Apprehending Paintings: an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Experience of Viewing Art.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own, except where other sources are clearly and identifiably cited.

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Abstract

The experience of viewing art is typically considered to reflect a complex relationship between numerous interdependent factors. Psychological investigations are predominantly experimental. Aspects of the art-object and the perceptual, cognitive and emotional processing of it, are variously explored. Visual-stimuli and personal responses are quantified and measured whilst trying to accommodate the many contextual and individual factors potentially involved. Difficulties presented by quantification within art-viewing research are often acknowledged. Influential variables resist clear definition and constructs may lack standardisation.

This thesis presents an exploration of art-viewing from an alternative perspective. The work here is concerned specifically with paintings. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis has been used to explore a collection of single encounters between one viewer and one image.

Two studies are presented. In the first, five participants were each asked to select an unfamiliar painting from a collection provided. In the second, twelve participants looked at the painting Las Meninas by Diego Velazquez. Semi-structured interviews were conducted whilst participant and researcher viewed the image together.

Both studies revealed a similar thematic arc. Initial themes regarding the inceptive moments of viewing emerged. Here the first grasps of attention and notable penetrating aspects of early engagement were described. Subsequently, themes involving deeper, extended interpretive activities were suggested. Paintings were descending into and explored and imaginative work flourished. Finally, in both studies, self-reflective experiences were recounted. Viewers considered and appraised their viewing activities and abilities. Self-evaluations and judgements collided with expectations and emotional responses.

Overall it was revealed that notions of space, layerings and dynamic interaction pervaded the experiences described. Movements between positions both psychical and physical were suggested throughout. As a means to think about such momentums, the research concludes by considering accounts of seeing and being seen provided by phenomenological philosophy.

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Chapter One- Introduction to the research

"For there would be a real pleasure in watching it. He would be able to follow his mind into its secret places. This portrait would be to him the most magical of mirrors. As it had revealed to him his own body, so it would reveal to him his own soul."

The Picture of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde

Theoretical and anecdotal accounts of art-viewing acknowledge its subjective nature, and yet when it comes to empirical treatments, subjective knowledge is typically avoided or rejected as interference. Vision, taste, semiotics, much work exists on the generalities of how we look at art. However little research exists on what it is actually like to do so. The purpose of the research undertaken here was to explore art-viewing from an experiential perspective. To learn about the 'what it is like' of looking at paintings, rather than any mechanisms or mechanics of how.

Art is rife with categories and attempts at definition. Renaissance art, pop art, art movements, styles, masterpieces, face painting. And with continued efforts to ascribe universal properties comes only more complexity. Is art still 'modern' if it was created a long time ago?

It is not the purpose of this thesis to try and say what art 'is', define beauty or explore neural underpinnings of taste or preference. Rather, it is to begin to consider what it means to look at a painting in the experience of the viewer.

Instead of turning to quantification as is the remit of much of psychology, the tools of qualitative analysis were chosen to best achieve this kind of investigation. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) allowed the collection of a series of rich idiographic accounts of encounters with paintings. This inductive approach provided an opportunity to approach art viewing in its full complexity, without reduction to prior definitions or divisions.

Humans have engaged with paintings since the first colour pigments were applied to cave walls some 40,000 years ago. We are as much mystified by the function of art as we are fascinated, delighted and disturbed by its appearance.

Paintings become intertwined within cultural landscapes and change as they traverse time. The Rokeby Venus was slashed in protest by a suffragette for its provocative

nature. The image of Dido Elizabeth Belle at Kenward House, most unusually for the 1700s, depicts the black Dido in a position of almost equality with her white cousin, a significance we might easily miss from a modern glance.

Paintings permeate popular culture and everyday life. Dan Brown wrote one of the most popular novels of all time, the quasi-apocryphal thriller Angels & Demons, a major plot point of which was the secret symbols which he suggested were present in Leonardo's The Last Supper. The 2017 film Loving Vincent was made entirely of Van Gogh style oil paintings, one for each of its 65,000 frames.

We feel strongly about art, that it can affect us, influence us, and irreversibly change us maybe? What is this mystical ineffable quality we ascribe to art and what happens when we look at it?

The question I have been asked most often during the course of this study is 'what is the point'? What is the point of furthering our understanding of something that does not have an obvious function or benefit? To me, that is precisely the point. Extension of knowledge regarding something we do which transcends our more obvious needs can speak to how we constitute ourselves as human beings.

I did not have much experience with art when I began this study. I could identify a few famous paintings, I had some personal favourites, but most of my experiences with paintings were via literature or film. It was exciting to work on a topic that was rather unknown and without initial personal connections. Over the course of the project, the participants really taught me to *look* at paintings which was a wonderful and unexpected gift.

Previous research on art-viewing has generally concentrated on perceptual and mechanistic explanations of aesthetic experience, employing a systematic, experimental approach to investigate processes and responses involved. The few qualitative studies conducted have cited such methods as prematurely reductive and lacking the scope to capture the potential complexity involved.

The Chapters

Following this introduction, the Second Chapter provides a review of the existing literature, both quantitative and qualitative. In the former, different approaches and dominant focuses are described including those based primarily in investigating features of the image, those which assess features of the viewer and cognitive, neurological, modelling and psychophysiological aspects of art-viewing. Regarding the latter, the use of qualitative methods in related fields such

as design, museums and health environments is discussed as well as the major psychological studies and the opening this presents for the current research. The cumulative conclusion indicated by the literature is that art and its appearing to us are worldly embedded and that context may present complexly and dynamically.

Chapter Three provides a description and discussion of the methodology underpinning the study. Phenomenological philosophy and the psychological approaches it has fostered are discussed. Phenomenological approaches to looking and vision are discussed and compared to conventional accounts of seeing. Different possible methods of undertaking the study are described and the reasons for the selection of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis are outlined.

Chapter Four presents the Method used to conduct the First study. This is a multi-painting study which involves five participants who each view a painting they have selected themselves. Decisions made regarding study design are described and this is followed by an account of the recruitment, interviewing and analytic stages of the work. Descriptions and examples of individual and cross cases analyses are provided.

Chapter Five provides an in-depth reporting of the analysis of Study One. Verbatim extracts from the participant's original transcripts are used to describe and support interpretations. The material is discussed thematically beginning with those which relate to aspects of engagement with the paintings and moving into a discussion of participants' interpretations and emotional responses.

Chapter Six presents a discussion of Study One, locating it within the existing literature. The findings are considered in relation to existing empirical and philosophical accounts of art-viewing. The communicative aspects of art-viewing are discussed and through this the positionality of the viewer, and the depicting and depicted image, in relational space is explored. The implications of conceptualising a shared 'world' co-constituted by image and viewer in terms of existing, and potential accounts of art-viewing, are considered.

Chapter Seven describes the method used for the second study. Here twelve participants view the painting *Las Meninas* by Diego Velazquez which was selected in advance for them. Half the participants had seen the image before and half had not. None knew this was the painting to be discussed in advance of the interviews. Again recruitment and the particularities of the cross-case analysis process are detailed.

Chapter Eight presents the interpretative analysis of Study Two. Again the back-bone of the account is forged out of the participants' language and verbatim quotations are used to this effect. Three overarching themes are presented. The role of The Gaze in encountering the painting, The Viewer's sense of self-awareness and concerns regarding the authenticity and legitimacy of their reactions, and the interpretative content of their viewings as characterised by multiple juxtapositions.

Chapter Nine discusses the analysis of Study Two in light of existing research. The findings are considered particularly in relation to theoretical and experimental approaches to intersubjectivity, reciprocal looking and notions of reality and authenticity in both the viewed image and viewing behaviour.

Chapter Ten concludes the research presenting an overview of the findings from both studies. Senses of movement and space and momentum between positions are identified and their presence in each Master Theme explored. These dynamic relocations are discussed in association with Heidegger's notion of essential strife between earth and world. Positioning and encountering within and of art, as part of our worldly engagement, are explored. Sartre's accounts of intersubjectivity and Merleu-Ponty's conception of enfleshment are revisited in this light. An evaluation of the material is offered including suggestions for future research. Finally, consideration is given to reliability and validity and a reflexive statement is presented.

Chapter Two -
A review of literature on the psychology of art and aesthetics

There is extensive philosophical and theoretical writing regarding art and aesthetics as well as that pertaining to the history of art and artistic creation. A wide range of questions with considerable overlap is implicated. *What is beauty? What is art? What is a picture? What is aesthetic?* It is not the purview of this review to attempt to delineate these fields or to provide an exhaustive catalogue of the many questions which have been asked within them historically. Rather the basis is the psychological, empirical work which provides enquiry into art appreciation, specifically of paintings, as the research undertaken is of this nature.

Entering the single word "aesthetics' into a psychological search engine search as PsychINFO reveals almost nine hundred thousand results stemming from philosophical, design, consumer research, medical (such as plastic surgery) education and psychological perspectives. Many filters can be applied to searches, and search terms can be entered in numerous Boolean iterations. "Psychology of art" generates just over six hundred hits, however, the pool is predominantly from the theory of art sphere, omitting relevant studies. In addition, demarcation of aesthetic concepts and terms varies considerably amongst researchers (for example Augustin et al., 2012; Leder & Nadal, 2014; Pearce et al., 2016). In short, there is no single search construction which is ideal, exhaustive and wieldable. Due to the amorphous nature of the field, the tendency for similar research pursuits to be assigned different nomenclatures, and the interdisciplinary overlap, the review was approached as exploratory and conceptual.

Quantitative and Qualitative literature – dividing the approach

It became clear early in the review process, that the amount of quantitative literature far surpassed that of a qualitative nature. Representation of the field in its entirety would demand an extensive discussion of the experimental literature. However, this thesis was born out of a commitment to qualitative methods and as such, one would want to pay work of this kind particular attention. It was decided therefore to treat the two approaches independently.

As the majority of the extant research is quantitative, an initial section covering this approach reflects as much. A second section provides a review of the qualitative

literature in greater depth. Each section draws on a corpus identified using a distinct set of search parameters. These were specifically designed for the particular type of research to which they were applied.

In both cases, the ambition using the resulting material was to explore useful trends and potential gaps in the literature and to explore ideas which might determine (and be determined by) investigative focus.

Review of the Quantitative Literature

Rationale and Criteria for Quantitative Review

There was a balance to be achieved when approaching the quantitative review. The range of search terms used needed to be flexible enough to be encompassing but a level of systematisation was also required. To this end, a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. These determined which studies would ultimately be reviewed, without the search becoming waylaid by uncertainties of nomenclature, classification and potentially obstreperous philosophical or theoretical debates.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Quantitative Literature Review

Inclusion	Exclusion
Exclusive focus on paintings	General focus on multiple art forms
or	or
Discussion of several art forms but as part of separate experiments within the study and where at least one concerns paintings exclusively.	Focus on music, film or forms of art other than paintings
Concerned with art-viewing	Concerned with art-making
Published after 2000	Published pre-2000
Empirical	Theoretical / Philosophical
Reproductions of paintings and computer presentations	Painting as a form of design, advertising or architecture (e.g. mood response to walls painted in different colours)

A variety of search terms were used including "aesthetic experience", "art viewing", "image perception", "pictorial perception", "pictorial viewing" and "paintings". All available search engines were checked including Zetoc, Google Scholar and PsychINFO. Citations were also followed, reviewed and included where appropriate.

The aim was to exhaust all available searches in order to find studies which fit the criteria.

Only studies involving paintings were included (rather than music or literature). Foremost because Paintings are the object of this investigation. Secondly, most disciplines within Psychology tend not to conflate the visual, the aural and the linguistic or treat such 'stimuli' as interchangeable.

With regards to the date range included, the character of research into aesthetic experience has altered dramatically in the last two decades. This appears due to the advance, and availability, of technology for use in experimental aesthetics (E.g. Eye tracking[1], Duchowski, 2002; Fu, Wei, Camastra, Arico, & Sheng, 2016. and fMRI, Ogawa, Lee, Nayak, & Glynn, 1990). For this reason, the search was limited to papers from the last two decades.

