 'movement image', it reflects but also injects, expression. In his instantiation it is predominantly the face that is the subject of the close-up, however expression can be read in other parts of the body, through movements, gesture. It is this expression that directs the affective qualities in the work, moving the close-up off the screen and out into our senses, our bodies. These affective qualities touch our senses.

Pairing and mirroring injects a sense of feeling into, in the work that is being performed on the screen. Some of these devices are explored in the video work *Care Instructions for Jean* where two pairs of hands move, reaching out they perform a folding gesture. The arms are all that we see of the bodies performing, this close-up affects our sense of

²²² Gilles Deleuze and Gilles Deleuze, *The Movement-Image*, Cinema, Gilles Deleuze ; 1 (London: Athlone, 2009).

²²³ Deleuze, Cinema 1

connection, allowing for a musculature association. In *Care Instructions for Jean* the arms move not in tandem but with one following another, slowly they reveal and conceal an aspect of the image on the paper. The image, a woman's face, is also seen in close-up.²²⁴

Jennifer Barker suggests that there is an associative/correlative act that occurs between the body of the viewer and the body in a film. 'I begin from the assumption that this empathy exists also between film and viewer and manifests itself in the muscular movements and comportment and gestures of each.'²²⁵

Like the Rückenfigur, discussed in the previous section, the figures in *Care Instructions for Jean*, two pairs of arms, are also a partial body, a fragment. The arms that perform the folding gesture allow for projection on behalf of the viewer. We can see-feel their movement, the arms stretch out towards us, fold over the paper towards us. Orientated for the benefit of our seeing they run fingers down the edges to press the fold. The movements are slow, slow enough to follow, the pace is instructional even, as though allowing for time to follow it. A stack of unfolded Mrs Morisons' sit in the room, waiting, ...is intimacy in the invitation to touch?

Film body and intimacy

In calling the viewer to act the work invites us into the film's body and as it does it draws us into a world where there is some secret commune between the two figures. There is no sound but we wonder do they speak, what is implicit, what is between, is there a leader/follower?

²²⁴ The image on the paper is a close-up of the painting by Portrait of Jean Abercromby, Mrs George Morison of Haddo by Allan Ramsay, c. 1767. This image shows the painting undergoing a process of cleaning by conservators.

²²⁵ Barker Jennifer, M. 'The Tactile Eye', p. 78

The film reflects on my experience of the pedagogic and instructional aspect of working at Burt Hall. There is a certain kind of learning that needs to be shown, in order to be passed on, a tacit engagement with materials. My film reflects on this notion of things being passed on, communicated through movement and gesture. On one occasion I observed a group learning to make wheat starch paste. During the demonstration there was a point where the lecturer, Jane, handed around the bowl and asked the students to feel the consistency of the paste. There was no way to describe this texture, it had to be learned through doing, through feeling the paste's viscosity. 'It's completely impossible to describe how you know when it is at the right consistency, stickiness and viscosity - you just know.'²²⁶

Care Instructions for Jean (see Portfolio of Work p. 19) was made in one take, unrehearsed. It meant that Nicola Singh who was performing with me, had to watch and follow, to imitate and echo rather than carry out a set of predetermined or scripted moves. The implicit or unspoken nature of this process of observing and following invests the work with a sense of intimacy. It is present in generating the work, in making it material. So rather than a practiced and remembered process this is a film of a live unrehearsed event. This has the affect of creating a certain pace but crucially makes the work less about performing something understood, and more about responding to something seen. All the while our actions are carried out toward the unknown viewer.

Jennifer M. Barker exposes the connection made between our body and the 'film's body' as a kind of musculature empathy.²²⁷ She argues that empathy is not simply a matter of identifying with characters but that it moves deeper into our skin, onto our body. She acknowledges that filmed gestures might not be responded to in kind but might be affective in producing bodily response (that we see an angry gesture on film does not

²²⁶ Dr. Richard Mulholland, Art conservator in an email exchange.