Purely theoretical work was omitted at this stage to retain an empirical focus in keeping with the nature of the thesis. Art can and is, encountered in a multitude of contexts and settings in everyday life. To echo this, no stipulation regarding the means of presentation (laboratory-based, presentation of original artwork or reproduction) was made. Similarly, no specific genre or era of painting was specified. An integral condition was that research focused on the viewing of paintings rather than the act of painting itself.

Review of the Literature

Research into aesthetics can be roughly divided into that which is concerned with the viewer and that which is concerned with the image. Viewer and image features also exist in a more integrated format in work which attempts to model the viewing process in its totality. Although the divides are not absolute and overlap exists, to aid clarity the literature will be presented according to these broad categorisations.

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[1] A 'fourth era' in the development of eye tracking technologies, characterised by an increase in interactive usages, is cited as beginning in 1998 following what is considered a seminal review of of the field by Keith Rayner (See Rayner, 1998; C. Walker & Federici, 2018; Duchowski, 2002)

Viewer centric research

Who is the viewer? How does one conceptualise the person observing the image? What factors are important to control or investigate? How does the viewer perceive? What about them (in both senses, around and concerning) influences this?

Research approaches viewers in different ways. As isolated performers of discrete sets of perceptual or visual acts, or, as individuals that are both personally and socially situated. In both conceptualisations, many factors which are potentially influential upon the viewing are implicated.

Augustin & Leder, (2006) explain "*One of the most important variables involved in this process of aesthetic processing is a viewer's art-related expertise*". (p. 136)

Research comparing experts and novices dominates the literature regarding the viewer and was by far the most regularly employed paradigm at the time of writing. The viewer here is recognised as situated within a world of past experiences, learning and understandings which might impact their viewing in different ways.

The aim of the expert/novice paradigm is to compare how, 'art expertise' (in whichever way the researcher has classified it), differentiates the experiences of those who have it, from the experiences of those who have not. Expertise is characterised in a variety of ways but the two main definitions are via education and knowledge (art-historians), or by ability (artists). Accordingly, experts and novices have often been compared to determine possible areas of difference between them. Where, or what, in paintings, groups attend to, matters of preference, neurological differences and a small amount of work regarding affective responses, have all been produced in this subset of research (Bhattacharya & Petsche, 2002; Koide et al., 2015; Shchebetenko & Tutikova, 2015; Shourie et al., 2014).

A general inference is that art experts usually demonstrate a greater liking for more complex or abstract art compared to novices (e.g. Silvia, 2006) and that increasing expertise can facilitate appreciation particularly of abstract art (Park et al., 2015). Novices, on the other hand, are often shown to respond more positively to representational pieces than abstract ones (Pihko et al., 2011).

A number of studies have been undertaken to investigate the cause(s) of such differences. Augustin and Leder (2006) reported that, when assessing art, novices focus

more on personal impressions and feelings, whilst experts focus on stylistic and structural elements. They also, however, noted a 'general dimension of interpretation' which operated independently of expertise. Stokes (2014), suggested that art experts' higher levels of sophistication when judging artworks were due to the prior knowledge and understanding they possessed. In addition, Silvia, (2006) suggested that experts find art more interesting than do laypersons and that this is particularly apparent in cases of more complex or abstract work. Note 'preference' and 'interest' are different measures.

To test the 'experts preference for complexity' assertion, Koide et al., (2015) compared the types of features in paintings that artists and non-artists tended to look at. Using eye-tracking techniques they discovered that non-artist viewers attended predominantly to low-level features such as salient areas of the image. The artists, on the other hand, attended primarily to high-level features such as textures and composition of colour. The researchers suggested that the artists extracted more information from these features due to their deeper aesthetic appreciation of paintings, a conclusion echoed by Stokes (2014). Similar results were reported by Vogt (1999) and Vogt & Magnussen, (2007). In addition, Kapoula and Lestocart (2006) suggested that experts tend to scan a larger surface of a painting than do laypersons. Cumulatively, it is advocated that expertise and prior knowledge leads to judgements and a viewing mode which is more aesthetic, whereas novices respond more personally.

There is neurological evidence reflecting this assertion. Bhattacharya and Petsche (2002) recorded differences in EEG phase synchronisations between artists and novices when asked to imagine a painting after viewing it. They hypothesised that these differences demonstrated the increased simplicity of the activity for the artists. Similarly, Pang, Nadal, Mueller-Paul, Rosenberg, & Klein, (2013) found that art expertise was associated with a reduced ERP response to paintings and visual stimuli controls. They suggested that this was due to an increased neural efficiency generated by the experts' extensive practice of viewing art.

The expert/novice divide is not, however, always consistent. van Paasschen et al., (2015) did not find a difference between experts and novices when measuring affect (arousal and valence), suggesting emotional responses to art, particularly in relation to expertise, are under-investigated. The difference between felt and perceived emotions was proposed to be in particular need of further consideration.

Francuz, Zaniewski, Augustynowicz, Kopis, & Jankowski, (2018) compared art and non-art students' pleasantness ratings of paintings. A number of the participants rated the images in the opposite way to that which the experimenters had expected. It appeared that there was more than one kind of expertise influencing the results. The authors, therefore, proposed a distinction between expertise based on education which they classified 'nominal' and a new category 'executive expertise'. The latter was reflected in behavioural accuracy (the non-experts who rated in the direction as was expected of the experts) and was suggested to be based on some inbuilt ability.

Francuz et al., (2018) usefully point out that 'expertise' can manifest in various forms. Indeed, many other studies have used different kinds of experts and novices. Art historians have been used as experts (e.g. Bauer & Schwan, 2018; Commare, Rosenberg, & Leder, 2018; Francuz et al., 2018 and Pihko et al., 2011). History of art students have been compared to psychology students (e.g. Cela-Conde, Marty, Munar, Nadal, & Burges, 2002; Helmut Leder, Ring, & Dressler, 2013). Mullennix & Robinet, (2018) broke 'expertise' down into separable components via a survey addressing areas such as art knowledge, exposure to art in galleries, time spent interacting with art and creation of art. Meanwhile, Kapoula & Lestocart, (2006) used three levels of expertise.

It is evident that the expert-novice divide is not uniformly deployed. Art 'experts' in studies have been characterised as artists (what makes one an artist?) art-history students and regular gallery visitors. Artists themselves may have expertise in different types of art (training to paint portraits in oils may require very different skills from sculpting in metals). Can expertise be classified as a 'have or have not' factor or should it instead be approached as a continuous variable? (e.g. Pang et al., 2013). Furthermore, in cases where studies are based on divisions which are not themselves questioned, do we become in danger of naturalising subjective distinctions and treating them as though they are objective realities?

Moving beyond Experts and Novices, although dominant in the literature, this particular comparison is not the only viewer oriented means of investigation. There are many examples of studies which approach the viewer according to aspects other than their level of naivety. Bao et al., (2016) for example, explored the influence of culture. Here Chinese and Western participants viewed landscapes and traditional art hailing from their respective cultures. Participants showed a preference for art from their own culture, which the authors suggested demonstrated the importance of ethnology as a

mediator in art-viewing. However, the same effect was not found for landscapes which were preferred by all participants. This suggested universals also existed independent of culture.

Pulzella, (2000) looked at viewer gender comparing male and female college students viewing paintings of diverse artistic periods and subject matters. The study aimed to explore differences in perceptual style and emotional sensitivity and reported that women tended to respond more favourably across the categories. Further down this avenue, Rudski, Bernstein, & Mitchell (2011) took up the menstrual cycle as their focus. They examined women's responses to paintings with implicitly erotic content – those by Georgia O'Keefe[2] - over the course of a month, with mixed results.

Studies have looked at the viewer's ability to empathise (Gernot et al., 2018), their perceptual style (Boccia et al., 2014) the effects of training (Böthig & Hayn-Leichsenring, 2017; Park et al., 2015; van Paasschen et al., 2015; Wiesmann & Ishai, 2010) and the presence of contextual information (Bubic et al., 2017; Cleeremans et al., 2016; Hernando & Campo, 2017; Lengger et al., 2007). The body has also been envisioned as a contextualising factor. 'Body sway', the amount of movement one makes horizontally to maintain one's balance, is suggested to be influenced by pictorial depth (Zoi Kapoula, Adenis, Le, Yang, & Lipede, 2011; Ganczarek, Ruggieri, Nardi, & Belardinelli, 2015).

A body of work has also been produced examining individual differences as they relate to the preference for abstract or representational paintings (a popular comparison discussed more fully in subsequent sections). Results appear ambiguous, 'openness' was associated with preference for 'erotic-abstract' and a disliking for 'neutral-realist' paintings (Rawlings et al., 2000). Conversely, openness was also found to be associated with a preference for representational art (Furnham & Walker, 2001). Preference for abstract art was similarly associated with 'openness to experience' and 'sensation seeking', whilst preference for representational art was associated with neuroticism and anxiety (Feist & Brady, 2004; Rawlings, 2003; Rawlings et al., 2000).

Adding to the ambiguity, a number of the aforementioned studies (Feist & Brady, 2004; Rawlings, 2003; Rawlings et al., 2000) reported a high degree of cross-individual

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[2] Georgia O'Keefe always denied any erotic component to her paintings, a misconception which she attributed originally to male art critics and one which was later revived via the political feminism she rejected. See (Lynes, 2006) for an interesting background

variability in preferences for abstract artwork. It has also been noted that various studies employed different personality scales and subscales. These included Costa and McCrae's (1985) NEO Five-Factor Inventory and Wilson and Patterson's (1968) Attitude Inventory, which measures conservatism. The issue of comparable constructs and measures apparently persists.

Broadly, it seems that there are multiple, complex, contextual factors which might influence a viewer's experience of art. This is demonstrated by the number and variability between those implicated in the literature. It is also suggested by the multiplicity within these aspects individually, in the way in which they are defined and actualised. Physical, temporal, personal and socio-cultural factors have all been implicated and diversely particularised.

Image centric research

A second body of research, rather than focussing on the viewer, explores factors in the image which might influence how it is viewed. Like viewers, images can be conceptualised in different ways. What makes up an image? The materials used to create it? The arrangement of shapes or colours on the canvas? What about the subject or narrative it depicts or the meanings and understandings which the artist might have hoped to convey?

This lack of simple definition is (as in the case of the viewer) reflected in the many features of images addressed by existing research. Artworks have, for example, been deconstructed into aspects of depth and illusory depth-percepts (Papathomas, 2002), perceptible space (Zoï Kapoula et al., 2009) and elements such as colour and size (Maglione et al., 2017; Nascimento et al., 2017).

In such cases, which are not atypical of the field, the image has been approached according to its physical composition as opposed to what it depicts or represents. Potentially contextualising factors are similarly neglected. Instead, material properties, 'Pictorial features', image statistics, symmetry, shapes and contours are the subjects of investigation. Work in this ilk, investigating artworks in their object existence, forms one arm of image-centric research. There are studies, however, which attempt to acknowledge alternative more subjective qualities of art.

As with work addressing the viewer, research regarding the image is monopolised by a particular comparative focus. Hypothesised contrasts between the viewing of

representational and of abstract art are a prominent feature in the experimental literature. The persistence of this comparison appears to reflect a prevailing assumption regarding the nature of artworks i.e. that there is some significant, essential difference between the two forms. Representational art is attested to depict meaningful, identifiable, real objects whilst abstract art does not. So entrenched is this conception of inherent difference, that studies which have their investigative focus elsewhere regularly include both types of artwork as an additional, precautionary, variable

The comparison between representational and abstract painting is linked to the way the 'understanding' of artwork is regarded. Understanding an artwork is believed to be a crucial part of the viewing process (Leder et al., 2006). Achieving understanding is also associated with other specific responses such as pleasure (Russell, 2003). Some conception of understanding is included in the majority of models of aesthetic experience (discussed later) and proposed to be strongly related to the likelihood of a 'successful viewing outcome'. The comparison of artwork which is apparently more easily comprehendible and that which is more opaque, therefore speaks to these issues.

The findings from the representation/abstract comparison are wide-ranging. Representational art is generally found to be preferred and to generate more positive affect when compared to abstract art. van Paasschen, et al., (2015) reported that participants rated portraits as calmer, less arousing and more beautiful, than abstract artworks. Returning to the previous comparison, such responses are usually found in laypersons or novices but not experts, who supposedly demonstrate ceiling effects.

The two types of artwork are not only suggested to elicit different responses. Research proposes that they are actually looked at in different ways (although results are again variable). Pihko et al., (2011) reported that gaze patterns were indeed effected by image type. For representational paintings, fixations were longer suggesting the identification of salient features. Abstract images were associated with more, shorter, fixations. This pattern was thought to be the result of repeated scanning in a continued search for identifiable details. Notably, these differences cease when longer viewing times and contextual information were included in the viewing conditions. Uusitalo, Simola, & Kuisma, (2009) reported increased preference and emotional response to representational art but found no difference in eye-scan paths. It was suggested that as all the paintings used were modern, the difference between the categories may have been less distinct.

Some studies focussed on higher-order cognitive processes. Schepman, Rodway, Pullen & Kirkham, (2015) reported that aesthetic judgements and affect ratings were more similar between people when viewing representational, rather than abstract, images. They suggested that this cross-observer similarity demonstrated a greater degree of shared semantic association in relation to representational art. Abstract art, on the other hand, was found less meaningful and so the same response was not observed. The authors referred to the similar findings of Vessel & Rubin, (2010) who suggested that a high degree of shared meaning might be intrinsic to representational art. Taste for abstract art, in comparison, was thought to be more highly individuated.

A wealth of comparative data has also been produced in the neuroscientific field. A number of fMRI studies have proposed that different cortical areas may correspond to the viewing of abstract and of representational artworks (Fairhall & Ishai, 2008; Vartanian & Goel, 2004). Interestingly the *degree* of activity in the *same* region has also been found to be a differentiating factor (Lengger et al., 2007). TMS studies have similarly implicated a variety of cortical regions as having different effects on, or being differently affected by, the two types of art (Cattaneo et al., 2014, 2015, 2017). The pattern of activity reported across studies clearly varies and Fairhall & Ishai (2008) suggest that this variation is rooted in the way the abstract-representational dimension is defined.

Indeed, there is evidently more than one approach to determining what is 'abstract' and what is 'representational' with regards to artwork. Abstract art may be described as the opposite of representational art, or alternatively, characterised by what it lacks i.e. content or objects identifiable as existing in the real or visual world. Abstract art might also be defined on its own terms i.e. as art consisting of its own means of representation (patterns, structures, colours and shading for example). There are also artworks that arguably belong somewhere in between. Paintings which are heavily abstracted but do, obliquely, depict recognisable objects or scenes for example. Meaning may be intended at a highly metaphorical or conceptual level. Similarly, in representational art, impossible, unreal or non-existent objects and phenomena may be depicted.

Some studies reflect this ambiguity. Three-component (rather than two), and continuous type categorisation systems have been employed by some experimenters to address these considerations (Fairhall & Ishai, 2008; Uusitalo et al., 2012). Pihko et al., (2011) also used images with a range of abstraction. As the images became more abstract,

aesthetic and emotional valence judgements decreased (although only for laypersons, not experts).

As with the distinction between experts and novices, difficulties delineating categories exist in relation to styles or genres of artwork too. Indeed, differentiating between representational and abstract art has troubled theoretical discussion historically. It has been implicated in the subject of 'pictorial representation' which concerned scholars such as Arnheim (1969, 1974) and Gombrich (1972) decades ago and continues to be a rich source of debate. 'How' images represent and how they represent reality, is not an agreed-upon matter by any means.

Multiple other 'image differences' besides level of abstraction have been implicated in aesthetics. Stylistic aspects such as type of art and complexity (Commare et al., 2018), type of content depicted such as figures or landscapes (Graham et al., 2013) or static, in comparison with dynamic, scenes (Massaro et al., 2012) are represented in the research. In addition, whether characters are social or solitary (Villani et al., 2015) and similar higher-level concepts such as an image's meaning (Ishai et al., 2007) have also been held up for review.

A focus on information about the artist is also common. Information may be provided or withheld regarding their name, the supply of which positively influenced perceptions of its value (Hernando & Campo, 2017) and of its quality (Cleeremans et al., 2016). Provision of supplementary information regarding an artist's background or character has also been demonstrated to influence preferences. The participants of White, et al., (2014) responded less positively to artworks when the artists were described as more deviant. Those of Van Tilburg & Igou, (2014) responded more positively to art when the artist was presented as more eccentric.

The influence of image titles is similarly an area of interest. Leder et al., (2014) found presenting images with matching titles increased viewers liking compared to non-matching titles. This effect was particularly pronounced in abstract art, however, there was no difference in responses when comparing matching-titled and non-titled pieces. A similar effect was found by Belke et al., (2010). Conversely, Leder, Carbon, & Ripsas, (2006) found that elaborate titles increased the understanding but not the appreciation, of abstract artworks and Russell, (2003) reported that title information reliably increased meaning but not hedonic ratings of paintings. Apparently, the effect of titles can be moderated by many factors and these also include the familiarity of the artwork, its

style, or the type of information the title is indicative of (Esfahani & Marasy, 2017; Mastandrea & Umilta, 2016; Swami, 2013).

This type of work is not without criticism. Not only might it be suggested that the factors included are inherently ambiguous and resist adequate delineation. There might also be problems regarding those it does not take into account. For example, moving outside the frame, Museum based research has been used to address concerns regarding real-world validity and the authenticity of laboratory-based studies (Babiloni et al., 2013; Heidenreich & Turano, 2011; Zoï Kapoula & Lestocart, 2006; F. Walker et al., 2017). Comparative studies have explored the differences between laboratory and museum settings. Results are mixed and seem to depend upon the type of art and the measures across which the art is compared.

Locher, Smith, & Smith, (2001) found that perceived pictorial and aesthetic qualities did not differ between presentation formats however their hedonic value was greater in a museum context. Albertazzi, Bacci, Canal, & Micciolo, (2016) reported only a slight difference between laboratory and 'real-life' presentation on ratings of pairs of antonyms related to texture. Brieber, Nadal, Leder, & Rosenberg, (2014) and Brieber, Nadal, & Leder, (2015) on the other hand, reported that participants found artworks more positive, arousing and memorable when experienced in the museum. Specker, Tinio, & van Elk, (2017) also reported that aesthetic experience was enhanced in the museum.

Environmental validity is not the only issue which Museology brings to light. A consideration often neglected in image-centric research is that paintings have social and historical contexts. The importance of these factors is pointed to by the activities which comprise museum-based research. Museology not only accounts for art as objects but also conceptualises works as part of 'collections' to be typified, organised and presented in the museum setting. The nature of forming collections inevitably involves and acknowledges socio-historical context(s).

The image-centric literature in its totality implicates many factors as potentially pertinent for art viewing. These influences are diverse; in some circumstances, context is treated as objective, as facts to be supplied or withheld, whilst other cases recognise a degree of social influence upon how context is created and understood. This results in an odd contrast wherein some studies explore the presence and absence of contextual information, whilst others look at viewers' subjective interpretations of this very same

material as though it should not be treated as objective and discretely definable (and therefore as present or absent) after all. The influence of presence or absence of titles on enjoyment versus how titles can be differently interpreted is one such example of this disparity.

Measuring the Response

Experimental studies of aesthetic appreciation not only presuppose notions about the viewer and image but also about 'the response', by way of defining what and how to measure it.

Studies involving aesthetic appraisal, for example, encompass an extensive range of variables. In addition, these variables are conceptualised in a wide variety of forms. Assorted presentation of such aspects in the literature has included concepts such as hedonic tone (Marin et al., 2016; Marin & Leder, 2018), appreciation (Dijkstra & van Dongen, 2017; Helmut Leder et al., 2012) and emotion and preference (Uusitalo et al., 2012; van Paasschen et al., 2015). Also discussed are specialness and impressiveness (Verhavert et al., 2018), understanding and appreciation (Leder et al., 2006; Swami, 2013), (dis)pleasingness (Plumhoff & Schirillo, 2009) and pleasantness (Babiloni et al., 2013). Liking and the degree to which paintings are "thought-provoking" (Specht & Kreiger, 2016) and strength of insights (Muth et al., 2015).

The means by which these variables themselves are measured is similarly diverse. Discrete measurements have been adopted in studies such as that undertaken by Kawabata & Zeki (2004) who asked participants to class images as beautiful, neutral or ugly. Measures can be continuous e.g. Pulzella, (2000) who used a semantic-differential scale with which viewers rated images from simple to complex. Measures may also consist of multiple subcomponents, such as Hayn-Leichsenring, Lehmann, & Redies, (2017) who measured 'liking' according to artistic value *and* beauty. In this case, no evidence was found to link these ratings to any universal image properties.

Arguably, categorical description of variables proves, in many cases, to be demanding, as measures of aesthetic judgement differ widely across studies. Variables and constructs resist unified definition and are approached diversely across studies. The aforementioned comparisons of experts to novices and representational to abstract art have been discussed in this vein. More broadly, comparative studies begin with a priori conceptualisations of the features being compared. There is an understanding that they

can somehow be described experimentally in a discrete, isolated fashion. That they are meaningfully related and that this relationship is expressed in such a way as can be captured through the unit or tool of measurement selected.

Again, such considerations speak to further reaching issues. Where do the categories, and the rules for how we circumscribe them, come from? What are the boundaries for the constructs selected and for what reason? What is liking and is it something which can only happen in the absence of disliking? What about preference, do we prefer something we like, something beautiful, something ugly, what if something ugly is itself beautiful? Is it possible for the range of categories and measures and their subsets to become so extensive that cross-study comparison becomes intractable? Is this desire for organisation itself problematic?

Integrative Approaches

Where the aforementioned work reflects a tendency to dissect 'the image' from 'the viewer', modelling approaches attempt to combine factors pertaining to both. Research from affective, cognitive, personality, perceptual and or psychophysiological disciplines may be amalgamated to produce an overarching description of an encounter with an art-work.

Empirical findings from more specific, directed experiments are used to create global models of aesthetic experience. These aim to account for viewer features and context, aspects of the image, how processing occurs and provide some description of potential outcomes or responses. One of the most influential of these models of perceiving art is that of Leder, Belke, Oeberst, & Augustin, (2004). They describe an account of aesthetic viewing which is multi-staged and differentiates cognitive and affective features that are continuously and interactively evaluated.

More specifically, a preliminary stage takes into account the viewer's mood and the context of the engagement. Viewing itself advances through a series of information processing stages. Here products of implicit 'bottom-up' perceptual analysis are combined with aspects of memory. Following this, further, explicit, higher-level processing occurs. Concurrently an affective feedback loop continuously informs each stage. This system is self-informing and feeds-back until a satisfactory result is achieved.

The model accounts for different 'outcomes' in terms of appraisals and emotions. For example, a painting can be judged as badly painted but if the viewer feels they have

understood it (we are reminded of the role of 'understanding' previously discussed), this can result in a positive emotional response.

Subsequent models have followed the Leder et al.,(2004) format and share some general characteristics. First a number of 'inputs' are usually identified. These involve specific and contextual aspects of the viewer and the painting. The viewer's current state and ongoing self are considered and terms like state affect, self-concept, cultural background and expertise would be used at this point. Regarding the painting, the presentation context such as whether viewing occurs a gallery or in an experimental study or a social situation might be considered here. Earlier models simply describe the 'stimuli' or 'artwork' rather than any contextualising factors.

Discussion of 'input' is generally followed by a sequential designation of stages, sometimes functioning as feedback loops. Generally, lower-order or bottom-up visual and cognitive processes are followed by higher or top-down aspects. To this end, viewing tends to be differentiated into earlier and later processing and proceeds from the automatic and implicit to more controlled, self-aware and reflective. Finally 'outputs' of the viewing are suggested. Outputs can be personal such as emotions, and judgements, but might also be socially related or involve repercussions such as self-change.