²²⁷ Barker, *The Tactile Eye*.

mean we respond by shaking our fists, but perhaps we move back in our seat, out of the way). If we consider Barker's position that there is a musculature connection present between our body and the film's body, and that film is structured to reflect the human body, it is possible to imagine that the film acts upon, inflects²²⁸ and affects our body. We can then also consider film to present a kind of mirroring space. 'The close-up, for example, evolved as a result of viewers' need for a closer view, aesthetically and narratively speaking'²²⁹, we crane our necks, the camera pans in. There is the possibility then, as we lean in, that the space of the film is open to us to occupy. It is more than a fantasy, as we perceive it in an embodied sense. Barker points out that in fantasy we have a notional sense of occupying another space, in contrast we can occupy the space of film as it is 'a fully embodied, inhabitable possibility'.²³⁰ It is because of this proximity that we can also close the distance between us, and the body on screen.

'The Strangest Object'

The connection between what we see and how we feel it in our body is explored by Stein. Stein's discusses the 'givenness of the living body' in a way that teases out the relationship between perception and sensation. 'I have my physical body (*Körper*) given once in acts of outer perception. But if we suppose it to be given to us in this manner alone, we have the strangest object...'. Here I am taking Stein's 'givenness' to mean present and beyond a doubt, indisputable. So here Stein is referring to the fact that we do not only rely on our outer perception of things to appreciate the given nature of our body, our body is a cluster of sensations both external and internal. But the relationship of these is folded together, for example, we see something within reach and we know that if we extend our arm we can touch it. She goes on to say; "'Touch me. I am really what I seem

²²⁸ Here I am using inflect to mean 'bends in' as much as to change.

²²⁹ Barker, *The Tactile Eye*.

²³⁰ Barker. p. 104

to be, am tangible, and not a phantom.” And what I touch calls to me, “Open your eyes and you will see me.” The tactile and the visual senses (as one can speak of sense in the pure sphere) call each other as witnesses,²³¹ Here, Stein is drawing on the connected nature of sensations; one sense is linked to another to develop a full understanding of the object before us. While I am predominantly concerned in this thesis with how we perceive and adopt a position of feeling things, this idea that sensations are doubly given to us extends the argument. After all, *feeling into* might indeed require calling on a cluster of sensations. That sensations straddle what we might consider the external and internal living body and that they are folded into consciousness, is a key consideration for this thesis, for in empathy we take the vantage point of another and but do not possess the ‘givenness’ of their sensation. However, with film we have the body we perceive before us, and in Barker’s argument the sensation of connection. What happens here in this space, this encounter between our body and the body on the screen? Perhaps, like the Rückenfigur, the body on film/video offers us a proxy, a substitute, a body that feels and perhaps allows us to explore these sensations at a distance. Or perhaps as Barker suggests, ‘At best perhaps we have an aperture... a glimpse of how it might feel’²³²

Apertures into the Intimate and Making with Others

Artist and film maker Jayne Parker discussing her work notes that working with people who knew her had ‘led to the special, delicate and beautifully observed quality’²³³ in her work, an observation which resonates and became a key concern for me. Building on the qualities of making with others, I wondered how might we engage in responding to art objects in a shared intimate environment? Friendships and relationships are built on a

²³¹ Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*.

²³² Barker, *The Tactile Eye*.

²³³ Andrews and O’Sullivan, *Objects and Affects*. p. 34

sense of a shared narrative and so to produce work where intimacy is intrinsic I looked to friends. What is it that makes this my default method of working? Is it the sense that trust is a given or that familiarity allows for a sense of freedom in making and dispenses with the need for lengthy explanations that might ruin the moment of making? This shorthand does seem to provide for a particular quality in making; an intimate quality. ‘To intimate is to communicate with the sparest of signs and gestures; at its root intimacy has the quality of eloquence and brevity. But intimacy also involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way.’²³⁴

In the run up to filming *My Dearie Dearie* I had considered a number of ways to help Nicola and Julie to engage with this idiosyncratic, and in some ways quite ordinary collection of photographs from the archive; a pot, a chair, a stone head. Here are some of the notes I made in the preceding days: ‘Do I need props? Should I use slides? Should the images be projected? Would the space (photography studio) be generous enough? Does projection/scale make the images more generous, yielding? How to orientate the camera for filming? How to focus on the *handedness* of the objects?’ In this list of practical considerations, there is a sense of anxiety about how to bring about response, a fear that the images might not provoke or affect (this is a subjective experience), a fear that the performers might feel uncomfortable responding bodily in front of a camera. As it happens, sitting in the slightly artificial space of the dusky photography studio I chose the ‘sparest of gestures’, simply to read aloud bits and pieces from the letters between Lee and Thompson. The handwritten notes I had made when visiting Vernon’s archive are incomplete²³⁵. The handwriting in the letters between the two philosophers was, at times, hard to decipher and so, in making notes, I had left several blanks. Here, the gap prompts