Models of this kind include Chatterjee's (2004) neuro-cognitive model; Pelowski & Akiba's (2011) model of the perception, evaluation and emotion in transformative aesthetic experience; The Vienna Integrated Model of top-down and bottom-up processes in Art Perception, (VIMAP Pelowski et al., 2017); Locher, Krupinski, Mello-Thoms & Nodine's (2007) model focussing on early processing; the psycho-historical framework presented by Bullot & Reber (2013), Winkielman, Schwarz, Fazendeiro, & Reber's (2003) discussion of hedonic processing-fluency, emotional appraisal model by Silvia (2005a) and Tinio's (2013) mirror model which related art-viewing to art-making.

Figure 1 collects a number of the inputs, outputs and perceptual acts suggested by the models above to visualise the range of processes implicated

Figure 1 Models of Aesthetic Experience - Summary

Inputs	Early Processing	Late Processing	Outputs
Image properties Style	Bottom-up processing	Top-down processing	Appraisals

Viewer Characteristics
   Mood
   Personality
	Gist	Cognitive Mastery	Affect
			
			Meaning making
			
			Self in/congruence

Contextual Features
   Presentation
   Environment
	Perceptual analysis		Bodily responses
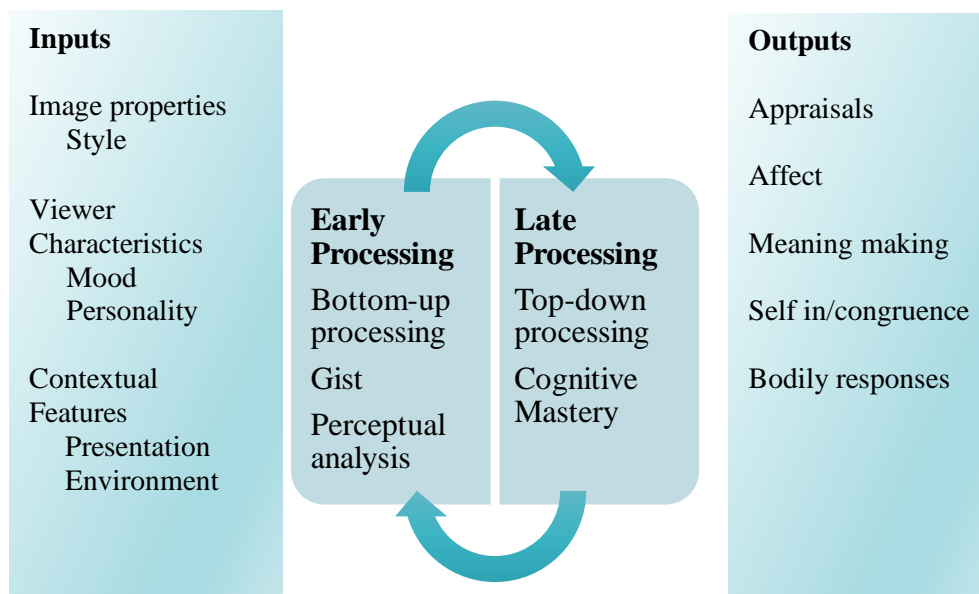
Although models differ in terms of the particular inputs and outputs proposed and by the specifics of the processes connecting them, they do share some commonalities.

Inputs generally take into account the viewer in context. Sometimes this context is more immediate, their current mood or expectations. It can also be more longitudinal and consider aspects such as their background and personality. The image is also treated as an input. Here the painting is generally considered in its physicality, where particular aspects such as colours, light, or style might induce a particular type of viewing. Context such as the presentation environment is acknowledged in most models. In terms of outputs, emotion and evaluation are, by the majority the main forms of response (e.g. Leder et al., 2004; Locher et al., 2007; Silvia, 2005).

It might be argued that the aspects which models share allude to the problems intrinsic to such an approach. All models offer some account of a 'pre-classification' stage, integrating features present before viewing which are considered to be important. The complexity of the elements regarded as potent in these antenatal stages suggests that what viewers bring to an image is by no means insignificant or simplistic. The sum total of the viewer and their context is interactive and contains aspects both particular to the moment and of historical origin. Regarded in its totality there is something fluid and almost ephemeral about this construct, with its interdependent elements ambiguously related.

An initial assessment of lower level features related to bottom-up processing is usually

suggested. This is followed by more interpretative elements of viewing. Models tend not to depict a strict serial flow of information. Numerous processing stages involving feedback loops, simultaneous cognitive and affective elements and integrated bottom-up and top-down processing of perceptions and memories are common. Implicit and explicit features are proposed to be influential in terms of memory, perception and evaluation and reflection. Often the assumption is that the reduction of ambiguity and increase of understanding or response to challenge is the main activity/goal of art viewing.

As Pelowski & Akiba (2011) attest, negative and disruptive aspects of viewing tend to be less well attended to in models than positive and self-congruent experiences. Similarly, although much attention has been placed on contextual and longitudinal factors relating to inputs the same sensibility has not been applied to outputs which remain generally treated as isolated responses.

The manner in which processing occurs is where models diverge more widely. Bullot & Reber (2013) focus on art historical knowledge and context, integrated with lower-level processes. Reber, Schwarz & Winkielman (2004) focus on processing fluency as a mediator of the aesthetic experience (see also Graf & Landwehr, 2015). The neuro-cognitive aspects of processing are central to Chatterjee (2004) and in the model proposed by Tinio (2013), aspects of the creative process are crucially incorporated. The relationship between schema generated during art viewing and the self is emphasised in the models of Pelowski & Akiba (2011) and Silvia (2005b) whose focus is directed to the role of emotions.

Because of this divergence, models then become difficult to compare. This problematises their assessment relative to one another and in terms of their incorporation of external evidence and theory. The contributing processes themselves can be differentially conceptualised and where models rely on structures which interact, such as a 'self', that model of the self too becomes influential, depending upon the way it is conceived.

Conversely, these attempts to capture a whole process and adequately reflect its complexity, arguably neglect or obscure the complete picture. By identifying discrete and distinct elements and trying to explain how they intertwine, the very nature of the experience, as holistic and continuous, may be lost in a reductionist wasteland

Another integrative aspect of art-viewing research involves the development of assessment scales. Rather than trying to propose how art-viewing occurs, Standardised Assessment Scales attempt to identify universal dimensions of responding across which individuals may be comparably measured.

Assessment scales offer an alternative to single-item measures of aesthetic response e.g. of beauty or appraisal. A multidimensional approach is instead suggested in order to capture the various aspects of aesthetic experience. This distinction seems to represent an ongoing negotiation in the experimental literature between complexity and specificity. How do we quantify a process which is intricate, fluid and contextually informed? Do we isolate one or two aspects we feel we can accurately manipulate (experts/novices, representational/abstract paintings, salience or liking) or do we deconstruct experience into all the components we can identify and try to consider both how they function independently and how they interact?

Scales set different parameters for what they choose to assess. The Aesthetic Emotions scale AESTHEMOS (Schindler et al., 2017) gauges responses not only to art objects but also as provoked by "design, built environments, and nature" (p. 1). Conversely, Hagtvedt et al., (2008) tested their affective-cognitive model for validity by comparing (rather than conflating) responses to art and non-art stimuli. There is no consensus in the literature more broadly, regarding the relationship between art and non-art objects and how they are perceived. For example, Graham & Redies (2010), reviewed perceptual *similarities* between viewings of art and non-art whilst Bundgaard (2009) discusses the *different* intentionality of art objects. On the whole, arguably decisions about what type of objects to include are rather arbitrary. They are made at the discretion of the researchers rather than being rooted in some well-established or fundamental criteria regarding what an art-object is (or is not) and how we in turn respond.

The very way assessment scales are developed, demonstrates the dependency (arguably present to some extent in all quantitative work) on treating subjective distinctions as objective, real, categories. Scales are factor analytically derived. Dimensions from previous research and newly formulated components are usually combined. Researchers must decide which elements from the literature to input as factors in their scales. If they have determined some area to be inadequately represented in existing research, they must develop new material for inclusion.

In addition to the affective and cognitive model developed by Hagtvedt et al., (2008)

and the AESTHEMOS (Schindler et al., 2017), recently created scales also include: The Survey for the Assessment of Aesthetic Perception (SAAP) (Rowold, 2008) and The Art Reception Survey (Hager et al., 2012).

Of the Scales discussed, it is useful to consider the factors uncovered in a collective form in order to appreciate their diversity. This is presented in Table 2

Table 2 Comparison of Factors Uncovered by Standardised Assessment Scales of Art-Viewing

The Survey for the Assessment of Aesthetic Perception (SAAP)	Affective Cognitive	Art Reception Survey (ARS) 6 Subscales	The Aesthetic Emotions scale (AESTHEMOS) 7 superordinate factors
Cognition	Negative Emotion /High Arousal	Cognitive Stimulation	Negative emotions
Emotion	Negative Emotion /Low Arousal	Negative Emotionality	Prototypical aesthetic emotions
Self-Congruency	Positive Emotion/High Arousal	Expertise	Epistemic emotions
	Positive Emotion/Low Arousal	Self-reference	Animation
	Curiosity Appeal	Artistic Quality	Nostalgia/relaxation
	Aesthetic Appeal	Positive Attraction	Sadness
	Creativity		Amusement
	Skill		
	Overall Evaluation		

Assessment scales are presented as rooted in concrete measures of art-viewing, yet produce very different results. Why is this? Is the material which informs their structure as absolute as is suggested?

During the development of the ARS, Hager et al., (2012) argued that dimensions of aesthetic judgement (like or dislike, beautiful or not beautiful), were missing from the SAAP but were "the most common self-report items in studies concerning empirical

aesthetics." (p. 321). What does it mean when items become the most common in the literature? Is it related to how often they are asked about? How does this then speak to their importance and centrality as part of a multi-scale assessment tool? Or as part of the experience of art-viewing itself?

The Problem with a 'science' of art.

Issues of quantification

Experimental research into art-viewing necessitates the setting of boundaries and definitions. Stimuli, tests, measures and controls require clear delineation. However, the basis upon which such categories are established is all too often uncertain and speculative. What does this mean for the subsequent knowledge generated?

How do we break down our aspect of interest? What informs the units, their size and how they are dissected and reassembled? How do we decide which components of experience we are going to aim our microscope towards? Is it important to separate cognition from emotion? Positive affect from negative? Perceptual from conceptual processing? How do we then take these isolated aspects of perception and cognition and integrate them to form a meaningful picture of human experience? If indeed we can at all.

There are two parts to this discussion. One is the tendency to amass specific, separate, empirical findings and use them as building blocks to try and construct a complete, coherent structure. The creation of a single entity from disparate bricks. The second is the size of those bricks, the granularity of focus. In the hope of excluding interfering factors and confounding variables how far do we distil down what we are looking at? And at what point does this focus become so discrete that it no longer represents or meaningfully relates to the overall process we originally wanted to understand?

As an example it is worth examining in more detail, a snapshot of Pelowski & Akiba's, (2011) model of aesthetic perception previously referred to. A central part of this model, differentiating it from others, is a proposed processing stage described as 'meta-cognitive re-assessment'.

Pelowski and Akiba first describe viewers as experiencing a period of "acute self-focused attention" (2011 p. 89). The reference provided in support of this is Steele, Spencer & Lynch (1993). This is a study which looked at self-esteem in relation to

choice rationalisation. Participants are tasked with rating "the desirability of 10 popular record albums" and their self-esteem was covertly manipulated via the provision of different types of performance feedback. How one might reconcile this with an experience of viewing artworks appears by no means simplistic. However, proceeding from this position, different consequences of this period of self-focus are suggested. For example, we are referred to Ingram, (1990) a paper which presents a conceptual model of "self-focused attention in various clinical disorders" (p. 1) and does not mention art, music, pictures or film. A second reference given is Steenbarger & Aderman, (1979), in which participants are abandoned in a room and the experimenter times how long it takes for them to leave.

Indeed, none of the studies referred to in the stage of meta-cognitive reassessment which is particularly defining for Pelowski & Akiba's (2011), original model, refer to art or aesthetics. Instead, findings derived from non-art stimuli and experiments unrelated to art-viewing have been gathered to build accounts of aesthetic experience. A body of individual findings has been collected and relationships between them proposed based on supposition.

Within models more broadly, the limited nature of what is described as the 'response' is also evident. Although there are many terms used, appraisal, judgement, emotion to name just a few, no holistic, comprehensive account of the 'output' or the responding to art has been offered. When 'cognitive mastery' and 'schema congruence' has been achieved, do we just walk away?

Research into art-viewing indeed raises some challenging considerations. Factors concerning the image, the viewer, and the role of context, as well as conceptualisation of the response and considerations of how to measure it, present a wealth of complexity. And often instances of speculation masquerading as fact.

When does science become scientism?

Difficulties generated by trying to approach art-viewing experimentally are not limited to the pragmatics of definition and quantification. There are associated ideological tendencies, demonstrated in the literature, which problematise aesthetics.

When thinking about how people look at art, we inevitably have to form some basic ideas about what constitutes the person. Some of this discussion unavoidably falls to that of biology, we are embodied beings after all. But to what extent are we governed by

our internal drives and biological needs? It is all too common to hear human behaviours accounted for by their biological underpinnings. Attraction, we say, is a guise for the scent of the most evolutionary advantageous mate. We place as much importance on who contributes genetic material as we do who contributes love when we define the term 'parent'. This impulse is echoed in the aesthetics literature. Rather than looking forwards, towards human distinction, investigations often look backwards at animalistic tendencies and the urges humans may well have superseded.

This emerges in several forms. One is the recourse taken to physical explanations for art-viewing experiences, such as modes of vision, bodily responses or neurological functionality (the problems with which have already been discussed). Another is the tendency to propose evolutionary explanations for behaviours and responses which might not necessarily have their inceptions in such primitive roots. Particularly reflective of the latter is the ongoing drawing of equivalence, between findings from animal studies and human aesthetic phenomena.

Watanabe (2013) presents a discussion of whether mice show a preference for Kandinsky or Mondrian. [3] Similar work involving sparrows (Ikkatai & Watanabe, 2011), pigeons learning to discriminate between Monet and Picasso (Watanabe et al., 1995) or between Van Gogh and Chagall (Watanabe, 2001) has also been undertaken. Taking the adage *everyone's a critic* to its Nth degree, pigeons were observed apparently appraising whether childrens' paintings were good or bad (Watanabe, 2009).

Dr Watanabe is by no means an outlier. Itti & Koch, (2000) in their paper about visual attention remind us that "Most biological vision systems (including *Drosophila;* Heisenberg & Wolf, 1984) appear to employ a serial computational strategy when inspecting complex visual scenes". Drosophila being the humble fruit fly. Plumhoff & Schirillo, (2009) as part of their study on responses to Mondrian discuss the ability of goldfish to discriminate between different rectangles. And then there is consideration of whether the seagull's beak might resemble a great work of art, specifically a Picasso as

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[3] Dr Watanabe's work was reported in The Economist under the apt title 'Of Mice and Manet'. And apparently no, mice do not have a preference for one artist over another, however they can be conditioned to do lots of things with morphine as an incentive.

suggested by Chatterjee, (2004) and by Ramachandran & Hirstein (1999) [4] who, incidentally, locate the key to understanding art in rat behaviour. Villani et al., (2015) describe 'Understanding social intention' as being "essentially linked to the brain capacity to recognize the unique morphology of the eye in primates" (p. 1) and remind us that there is an equivalence between the monkey brain and the art on the ceiling of The Sistine Chapel[5]

When restrained to consideration of humans, the tendency to restrict explanations to primitive origins persists. Winkielman, Schwarz, Fazendeiro, & Reiber, (2003) frame art viewing from the point of view of biological necessity: "We need to distinguish what is hospitable and what is hostile, what to approach and what to avoid, what is valuable and what is worthless, what to pursue and what to abandon." (p. 2)

Discussions of 'cognitive fluency' represent a large body of the literature (e.g. Belke et al., 2010; Forster et al., 2016; Graf & Landwehr, 2015). Fluent processing is said to generate positive responses to art and this is also explained as having an evolutionary origin. Fluency is associated with familiarity (Reber et al., 2004) (what is familiar is processed more fluently). Unfamiliar stimuli may be associated with threat and a biological disposition for caution (Song & Schwarz, 2009) whilst familiar stimuli are therefore responded to more positively. In the same vein, we also have an inbuilt preference for prototypicality and symmetry "due to the association of these variables with high mate quality" (Winkielman et al., 2003). The 'why' of responding to art, what we find beautiful, easy to understand, attractive, or judge as pleasing often lends itself to biological explanation.

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[4] Ramachandran & Hirstein, (1999) explain: "Consider the peak shift effect — a well-known principle in animal discrimination learning. If a rat is taught to discriminate a square from a rectangle (of say, 3:2 aspect ratio) and rewarded for the rectangle, it will soon learn to respond more frequently to the rectangle. Paradoxically, however, the rat's response to a rectangle that is even longer and skinnier (say, of aspect ratio 4:1) is even greater than it was to the original prototype on which it was trained. This curious result implies that what the rat is learning is not a prototype but a rule, i.e. rectangularity. We shall argue in this essay that this principle holds the key for understanding the evocativeness of much of visual art."

[5] In primates, electrical stimulation of the poly sensory zone in the precentral gyrus (roughly matching the dorsal part of area F4) induces a contra-lateral defensive posture consistent with the one' portrayed by Michelangelo in the *Expulsion from Paradise* (Graziano et al., 2002).

The tendency to locate art-viewing in the biological is also reflected in the form development of psychological aesthetics has taken. Not only have the last few decades witnessed the advances in fMRI and eye-tracking technology discussed. The role of the body and hence psychophysiological measures (skin conductance responses and facial electromyography) is being increasingly implicated and investigated (e.g. Gernot et al., 2018 p. 81, p. 42).

Neurobiological approaches to aesthetics are particularly demonstrative of this trend and the area is described as undergoing particular expansion. Semir Zeki is accredited as being the father neuroaesthetics (Chatterjee, 2011; Nami & Ashayeri, 2011) a field which explores the neural underpinnings of the appreciation, interpretation, creation and perception of art. Key endeavours include discovering neural correlates of aesthetic cognitions and emotions.

To summarise some of the extensive work in this area: fMRI has been used to investigate the areas of the brain associated with different 'types' of viewing. Sometimes this is in a more straightforward manner such as telling participants either than they were viewing fake or authentic images and comparing their brain activity (Huang et al., 2011). Here responses to the paintings assigned fakes were greater in some cortical regions. In terms of localisation of function neural correlates for perception of implied motion (Cattaneo et al., 2017). Beauty (Kawabata & Zeki, 2004) and preferences expressed between paintings (Vartanian & Goel, 2004) have also been prospected.

Other distinctions were more complex. Rather than altering what was viewed Cupchik, Vartanian, Crawley & Mikulis (2009) asked subjects alter the way they viewed images e.g. in an engaged or a detached style. Similalry Ishizu & Zeki (2013) asked participants to judge images ether in an affective or cognitive form. They reported some evidence of functional specialisation but concluded that experience, judgement and decision making were less easy if impossible to separate neurobiologically.

How do we actually know 'what' or 'how' someone is perceiving when an area of the brain lights up? Especially considering the multiplicity of reactions, interactions and responses indicated by existing research?

To this end, Vartanian & Skov, (2014) and Boccia et al., (2016) conducted meta-analyses of the neuroimaging literature. Both employed the activation likelihood

estimation method (ALE) to discover which areas of the brain were consistently implicated across studies and results are summarised in Table 3

Table 3 Neural Regions Implicated in Studies of Art-Viewing

Vartanian & Skov (2014)	**Boccia et al., (2016)**
Lingual gyrus	Lingual gyrus
Middle occipital gyrus	Inferior occipital gyrus
Fusiform gyrus	Fusiform gyrus
Precuneus	Anterior cingulate cortex
Inferior temporal cortex	Amygdala
Insula	Insula
Putamen	Middle occipital gyrus
Parahippocampal gyrus	Parahippocamapal gyrus
Anterior temporal lobe	Anterior cingulate cortex
Anterior insula and putamen	Precuneus
Posterior cingulate cortex	Inferior frontal gyrus
	Middle frontal gyrus
	Medial frontal gyrus
	Claustrum
	Precentral gyrus
	Culmen
	Anterior Cerebellum

The inconclusive and ambiguous nature of the neuroaesthetic results suggested in this table has been similarly noted by a range of authors (e.g. Cela-Conde, Agnati, Huston, Mora, & Nadal, 2011; Cinzia & Vittorio, 2009). In an additional review Bezruczko et al., (2016) commented "In general, the inconsistency and diffuseness of these results is troublesome" (p. 294).

The neurological approach to human art-viewing has seemingly implicated many brain regions under a wide range of conditions. But what does this mean in terms of the

experience of art-viewing (or any experience)? Can such aspects of mental life be meaningfully reduced to a physical basis, to the brain?

Summary of the Quantitative Literature

There are broad suggestions indicated at the heart of this literature which require consideration. Notable, are the elements of complexity, multiplicity and interaction in the factors suggested to be involved in art-viewing. Particularly represented are investigations into the differences in viewing patterns and styles between experts and novices and between viewing representational and abstract. This research indicates that expertise and representation, and therefore knowledge and meaning, effect viewing in many, often contradictory ways.

In terms of causal explanations, processing fluency and temporal integration of lower and higher-order visual and cognitive features are suggested. Underlying these, biological and evolutionary bases are often proposed. The research into these areas is general laboratory-based and increasingly physiological in focus. Neurological (EEG fMRI), psychophysiological (SCR pupil dilation), and behavioural (Eye-tracking) measures have become progressively popular seconded by measures of judgement or preference.

Cumulatively this reflects a general treatment of aesthetic experience as located within a detached, physical framework of biologically driven universals (rather than one of situated psychological experience or shared consciousness). One could argue that such an approach is inherently lacking as it is art, in its creation and appreciation, which provides a particular exemplification of being human and of our subjectivity. Art represents what makes us human as opposed to a biologically bound, needs-driven organism.

The domination of the natural science approach in the empirical literature on art-viewing has inevitably generated a body of knowledge with a particular character. The roles of perception and processing in the experience have been given a high degree of prominence (evidenced by the many forms and facets its investigation has generated). It has also perpetuated a culture which sees aesthetic experience as a utilisation and balancing of demands and resources. A composite of dissociable calculations, each of which can be detached and observed and manipulated meaningfully. Within these conditions, subjective, human distinctions and categories have become naturalised, incorporated into experimental design and treated as objectively real.

The cementing of the representational/abstract division as real and meaningful in experimental aesthetics is an exemplar of the way in which a natural science approach, or culture of scientism, can negatively influence overall understanding. By being prematurely reductionist, such a climate within research risks not only compounding but also generating, erroneous ideas and conclusions and potentially naturalising subjective categories.

As such, research generated by experimental aesthetics , arguably supports the folly of its own approach. Where experience is treated in a mechanistic, compartmentalised and objectivist fashion; where Paintings are stimuli and viewers are processors who performing discrete measurable actions, more questions are raised than answered, more problems generated than solved.

Multiple, wide-ranging factors have been implicated in aesthetic experience. In turn, issues concerning ambiguities of definition, categorisation, measurement and conceptualisation are generated. Viewer, image, contextual and combined features are repeatedly delineated, controlled and compared. Considering these factors in their totality ultimately begets the apprehension, in the light of describing behaviours using multiple and variably defined comparisons and measures, are we treating constructs as collative or commensurate (and de facto?), when in fact they are not?

More problematic than what quantitative psychology attends to in art-viewing research, however, is what it neglects. By seeking to deny the value of or avoid subjective knowledge, any real representations of subjectivity are lost.