²³⁴ Lauren Berlant, *Intimacy*, Uni Chicago Press

²³⁵ When I made my visit to Sommerville College, Oxford, I was given a few hours to explore hundreds of letters, in the time given it was only possible to read a handful.

a creative response and as I discussed earlier in relation to Deleuze; translation becomes expression. As I read out my notes aloud to Julie and Nicola, I filled in the blanks with my own musings about what might have been written, what might have been inferred. This process of filling in the gaps opened a space for projection into this intimate text and the sense of empathic 'feeling in' grew. Discussing the work of Anri Sala, Laura Allsop says 'Hence words that are lost in translation or ideas that are misinterpreted in the process of transcription are to Sala the most significant moments in a narrative. His work thrives on notions of rupture, on emphasizing what he refers to as the syncope (a stressed offbeat in a rhythm) and loss.'²³⁶

This 'rupture' Allsop refers to might in my case might be one where divulging the private notes of a stranger became the cue that allowed her objects to come to life for us. We scrolled in succession through the images on the screen of my laptop, just large enough for the three of us to lean in and to see the sheen on the pot and the dark space that surrounds it, or the detailed carving on the chair handles. Minutiae that on first glance seemed unimportant took on a different role after looking for a time, becoming the stuff that feeds and informs response, the details that unlock our ability to feel into the object.

Being Led By and The Echo (Julie and Kit)

'This declares the defining tension between subjects, objects and emotions. Emotions are our impotential, which is realized through the exposure (literally, the setting-out) of subjects to objects. We need to feel *things* in order to *feel* things, and that subjection to the objects of feeling is what makes us subjects.'²³⁷

²³⁶ Laura Allsop, 'The No-Zone: Anri Sala', *Art Review*, December 2008, http://cloud.hauserwirth.com/documents/efF30Mfgi93lj7hh338AN0OxUHw4ahh70fTxZeEU118v1stHU/art-review_december-08-EVrypT.pdf.

²³⁷ Steven Connor 'Feeling Things' p. 2

In *Object Other and Trying On* p. 120, I looked at where Nicola's response mirrored Kit and considered how this offered an insight into pairing and shared sensation. Here, I am looking at Julie's response, which also reflects Kit's in a different manner. I want to consider how the connection between Julie and Kit's gestures penetrate ideas of the echo and being-led-by. Nicola and Julie reacted with their own gestures, finding physical echoes to the objects in hand gestures, the roll of a shoulder, clenched fists, feet carefully placed. Though Julie did not feel the object before her she enacted what I might call an imagined haptic response. Perhaps the 'handedness' of the objects made this possible, the chair is an object of and for the body, the clay pot is made with and by our hands. Julie chose Vernon's image of the ceramic pot and spoke as she became acquainted with it, using words to describe how she sensed the object taking shape in her arms and shoulders. Moving her arms, rolling her hands outwards and her shoulders back, the movements generous and open she said:

'In response I have this feeling that... (*hands move in wide rounded gesture*) about its kind of depth, how it's made or something. But also what's really intriguing me is my desire to want to be inside it. So I know I've chosen it because of this outside.... but knowing there's the (*hands moving from inside to outside of imagined object*) ... wanting to feel this inside and I guess that (*hands thrust down and out to edge of imagined pot*) ... would be some response... (*hands appear to pinch edges of pot*).'

It is compelling to note that Julie's symmetry of movement, her lifted shoulders, resonate with comments made by Clementine Anstruser-Thompson made about the same object in *Beauty and Ugliness*: 'We have already seen, in analysing the bodily sensations which accompanied the perception of the jar, that we require, for that pleasantness with which we associate the word 'Beauty', "a totality of movements and a harmony of movements in ourselves answering to the intellectual fact of finding that the jar is a harmonious whole" adjustments of bilateral breathing, of equilibrium transferred with regularity from one side

to the other, tensions of lifting up and pressing downwards, as the eyes move along the symmetrical outline of the jar.’²³⁸ In this way the work sees these historic events as precursors, as guides and the work as following or ‘being led by’ history. There is a distinction to be made here, this is not an act of mimesis or a tracing, it is closer to an echo, where the reverberations mirror but also reflect their own sound.

As Julie moved I stood behind the camera, wondering if the shot was too tight, or if, in fact, I should be closer. I moved to the right, placing the image of Vernon’s objects just out of view of the camera. In doing so both Nicola and Julie appear on camera to be referring to something outside of the frame. This idea that they are engaging with something unseen heightens a sense of their inward reflection. However, in their gestures something else is revealed, perhaps it is this kind of ‘impotential’ that Steven Connor refers to.

Feeling into and Affect

If it is that ‘you cannot read affects, you can only experience them.’,²³⁹ then a testimony of the experience of making the work seems fitting. In *Object Other and Trying On* I looked at the similarities between Nicola and Kit’s reports of the experience of looking at the chair and considered them as an example of pairing. Here I want to look at how Nicola’s feedback constitutes affective attention. Nicola sat and squared her shoulders, knees, and clenched fists moving in a mannered subtle way. She was silent and focused carefully on its image, shaping her body and her gestures to somehow reflect those of the object she was looking at. In a follow up discussion with her I asked her about her experience of making *My Dearie Dearie*, how her body felt making these shapes, gestures and articulations. She replied saying; “key words are cradled, proud, alert, symmetry.” Her

²³⁸ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, *Beauty & Ugliness*. p. 184

²³⁹ Andrews & O’Sullivan *Objects and Affects* p. 11

response highlights certain key aspects of what I am calling *empathic attention*. Both in gesture and language there is a reaching out and into the object before her. Her use of the word ‘alert’ as a pivotal phrase speaks of a certain kind of attention, one that is active, awake. She outlines her sense of relating to the chair, as a kind of looking inward, (“I imagined sense of the chairs scale, density, texture etc. into the physical/somatic sense of my own body”²⁴⁰) imagining its material characteristics as transposed to her own. Nicola’s ability to respond imaginatively and bodily, in a proprioceptive sense, is reflective of affective attention. It points to the qualities that are inherent in the empathic encounter of art. A looking that is awake to the object before it, that moves in oscillation between what we see and what we feel. Furthermore, it takes the characteristic of this outward perception to find an internal response, one that attempts to bring the object before her to life.

²⁴⁰ From an email conversation with Nicola Singh

Section 3

You

Part I

Dear Edith,

What did you mean by 'being led by the foreign experience'? For my part I've taken it on loosely as a kind of following; following that is aware of bodily response, of the connection between feeling with and feeling into, that observes and pays attention to details, that is alert to the potential they hold. I imagine a game played when we were kids, where you closed your eyes and understood that when you fell back you would be caught. I close my eyes and imagine two hands reaching out, embodied, almost real. I lean back attending carefully to the weight moving to my heels, the heat at the top of my head, and my clenched fists. And then fall.

Your hands drop with my weight, you clutch under my arms, quickly your foot shifts, stumbles giving way a little.

You are bent under my weight, your body folding slightly, your arms holding tight and I am caught.

Yours truly,

Fiona

Section 3

Part II

Conclusion (Back-View)

‘Berma, too, uses her voice, her arms. But her gestures, instead of testifying to ‘muscular connections’, form a transparent body that refracts an essence, an Idea.’²⁴¹

The body of work produced through this research, both in writing and artwork, exists as a reaching toward an idea. That inclination toward something and someone sets out the core emphasis of the combined theoretical and practical research and addresses the question of whether the intimate nature of feeling *with* and feeling *into* art might be deemed empathic. It follows then that I have looked out, to other artists like Moyra Davey and Runa Islam and looked in, at my own artwork to find a connective tissue, something that exists between the body and the object, between the artwork and the viewer, between you and me.

In the early days of this research project, I might have considered my picking up a camera and photographing a stranger as a polite transgression, a *going toward* that ended in the press of a button. My dissatisfaction with this resulted in inviting others to engage with me in the work, to open the process up. As my practice and research developed and my thought lines shifted I began to think of my engagement with others in a new light, as a threshold to exploring intersubjectivity that is created through unfolding a particular kind of attention. Approaching the threshold of the other with Edith Stein and Vernon Lee has allowed for a new critical framing, one where oscillating, feeling *with* and *into* become robust research strategies rather than delicate possibilities. As such this body of research,

²⁴¹ Deleuze, Proust and Signs p. 26

and by that I mean the artwork and writing seen as a whole, narrates a refinement of my practice that offers up new knowledge in this specific field of enquiry.