Qualitative Research

Pelowski & Akiba, (2011) refer to Funch's (1997) condemnation that "if appreciation of a specific work of art really has an impact on the viewer's life… it would be difficult, if not impossible, to give evidence of such influences through empirical studies." This might well be true of experimental endeavours but there is more than one way of being empirical.

Notwithstanding that there is also more than one 'qualitative' psychology and within the field there are oppositions and positionings, the majority of such approaches still share some commonalities which differentiate them from quantitative methods. Quantitative and qualitative approaches are arguably, at their most basic level, ontologically incommensurable. They each treat the person, their world, and what can be known

about them in different ways. Qualitative psychology, therefore, has different aims from quantitative research and makes different claims about what it can tell us.

Experimental psychology treats mental processes as quantifiable. People and their environments are considered as one would the objects which are the purview of the natural sciences. Studies are based on existing theory and designed to be rigorously objective. 'Variables' are tightly delineated and controlled. The researcher takes a third-person perspective, understanding what participants report or indicate from a detached dispassionate position.

As discussed, arguably art represents something about human beings and our world that makes us essentially different from this world investigated by the natural sciences. The tools of quantification and experimental design are therefore inappropriate and inadequate for understanding what art encompasses.

Much (but not all) qualitative research emphasises the very aspects of existence that are considered confounding in quantitative psychology. As part of experiential approaches in particular, socio-cultural and historical context, intersubjectivity, and the individual as a unique being circumscribed by their own thoughts, emotions and language, are acknowledged and considered a source of knowledge. Qualitative psychology provides the tools to embrace what is arguably lacking from experimental aesthetics. Rather than attempting to capture human behaviour in numerical form, personal experience and subjective understandings are valued and sought after. Kinds of things, rather than amounts of things, are explored.

Qualitative psychologies assume a different relationship with theory and theorising. Many qualitative methods proceed from participants' insider perspectives rather than external concepts or hypotheses. Personal experience in all its complexity is the material or data of interest, rather than a source of bias or interference. In the quantitative research on art-viewing, the aesthetic experience is lost due to what quantification does to mental life. It reduces it to a mathematical equation. By asking 'what is art' or 'what is a painting' in terms of definition, such concepts become diminished, abbreviated to a paint by numbers affair. Qualitative psychology has a different focus, asking things like what a painting means for us or how we might understand it.

Methods shape the findings they produce and the interpretation of them. Whilst quantitative researchers strive to be objective, qualitative researchers acknowledge an

impossibility of neutrality. Psychology is always an intersubjective affair and particularly so with paintings which depict worlds, meanings, subjects and may also suggest the artist's subjectivity. Whilst this is considered an intrusion in experiments, qualitative psychology takes a completely different stance. The aim is not to make predictions and prove or disprove them, but to be inductive and flexible, lead not by what we think *is*, but to ask what it *is like*.

Work offering a different, non-objectivist perspective has, therefore, provided alternative insights into the question of art-viewing. Whilst there is relatively little in the specific domain of the psychological experience of viewing paintings, anthropological and ethnographic work and psychological studies from the fields of health, design, education and museology offer insightful resources.

Following the review of the quantitative corpus, a discussion of the qualitative work is presented. This latter section was generated using different parameters as was necessitated by the paucity of relevant existing research, specifically regarding paintings from a psychological perspective. The rationale for the qualitative review and its criteria are outlined below.

A note on the criteria for the qualitative review

Little psychological qualitative enquiry exists as to the experience of viewing paintings directly. Because of this, studies which fell outside the criteria adopted for the quantitative search were included in the qualitative review. The research described in this thesis is itself qualitative so it was considered important to include as many relevant qualitative studies as possible even in cases where they fell outside the original remit of the literature review. Studies were searched for in the same extensive way as the quantitative work but were considered due to degree of similarly to the research question, a qualitative consideration not amenable to strict inclusion and exclusion criteria more appropriate for a quantitative review.

For example, the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rick E. Robinson (1990) was published in 1990 and so outside the original time frame. However, this research was included due to the degree of similarity in aims and approach to those of the thesis. In addition, with 299 citations according to Microsoft Academic (though not a decisive measure but compared to under 10 for the more recent papers discussed), it appeared to be a major text. The more recent research of Tone Roald (2007, 2008) includes other

visual art forms as well as paintings, but again due to the resemblance of the research questions considered and her phenomenological stance, this work was also included. Largerspetz, (2016b) uses both qualitative and quantitative methods, however, this was one of the few recent studies involving paintings exclusively.

In addition, it was considered necessary to cast the net outside strictly psychological research as other fields had notably given more consideration to qualitative aspects of art and its viewing. Examples from these areas will be discussed first, followed by consideration of the work in the psychological field.

Health

Nielsen, Fich, Roessler, & Mullins, (2017) conducted an anthropological study to explore the impact of art in hospital dayrooms. Data were gathered over a two-week period and art was installed in the second week for comparative purposes. Semi-structured interviews, observation and informal conversation were included in a natural experiment design.

An over-arching finding was the expectation of the situation i.e. as medical, directed the impact of the artworks. Patients prioritised medical and health aspects in their meaning-making. The art was not explicitly noticed because concerns related to being in a health setting took precedence.

The presence of the artworks did have a background influence upon the patients. This was evidenced in four areas, physical, social, emotional and cognitive. Physically patients tended to gravitate towards the wall where the art was located. Socially, art was used as a reference for conversation. With regards to emotion and cognition, in the interviews patients reported that the art provided a welcome distraction and that it contributed positively to the atmosphere. They also suggested that it improved the subjective experience of waiting. The authors concluded there was potential for art to become more explicitly employed to operationalise these positive influences.

The role of art in conversation, as alluded to in the aforementioned study, has been more directly addressed elsewhere in health psychology. Gelo, Klassen, & Gracely, (2015) used a modified form of grounded theory to explore how an artwork might facilitate nurse's conversations with patients. They looked particularly at the spiritual use of images, where spiritual referred to an openness to the discussion of religious, psychological and social aspects of illness and hospitalisation. The images themselves

were representational and nonreligious. By way of findings, the art-works were reported to facilitate conversation and it was suggested that they could enhance wellbeing.

In the context of spirituality and pastoral care, the study used a guided form of interviewing based on a technique called Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS: Housen & Yenawine, 2001). VTS is generally used as a teaching strategy in museums and education to promote visual literacy. In this research, participants were asked questions such as 'Where are you in this painting?' or to 'Make up a story about this painting'. And more specifically 'What does this painting say about where you are in this stage of your illness?', and the themes which emerged included 'Returning to life as a well person and regaining identity', 'Reducing isolation and connecting to others', 'Comfort from pain and suffering', 'Unity with nature and the larger world' and 'Surviving illness: future focus and hope.

These two studies had very particular ambitions (perhaps reflected in the directing nature of some of the questions described). Art was explored for its facilitative and therapeutic potential. The experience of the artworks acted as a mediator rather than being the focal subject of investigation. In spite of the differing focus, these studies clearly provide examples of the way in which qualitative work can offer insight into the experience of art-viewing. The sociality of art and its 'between people' aspects and the way these might relate to individual's lives emerged in both cases. Indeed, both studies demonstrated the relevance and importance of considering art's social embeddedness.

Using narrative analysis, Colbert, Cooke, Camic, & Springham (2013), conducted an investigation into the way in which people with a diagnosis of psychosis explored the meanings of their life experiences. Both participants and their clinicians were invited to reflect upon paintings and art was again approached as having facilitative and therapeutic potential. It was hoped that through viewing and discussing paintings, both patients and members of their clinical team would become able to modify dominant or stigmatising narratives regarding psychosis and mental health. The exercise was directed towards providing recovery and wellbeing enhancing experiences. The promotion of recovery through distraction from distressing symptoms was described by participants. Societal conceptions of mental health and othering were also alluded to. The authors suggested that looking at art together was shown to be beneficial for the community (e.g. improving relationships between staff and clients) and socially.

Again this study had a quite specific goal. Rather than being purely exploratory, there were therapeutic and interventional effects desired from the interactions with the art. As such, individual experiences with paintings were not the main focus. However, some really interesting material was included in the paper suggesting personal art-viewing may be an in-depth and multi-layered experience which is worth approaching in its singularity and in an exploratory fashion.

Participant Kevin, for example, remarked: "I … felt like I was with the Dutch master at the top" (p.253) suggesting some kind of empathy or connection with the painter. This is remarkable as the painter was not depicted in the image and is also from a different place and time. In spite of this Kevin reports feeling 'with' him almost physically. Similarly, in the painting 'Samson and Delilah' by Anthony Van Dyck, (1620), one unnamed participant saw "terrible states of mind" (p.253) more extreme than those he had personally experienced. This apparently helped him accept that such fervours might be part of human experience rather than necessarily partitioned as part of 'illness'. Again a sense of understanding or connection with others was suggested. Even without the wider context (of recovery narratives and wellbeing), it is interesting simply to think about the ability demonstrated by the participants, to recognise other's states of mind. Particularly as this was in a painting from the seventeenth century and in some ways far beyond their own experience.

As these studies collectively suggest, in the health-related research art is (understandably) often treated in a particular fashion. Rather than being focused on as an encounter in its own right, art-viewing is primarily considered as an addendum to the experience of illness. Art is used to facilitate communication, expression, or understanding of difficult conditions. It is employed to act as a conduit between illness and self.

Health studies have an impetus to explore what might increase wellbeing. The experiences of looking at paintings are therefore often of secondary concern. Although not directly about the experience of viewing, studies of this nature provide much relevant insight. They present evidence that paintings can have powerful impacts upon individuals, even in times when art might instinctively seem least relevant (when in pain, or unwell or distracted by serious life events). Furthermore, such work stresses the observation that paintings are extremely social items. Not only can they facilitate

discussion between people, but they can also allow people to consider others' points of view more clearly, perhaps changing their own in the process.

Design

In the design world, many studies have looked at the 'aesthetics' of environments. However, only a few of these have looked at the contribution of paintings. In one such exception, Smiraglia (2014) used thematic analysis to explore the impact of environmental art. Parallels may be drawn between this and the Nielsen et al., (2017), health study, however instead of a hospital, the setting was the workplace.

Staff were interviewed regarding a long-running, onsite art exhibition program. The main theme identified in the resulting data was 'Conversation and social interaction'. Here, artworks promoted conversations and stimulated sociality. They were used as conversation pieces and were felt to be universally accessible even without specialist knowledge. A second dominant theme determined was 'Enhancement of the workplace environment'. Enhancement was described both aesthetically and as a contribution to an overall positive sense of the organisation.

The authors also reported topics commonly mentioned by their participants. These (quite similarly to those implicated in the hospital study) included 'Emotional Response', 'Personal-connection making' and 'Learning opportunities'. Art provoked positive emotional experiences including joy and wonder. Staff were able to relate to it on a personal and individual level, often making connections to their own memories and experiences. The artworks were found to be thought-provoking. Participants described learning about artistic styles and developing a recognition of the individuality of art. An increased understanding of the ways art could promote individual expression was also imparted.

The analysis in this research did not consist of any in-depth interpretation. It was also significantly guided by the number of participants who discussed each theme. As such, the importance participants placed on different aspects of their experiences and the way they understood them were omitted.

These issues notwithstanding, notable insights emerged. The role of art as a mediator between personal and social space was (again) alluded to. Art was (again) described as facilitating communication between individuals. Participants described feeling that they

understood the artist's aims or could recognise their skill or technique. The presence of the art also provided an overall positive sense of community.

Like the others presented, this study suggested a range of ways in which art might be provocative and influential. Art was experienced as transformative. Participants reported experiences of intellectual change through education and personal change through provocation. Art generated both more immediate emotions and a longer-term sense of reflection. It instigated recollections and explorations of personal connectedness. The sense of an embeddedness of art in our individual and social worlds is once again demonstrated.