I have demonstrated the various ways in which this enquiry represents a unique approach to our engagement with the art object in contemporary art practice, framing it in terms of what I am calling, *empathic attention*. As such it offers a guide, a means to think with. It also creates a rare contemporary reappraisal through art practice, of the work of two female philosophers Edith Stein and Vernon Lee. Over time Stein and Lee became central figures on this research journey providing me with a porous structure for working *with* and *into* this thesis and practice. Consequently, their presence is folded into both the theory and practice. In the introduction I outlined Stein's ideas of 'leib' and 'korper' this key methodological concern has been embedded in the research through a practice which considers empathic attention to be engaged in a process of 'looking out' and 'looking in'. In doing so, it has shaped both my studio practice and how you as a reader come to engage with these ideas. This approach becomes part of the unique contribution of my research.

In my conception empathic attention is active and engaged, it is directional, it reflects a responsive viewer and in creating work, hopefully an artist who is alert to the possibilities of engagement. Catherine Wood says 'The notion of agency encompasses the fact that you can choose what to give your attention to – you can choose what to look at or look away from'²⁴²This research argues for a focus on the particular kind of attention we variously give to art objects. It does this through examining affective triggers in the work that create room for perspective shift to occur. In addressing the body, it proposes that attention is changed or charged when the figure is present, and that 'mirroring', as discussed on page 75, causes us to engage more deeply. The work also looks at where imitation and simulation as empathic methods make the shift to something like incarnation, something

²⁴² Wood C. in Martin, *Mirror-Touch*. p. 277

that reaches deeper and brings us closer to manifesting or embodiment. In doing so it concludes that feeling *with* and feeling *into* are indeed characteristics of empathic attention.

Appended to this notion of empathic attention to contemporary art is the notion that art offers us a space to practice this kind of attention. When we enter the gallery space (or another space) we are seeking an experience of something, in doing so perhaps we are more open to the possibilities of shifts or changes in our attention. We are alert to our position as viewer. This relationship is further unfolded in that my position as an artist allows me an aperture. When I stand behind the camera, I become an observer of the events evolving but also my attention is inclined to specific things. My motivations are governed by particular objects and images with which I create opportunities to work alongside, to be in a position of feeling *with*.

Moving through the research it becomes clearer that what I am inclined to, what I am reaching for is a kind of ‘under the skin’ experience of viewing the body that is not about making a connection with the physical object alone, but in developing a sensation *into* the object through thoughts and ideas. Empathic attention allows us to orientate ourselves *into*, to consider the direction of our attention, to experience a shift in perspective. Gesture is a means to express an idea, a thought articulated with and through the body and so I turn to gesture and detail as central concerns. The images of hands folding, of pinning, of placing a scarf, all point to the idea that gesture is the object, it is the object of attention. ‘It is the gesture of a gesture that beckons me, and with it I’m seeing pure means.’²⁴³ Lomax condenses the thought. As I explore these thoughts and gestures through video and printed materials it seems that my work is more than a *trying on* of these aspects of others and that in doing this, I have formed a way of working where I am absorbed in

²⁴³ Yve Lomax, *Pure Means: Writing, Photographs and Insurrection of Being*, 2013. p. 18

the material of others; Vernon Lee, the conservators, the writers. Where gestures began as a means to express inclination, they have grown into something closer to an affective response, intimate engagement, a feeling into. Crucially, as the work is made with and alongside others, the shared nature of the experience exists not in one place but in a complex interrelation... a going to and fro.

Further Questions

It is certain that there is a link between the art objects that the conservators work with and the photos that prompted me to make *My Dearie Dearie*. Like the Dürer drawing these objects are suffering and display their wounds. For the most part they have an area of damage; holes, tears, gaps²⁴⁴. This gap, or tear, is the reason for its current attention. The objects incomplete nature seems to position it at the threshold; its very gap becomes the point of entry. ‘When objects are lost subjects are found. Freud’s language is poetic: ‘the shadow of the object fell upon the ego.’ The psychodynamic tradition – in its narrative of how we make objects part of ourselves- offers a language for interpreting the intensity of our connections to the world of things, and for discovering the similarities in how we relate to the animate and inanimate. In each case, we confront the other and shape the self.’²⁴⁵ If the at the core the art object allows for a kind of permeable and mutable subject/object then is the damaged object the ultimate empathic object? Its very damage allows for our relation to it to foster an empathic approach, certainly for conservators this is true. If it is that we ‘shape the self’ in order to respond, then how are we shaping ourselves in relation to its damage? If this is the case then empathic attention operates in a way that might be seen as a form of repair; of bringing things back together.