Museums

Where research in design is relatively sparse, work in museum studies is far more prolific. The study by Pekarik, Doering & Karns (1999) is notable as it proceeded from far more of an empirical (rather than theoretical) basis than many of the other studies discussed. Museum attendees were asked to talk about what they considered to be satisfying visits. From this, a list of common phrases was developed. These were then clustered into four 'types' of experience. Object experiences (seeing "the real thing", being moved by beauty, seeing rare or valuable things), Cognitive experiences (gaining information, enrichment of knowledge), Introspective experiences (Imagining other times or places, reflecting on the meaning of what was being viewed, feeling a spiritual connection, recalling a memory) and Social experiences (spending time with friends/family/others, seeing ones children learn new things).

These themes echo the design and health research in the factors they implicate. Ideas of social or more personal, reflective and introspective, more intellectual, cognitive, knowledge acquiring or thoughtful, and finally more emotionally aligned experiences, were reported. This study did differ from those previously discussed in that in this, case responses were directly tied to 'Objects'. Potentially this reflects the focus of museums as being display areas for the physical presence of art. The importance and influence of context are again to be noted.

Museums are cultural and social institutions so investigation is often directed toward art reception within the particularities of its surroundings. Focus often follows the 'perlocutionary mode'. Here, the interaction between features of an art-work and

aspects of the display scenario is explored. Attention is paid to the nature of meanings this *relationship* might generate.

Hooper-Greenhill, Moussouri, Howthorne, & Riley (2001) for example, looked at what they termed 'interpretative strategies' in the Wolverhampton Art Gallery (WAG). The gallery has endeavoured to develop a range of well-established and active systems in order to aid the appreciation of its collection. The research aimed to examine visitors 'interpretative repertoires'. This involved examining the ways in which the information provided by the gallery influenced existing ideas, discussion and interpretations. As an ethnographic study, visitors were accompanied during their visits by the researcher and a 'think aloud' protocol was employed.

Broad topics emerged from the visits. For example, a theme described as 'the subject matter and the visual qualities of the works of art' involved ideas regarding the merits and preferences viewers associated with representational and abstract art. Another, 'The value of art and art museums in everyday life' involved perceptions of the gallery visit as an educational, challenging and aesthetic experience.

The authors distinguished between direct and indirect methods of interpretation. The former involved the viewers looking and questioning, the latter, seeking supporting information and materials. A range of connections with paintings was suggested. Sometimes responses were based on formal aspects such as colour and composition. Others involved attempts to locate the artwork's subject matter within a wider social-cultural context. Relating to the artist, viewers' own personal associations or relating to the art as an object, all fell under this remit. Visitors were interested in the context of the paintings, their date, value and framing. They also formed and relayed their interpretations in a variety of ways. These included the construction of narratives, looking for meanings or messages, interpreting the subject matter or considering the artist's intentions.

Interestingly the themes developed broadly echo the subject areas which tend to be focal in quantitative experiments. Representational and abstract art were treated as separable and contrasting. Features of the object and features of its context were similarly separated. The viewers' comments were grouped according to the number of times they occurred. It is therefore hard to tell on what basis the themes themselves were created.

It could be argued that this echoing of persistent contrasts and concerns might serve as a reminder of our preconceptions about art. How pervasive are certain particular notions about art and how do these influence our viewing? Certainly, questions are raised. Why do we commonly classify composition as a formal characteristic and subject matter as more interpretative or contextual? When we form our themes in qualitative work, is there a danger, if we are not carefully reflective, of introducing ingrained 'categories' of which we might not be explicitly aware? For example, although it is common to treat factors such as gender or social-economic status as divisive, the researchers here reported that meaning-making strategies could not reliably be linked to these demographics. There was however some evidence to suggest education level affected the level of language and concepts employed to described meanings.

Overall the WAG study suggested the presence of a great homogeneity in interpretative strategies and approaches involved in art viewing. It also emphasised some underlying commonalities. There may be many different things that we might look at, or for, in paintings, but this variety itself is typical of all of us.

Education

Qualitative approaches regarding the experience of art-viewing have been applied in the educational sphere. Cloonan (2012) for example, conducted a descriptive phenomenological analysis. A two-part interview process was employed. Participants viewed the same painting at each interview and in the interim were given learning materials and information regarding the image viewed. The aim was to compare naive and informed viewing experiences and find evidence of the consequences of art education in the experience of viewing a painting.

Some blurring or adaptation of the descriptive methods appears to have occurred in this work. Rather than proceeding from a non-theoretical starting point as per the phenomenological approach, the authors made the decision to adopt a pre-given meaning structure and apply it to their responses. Thus accounts were allotted to either 'Naïve', 'Informed' or 'Impact of Art education' categories. In addition, the accounts of the three participants were discussed individually. No attempt to discern or describe any overall meaning structure (as would be the aim of a descriptive phenomenological treatment), was presented. Instead, for each participant an account of their experiences, as they related to the categories 'Naïve' 'Informed' and 'Impact of Art education' was provided. At the end of each section, a 'commentary' was presented by the authors

describing their interpretations (usually avoided in a descriptive approach) of the material.

Despite the confusing employment of method, some interesting observations can be made of the data recounted. The participants, assigned the identifiers P1, P2 and P3, all appear to describe an initial period of early impressions. These initial reactions are often apparently simplistic - all three participants appear to notice colours first. Subsequently, responses develop into more cognised or reflectively emotional forms. Over time, P1 and P2 become more aware of the subject matter (a war scene) which they find increasingly unpleasant. P3 experiences a change in the certainty of their interpretation becoming unsure and then again surer, of who wins the battle. All three describe contrasting or contradictory responses, sometimes of initial like and then upset or fear. Sometimes such ambiguity (as in the case of P3) is considered to be part of the image itself and regarded as a positive feature.

Ultimately, the study indicates a strong sense of temporality in art viewing. It also suggests that ideas and interpretations may change over time and that viewers may have contrasting ideas either sequentially or simultaneously.

Psychology

"The Art of Seeing, An Interpretation of the Aesthetic Encounter" by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rick E. Robinson (1990) contains a qualitative analysis of 57 interviews discussing experiences with artworks. For this study, an 'expert' population of museum professionals and curators was chosen. It was argued that their increased experience with art-viewing would be facilitative. Due to their high level of expertise, it was expected that this demographic (in comparison with non-experts) would have a superior aptitude for art-viewing, better understand the nature of visual objects and possess an increased awareness of their own reactions. Such a group, rather than one consisting of laypersons, would thus produce the 'most coherent statements of the nature of subjective experience' (p.20).

The research sought to produce a general descriptive structure of aesthetic experience. It was hoped this would, in turn, have the potential to offer insight into particular areas of aesthetic responding; "What is the nature of the aesthetic experience? Is it the same for everyone, or does it differ? Why can it be so enjoyable? Is it possible to facilitate its occurrence?" (p.3)

Interviews addressed four general topics, 'current and historical professional standing', 'personal history of art viewing', 'discussion of specific encounters with artworks' and 'discussion of the aesthetic experience in general'. Each topic was analysed to derive a system of descriptive 'coding' categories. The authors describe grouping quotations according to the coding system developed, to 'illustrate a theme we feel a coding category captures' (p.25)

As a result, four 'dimensions' of the aesthetic encounter were derived. The Perceptual, The Emotional, The Intellectual and The Communicative. The term dimension was used to represent a range from variance to convergence, across which these aspects were experienced by participants

Reflecting this, the main dimensions contained sub-dimensions often describing contrasting positions. The appreciation of tension or composure, within emotional responses for example. Or, intellectually, whether historical understanding was considered an impediment or positive contributor to the experience.

Within the Perceptual dimension, a continuum between regarding the object as a whole or totality and as a sum of constituent elements was identified. Conceptions of beauty presented a second dividing factor. Beauty was identified by some viewers as a formal or compositional quality the 'classical approach' whilst others attributed beauty to specific perceptual qualities of the object without reference to 'classical' notions. Another spectrum described within the perceptual dimension was that of sensuousness. Perceptual responses might be primarily visual or might encompass other senses. Alternatively, they might be regarded as intermediaries for other aspects of the encounter. Here what is seen or sensed acts as a vehicle for other considerations – particularly those regarding the activity of the artist and the making of the work: "You can almost see the woodcarver, you know, attacking that piece of wood with the kind of fervour and creativity of the moment" (p. 33)

The emotional dimension consisted of both positive and negative responses. Ranges of experience from tension to composure and surprise to familiarity were also identified. The influence of 'intellect' upon emotional responding was also discussed. For some thoughts complimented emotionality. For others, intellectual concerns were considered a distraction and detrimental to emotional reactions. Viewer's perceptions of artists were associated with a range of emotional responses. On the one hand, admiration and a sense of the artist's ability as unfathomable (e.g. "My God! … How did he? ...") was described. On the other, feelings of affinity and shared understanding were expressed.

In terms of the intellectual dimension, engaging thoughtfully with art was apparently considered by viewers to be either their primary mode of engagement or a secondary ancillary activity. Intellectual 'style' was also presented as a relevant sub-dimension, ranging from openness to closure. An open style consisted of intrigue, appreciation of inexhaustibility of the art, and the desire to discover new and unexpected insights. A closed style, on the other hand, represented a problem-solving approach, the desire to come to an understanding of an artwork, the need for a sense of mastery, and ideas of how these might be rewarding.

'Historical Understanding' was also specified within the intellectual dimension. Here existing knowledge was identified as either important or obfuscating. Some viewers deemed historical knowledge to be essential for understanding "it's very satisfying to know that, first of all, you are holding the past, basically." (p. 51). Others considered it an obstacle.

Differing views on knowing about the artist's intention and knowledge of their biography and canon of work were presented. Such understandings were seen as more, or less, important. "it's important to know what Vermeer intended" (p. 5)

Describing 'Communication as a Dimension of Aesthetic Experience', an emphasis on similarities or differences (with different eras or cultures) was identified. The role of shared feelings or experiences 'through space' (by positioning oneself in front of an image and having a dialogue with the artist) was also noted.

Interpersonal communication was further described in two forms. One with the artist or image and another with the self. The perceived relationship with the artist was also suggested to present in various forms of communication. Some viewers and thought of the artist as a mediator between themselves and the art. Others suggested communicating directly with the work. In cases where the artist wasn't present as mediator, the sensual nature of the image (smell for example) was the focal means of communication. Communications with the self were described as ranging from instances of self-reflection to loss of self and transcendent experiences.

Notable quotations are presented in Table 4 below. Viewed in their totality, some examples from the interviews are more clearly descriptive of what we might associate with the dimensions suggested, some less so. This arguably demonstrates interoperability between those dimensions (the authors note the, in some cases,

indistinguishable nature of emotions and intellectual aspects for example). It might also reflect vulnerabilities within the dimensional structure itself.

Table 4 Quotes Demonstrating the range of experiences present in Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson's (1990) dimensions of Aesthetic Experience

Perceptual	Emotional
"*A quality comes through, nearly a texture*" p30 "*The image is so beautiful that you could worship that thing*" p31	"*The figures in the centre form a circle. The way they are arranged, the way the colours are arranged, make a circle so that you're constantly pulled back to the centre, and particularly to the little boys head.*" p.36 "*I mean I had tears in my eyes. I was really emotionally moved*" p.34 "*I was just indignant, furious.*" p.37
Intellectual	**Communicative**
"*You can see that the object tells you all about itself*" p.43 On being asked why it's gratifying to obtain a beautiful object for the museum: "*Greed! [Laughs] That's what you want, you want it and you get it.*" p.44 "*This piece is just terrifying*" p.55	"*I base things on what communication comes from the piece*" p.63 "*the feeling of hope that might be generated by some little area in some painting just by the colours it might have*" p.67

Why might this be the case?

The study had particular aims for the knowledge it hoped to provide. There was a concern with enhancing the enjoyment associated with art-viewing and contributing to an understanding of how this might be done. The research is indeed introduced with a discussion of the 'value' of 'visual literacy', (p.2-3). The authors propose that a better comprehension of the aesthetic experience might suggest means to facilitate skills of seeing and interpreting. Development of these skills would, they surmised, enhance aesthetic responding. The selection of professional respondents as participants was to

this end as it was argued that such abilities would be better developed in those with art-viewing experience.