²⁴⁴ Indeed the Rückenfigur, as discussed in Section 2 PtII Object Other and trying on, is an incomplete object.

²⁴⁵ Turkle, *Evocative Objects*.

Out of this body of work there are certainly some unanswered questions, a sense of something continuing to unfold. For example, in Section 2 *Intimacy and Encounter* I touch on the idea of what I call the imagined haptic. Examining the ‘handedness’ of Julie’s gestures and seeing in them the link between perception and touch as a reaching toward something. She does not feel the object but imagines touch and enacts a proprioceptive response. This bares a connection to my most recent work with felt and felted screens that is not covered here. Making these felt pieces satisfies something in me that needs to have a physical connection with the work, to have a tactile engagement, something that video doesn’t provide. It moves the work from the screen into your arms and fingers, which in turn seems to give the sense of a pressed against feeling, affecting the very fibre of the material. In Section 1 *Screens and Loops* I write about the screen as a method of transference, a way of moving us from one space to another. The felt screen I have constructed creates a very different space, it is absorbing, enfolding and acts as a kind of baffle, in the sense that it shields us from the space around it. When filming for *My Dearie Dearie*, I brought this felt screen into the photography studio. I felt the big airy room might need to be scaled down, or closed in a little for Nicola and Julie to feel comfortable, to feel like this was a space where intimate conversations and gestures can be enacted. And in the gallery the same affect is sought after in an attempt to create a space where these gestures might be encountered. This work coming as it does at the end of my research journey is revealing of the link between the haptic perceptions of the body and feeling *into*.

On the table in front of me I have a small piece of felt fabric, no bigger than a handkerchief. Inscribed on it, pressed into its fibre, are the words *My Dearie Dearie*.

Epilogue

A VIOLENCE IN THOUGHT

Dear Edith,

Perhaps I can share with you a story, or a truth as Proust might have it; a ‘violence in thought’²⁴⁶?

I enter through the glass doors and am relieved to see my usual spot is free. I drop my bag and slump down into the egg shaped chair, pulling out my laptop and notebooks and piling them on to the low round table. The view from here isn’t much to write home about, looking down I see the back alley, the top of a mans head, smoke billowing from his cigarette, a large, wheelie bin over-flowing with boxes and rotting fruit, but above it all, a sliver of sky. I open the laptop and am pleased to see the battery full.

I’ve been sitting reading and writing notes for a while now. The comfort of the egg shaped chair feels compromised and I shift to the left then right. Lifting my laptop to balance it on my left knee, my legs folded with my heel lifted slightly to support them. This is unsustainable, soon my foot collapses, the laptop judders and my concentration wanes.

Walking stance reverse sidekick

Walking stance right hand block

The voice comes from behind the bookshelf. Mostly I am curious, was it kick? Yes, I’m

²⁴⁶ Deleuze says that, for Proust ‘truth is never the product of a prior disposition but the result of a violence in thought. The explicit and conventional significations are never profound; the only profound meaning is the one that is enveloped, implicated in an external sign.

sure she said kick. I return to the laptop. I am writing snippets about gesture and reading my notes on Yves Lomax. This is difficult stuff, I reread the sentence for the second time: ‘Yet there is also, and always at the same time, subjugation, for with subjectification we become subject to, ‘captured’’,²⁴⁷. This last word holds my attention. What does it mean to be captured in this sense?²⁴⁸ Is it an ensnaring, a seizing as she seems to suggest or a very mundane experience, like having your photograph taken? I lean to look out the window at the sky above the rotting fruit and as I do I hear her voice again.

Walking stance knife hand block

Walking stance low block

Shrugging off the voice, I return to the laptop, and in the search-bar of the Finder window type ‘gesture’. The small pause while the laptop hard-drive grinds through hundreds of files gives me time to think and I grab a pencil to jot down some thoughts in my notebook. I flick past a print out of a video still and a pencil drawing with several scrawled notes around it. A post-it note on the next page shouts: ‘trying on as method’, I consider this for a minute and why it was so important. With the 2b pencil I write ‘capture/subject/ensnare’ and make a small rough drawing of some kind of aperture. Before closing the notebook, I fold the corner of the page and then I hear her shout.

Walking stance reverse sidekick

Walking stance front kick

Louder this time, it is harder to return to my thoughts. I look at the laptop. The finder search brings me to piece of work made with a friend in 2014. A sound piece, perhaps listening to this will help drown out the ambient distractions. I put my earphones in and as

²⁴⁷ Yves Lomax, *Pure Means*, p. 17

²⁴⁸ See more re capture chapter? pg.?

I do read a little more Lomax: 'There is the activity of affectivity as an outside is folded inside. In short, without *a power to be affected* subjectification would never happen'²⁴⁹. I make an audible 'huh' sound as I grasp the significance of this²⁵⁰. My cheeks flush red, embarrassed, as having my earphones in, this sound is louder than I know. The sound piece is playing now. In it, the voices of two women read a text one following the other in sequence. It has played through only one loop when I am diverted once again.

Walking Stance Single Forearm Block

Knife Hand Block

I remove and then replace one earphone, as if to reconnect momentarily or to check the silence has resumed. Distracted, I open up a fresh blank document. I need to write a proposal for a piece of work, to clarify my ideas and imagine how it might take shape. For this work I need to engage another person, an actor maybe? I consider the difficulty of directing someone when I'm not sure of the choreography of gestures myself. Should I ask them to take a deep breath? How might I film the rise and fall of their shoulders? I'll use the photography studio, the lights low, short close-ups. I should write this down and so I start typing, titling the document 'gestures, proposals, notes'.

Walking stance closed hand strike

Double forearm block

My shoulders jerk in an involuntary response. I look up, and lean slightly to the right,

²⁴⁹ Yves Lomax p. 22

²⁵⁰ See further discussion of the significance of this Ch? Pg?

turning my egg chair on its axis. From here I can see past the bookshelf that screens me from her. I see her straight back, long hair. Her voice is sharp and tense. She is with a boy. He looks to be about seven years old, his shoulders rounded and he is swinging his feet under his blue plastic stacking chair. A bright airy gesture but not the one I need just now. Thinking again about the proposal notes on my laptop, I consider how I might develop a glossary of movement for the actor in the film. Perhaps I should make a list of gestures for them to circle through? Perhaps I should think of it as a warm up, after all, the provisional might provide more room for practice, loosening and chance or for the kind of ‘trying on’ that I have been hoping to achieve in my working methods.

Walking stance, Reverse sidekick (low mumble)

Jump Spin Hook Kick (low mumble)

The repetition of these commands is making it hard to ignore now. In an effort to focus I turn up the sound on my headphones. Louder now the sound piece repeats its loop: ‘With your right hand you fold down my top right corner’ ... listening to this I am reminded of the methods used to make the work, one following another. I make a note of this on the open document, it will be useful for the proposal, and underline ‘being led by...’

Walking stance right hand block

Walking stance rising block (low mumble)

We have been here 4 hours already! You know this!

A shout! The raised voice in this hushed atmosphere punctuates. I remove my right

earphone and lean again turning the chair to one side. The boys' feet are still, the hunched shoulders are shaking slightly and he is clutching a blue folder, also shaking. He is crying! He is crying...I look again at her, trying not to judge, I know this frustration. But here in this public quiet place this seems taboo. I have looked for too long now but I can't look away from the drooped head, he lifts his right hand and though his back is to me, I hear the snuffle and understand he has rubbed tears and snots on his sleeve. He mumbles again and returns to the folder. I have lost my train of thought and realize my chair is now swivelled and I am fully facing the young boy's back, his hunched shoulders, the droop of his head, the low mumble, the shock of the shout.

I feel a shift in my left hand... it is lifted and now I am standing. My earphones pull and drop to the floor. My right arm is drawn back...I step forward, now a little to the left. I lift my leg and spin my body as if on an axis so that my leg is kicking out in a straight line. I feel a sound escape as air is pushed upwards out of my chest cavity, heeeuuu... Legs straight, I take two steps forward, my knees bend to the side, left foot forward and punch! Hheep...My left arm shoots out in line with my shoulder...I step back and cross my arms at my chest, my body following its own instruction, left leg back and the small sound of air escaping hheurrrp.... arms by my side, then the pattern repeats, this time with the right leg.

I am now standing beside the young boy and the woman. She stares at me blankly; he giggles from behind his hand. I feel out of body, light headed and almost floating as I make my way back to my chair and pick up the laptop.

Yours truly,

Fiona

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