The researchers aspired to begin their study based only on the assumption that aesthetic experience is qualitatively different from everyday visual encounters. However, as evident in their method and initial decisions made, there persists an implicit, base preconception, (acknowledged in the foreword p. X) that art-viewing is a skill-based activity, "without training the skill of seeing and of interpreting what is seen remains latent." (p.2). The implication of approaching art-viewing as a skill which may be cultivated is that there is a preferred manner of aesthetic viewing. This, in turn, suggests that superior forms of experiencing and responding to art are real and conceivable, and as such one may be educated into having them or bringing them about. All this begs the question, who decides exactly what is the correct way to respond to art?

The study's participants discussed a range of art-forms including sculpture and jewellery as well as paintings. The works values, as museum pieces, were also explored. This wide lens coupled with the sorting of responses into categories, rather than a fully interpretative analysis, has some implications for the results. There is the potential to prioritise surface or wide-ranging features of participants' accounts, rather than identifying more implicit or experiential aspects. For example, issues of temporality, the role of context, and either-or conceptions of responding appear to permeate the categories. However, these are not given consideration in their own right. The content of viewers' interpretations and the actual meanings formed appear similarly subsumed into an overly dominant overarching structure.

Where respondents in the Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) study self-selected the art discussed and referenced a number of artworks, Mikal Lagerspetz (2016a) took a different approach. Two paintings were pre-selected and viewed by all the participants. 82 interviews were conducted based on *The Persistence of Memory* (1931) by Salvador Dalí and a contemporary image *Which Link Fails First?* (1992) by Finnish artist Teemu Mäki.

Respondents were encouraged to compare the pieces and comment on preference. Viewers, in this case, were 'laypersons', and analysis followed Kvale's (1996) meaning condensation approach. In vivo coding produced 40 variables which were then grouped according to the stages of aesthetic experience suggested by Leder et al., (2004). These results are reproduced in Table 5.

Stage of Aesthetic Experience according to Leder, Belke, Oeberst & Austin (2004)	Coding Variables Generated by Lagerspetz (2016a)	
	Dali	**Maki**
Perceptual Analyses	Colours soft	Chaotic (no)colours edgy
Memory Integration	Familiar	Unfamiliar
Explicit Classification	Surreal Modern Other styles	Graffiti Modern Other styles
Cognitive Mastering	Time Environment Society	Society Environment Other
Evaluation: Cognitive	Professional Difficult to understand Intriguing Open for interpretation	Difficult to understand Intriguing Not professional Professional
Evaluation: Affective	Peaceful Uneasy	Aggressive
Judgement	Preferred On my wall Not on my wall Beautiful Ugly	Preferred On my wall Not on my wall Beautiful Ugly

In addition to this analysis, three viewing approaches were suggested, naive, scholarly and deliberative. These were derived from examples in the data and informed by Leder et al's (2004) model and another existing theory namely Parsons'(1987) hierarchical stages of aesthetic understanding.

The first or lowest level of Parson's hierarchy involves responses dominated by discussion of the artworks subject matter. Lagerspetz suggested that the naive approach

could be characterised by this form of responding. The scholarly approach was conceptualised as a detached responding which is logical and inductive. Finally, the deliberative approach was suggested to involve evaluations and judgements and an ability to move between 'stages' of perception and evaluation.

In contrast to Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990), this work explicitly sought to address temporality. The order of identified forms and aspects of interaction was treated focally. Sequencing was rendered through Leder et al's (2004) model of aesthetic appreciation which, as discussed, is serial in nature.

The use of structures and sequences pre-determined by existing models, as a framework into which collected data is allocated, has particular implications. Although in one sense support may be given to the models involved, in another the results reflect ambiguity. Does the data support the models, or do the models determine the data? It is difficult to see how, or whether, new concepts and modes of responding, have been given space to come forth.

Phenomenological research which directly addresses the experience of viewing paintings is limited. Tone Roald has produced a body of work as something of a trailblazer to these ends. 'Cognition and Emotion An Investigation through Experiences with Art' (Roald, 2007) presents one such phenomenological study.

Using Kvale's (2007) meaning condensation (as was the method chosen by Lagerspetz), 13 interviews, which took place following participants' visits to a museum, were analysed. Topics that might particularly illuminate the relationship between cognitions and emotions were sought, as this was the focus of the study. Consequently, three areas were identified in the results, 'Emotions without Conscious Cognition', 'Somatic Experiences in Art Appreciation' and 'Volitional Aspects of Emotion'.

Rather than being the subject of the investigation per se, the aesthetic experience, in this case, was used as a means to inform an associated area of discussion. Roald presented a contribution to the longstanding debate about the relationship between cognition and emotion, concluding that a conception of emotions as separate from cognition was supported by the findings.

Both Roald (2007) and Lagerspetz (2016b), used accounts of art-viewing to inform and support pre-existing archetypal models. This suggests both optimistic and cautionary inferences. Both pieces demonstrate the potential for understandings of aesthetic experience to be illuminative and integrate with existing psychological concepts.

Conversely, those understandings may be restricted or impeded where inductivity is neglected due to a focus on existing theory.

Roald, (2008) subsequently addressed 'the appearing of art appreciation'. As was the case in the previous study, art appreciation was approached as an aggregate, general semblance. The experience involved the viewing of multiple paintings and was considered in its totality. Interviews were conducted following a museum visit and participants were asked to reflect upon their particular experiences therein. They were also asked about past interactions with art which they considered to be pertinent.

The question addressed was "*What and how is art appreciation in its appearing?"* Meaning condensation as described in Kvale (2007) was again used to locate relevant aspects of the responses. Roald also noted that considerations of generalisability were attended to from the inception of the research. It could thus be argued that such concerns influenced its progression and results.

Three types of experience were suggested in this work. The first consisted of an initial response to what was described as a 'Good gestalt' or, experiences of pleasure in response to what was felt to be beautiful. This first type of reaction was ascribed to the aesthetic elements of art-works only. It did not involve interpretation or intellectual engagement. The second type of experience related to an intellectual appreciation of the artwork. This cognitive component was described as separable from the first and concerned understanding. Finally, a third, an embodied, affective experience was proposed. In identifying these three forms of interaction, Roald highlights the presence of divergence in the responses. Different, distinct experiences are described, rather than a generic or universal reaction stemming from a unitary mental approach. Different paintings prompt different responses. Multiple responses originate from the same painting.

On Tam's (2008) phenomenological enquiry into art viewing, similarly incorporated the observation of multiple paintings. Subjects were interviewed first, with the aim of discussing general previous experiences with paintings. They were encouraged to discuss any past art viewings which were particularly notable, especially involving those from a museum setting and any with particular individual relevance. Following this, a visit to a museum was arranged. Participants were encouraged to explore the museum in anticipation of a second interview which would involve discussion of the visit.

Tam's findings are interesting as they suggest a central theme of encumbrance. Describing feelings and experiences with paintings is reported to be problematic. A void of comprehension regarding the cause and genesis of responses is reported. Participants struggle either with understanding, or the expression of, what happens to them. Tam suggests that his participants' feelings in response to paintings were either occluded or confusing to them. Potentially this was due to their number and complexity or, that whilst the experience itself was clear to participants, actual description presented a challenge. Additionally, it was theorised that participants were influenced by expectations regarding how they should respond to paintings and these obscured either understanding or communication of, their personal reactions.

The interviews were analysed using the 'lifeworld existentials' suggested by van Manen (2016) as guidance. These are *lived space, lived body, lived time* and *lived human relation*. Further discussion of different phenomenological approaches is undertaken in the methodology section. However, Tam's study suggests a possible lack of fit between these foci and his participants' actual sense-making. Along with the difficulties in understanding or verbalising their reactions to paintings, Tam also reports an absence of the sense of time and an absence of a sense of body. Absences can themselves reflect important presences, however where participants did not discuss or refer to areas (time and bodily reactions were not mentioned in the interviews) one might be wary of making inferences about them.

The absence of participants' affinity with the areas highlighted by the lifeworld existentials, through which the data were viewed, and the issue of problematic reflection, understanding or communication, suggest the advantages of a more inductive approach.

Both the work of Roald (2007, 2008) and Tam (2008) address the experience of art viewing based on interactions in museums and involving a number of paintings. Although individual paintings are referred to, the approach is towards art viewing as a consolidated activity. They address experiences with artworks as a collective and art viewing as a type of experience produced as an aggregate of interactions with multiple images. They also discuss art-viewing primarily in retrospect. Indeed Roald (2008) notes that her work attempted to address how art appreciation occurred in the initial moments of viewing, "the first aesthetic meeting" rather than intending to "dive deeply into the particular constituents of the experiences" (p. 200).

Room here is clearly left to address the idiographic, individual encounter with a painting – the what happens when we look at a single image, rather than discussing more general aspects of art viewing and interactions with painting*s*. To ask, what happens when we encounter a painting?

Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative literature

Broadly, quantitative approaches have identified various aspects of the person, particularly in the form of historical relationships or expertise with art, as influential in viewing. Taken as a whole we might conclude that there are many different components to viewing and that it is not a single or uniform act. The implication of this is that art-appreciation may be hard to delineate according to the current categorical way we describe mental activity and processes. Emotions, cognitions, interpretations, judgements, preferences, pupillary dilations. The aesthetic experience is suggested to be extremely complex and varied but seldom investigated holistically.

Quantitative studies do not address the person as a dynamically temporal being and seldom speak to the long term resonances of art, instead focussing on immediate outcomes. Viewers may bring memories and expertise with them to an experiment but these then become somehow fixed at that point in time.

Qualitative studies, on the other hand, have suggested art can be important in a person's continuous sense of self, both retrospectively through invoking memories and by allowing viewers to imagine future-selves. Art has also been addressed in terms of its health effects in terms of wellbeing, changes in attitudes and value and learning.

The qualitative research suggests that art traverses time, culture, and geography. It involves the creation of shared meanings by nature of the fact that it was created by a person and is viewed by a person. It has an unavoidably social aspect. The experience of art may not necessarily break down into the experiencing of component elements, (vision, cognition, empathy or proneness to nostalgia for example) into which quantitative psychology seeks to compartmentalise it. And if it does, we need to acquire an account of that experience to discover what those parts may be (before we attempt disassembly). Otherwise, the state described by van Paasschen et al., (2015) may continue, i.e. "there is no consensus in the literature on which mechanisms underlie our perception of art or what exactly defines an aesthetic experience." (p.1).

Overall the literature evidences a series of both positive and negative trends which, when considered together, complement each other in directing future work. In some cases, a tendency towards scientism creates research which isolates the viewer or the image positioning them outside of context and often in a particularly mechanistic, abridging manor. The converse, that research does attempt to consider context, and provide interactive accounts is also the case, and here factors implicated are many, various and capricious.

In some instances, response measures or scales employed may seem reductionist or overly biological. However, the need to account for many influential factors is also highlighted. These include the viewer's subjective appraisals and reactions, bodily and otherwise. Criticisms of reductionism or a tendency to presumptively categorise, do not only pertain to quantitative work. Qualitative studies too have demonstrated the habit of addressing art-viewing with particular distinctions in mind from the outset.

Indicated therefore is research then which allows for an integrated approach rather than the division of elements of experience based on a priori assumptions. This is suggested to avoid taking an overly reductive or prematurely established and thus occlusive stance.

The following study, therefore, considers the question 'What is it like to look at a painting?' and has been undertaken with particular concerns in mind. No study has, as yet, involved exploring the specific viewing of *a* painting, as it is experienced in its singular form. Acknowledging the opportunity to gain unique insight of an idiographic nature doing so may provide, art-viewing in its generality will be replaced by an exclusive focus on 'a painting' in this study. By taking an exploratory approach, it is hoped that the many contexts, particularities and forms of relatedness which may characterise the encounter between viewer and painting, will be allowed to emerge freely. The nature of such experiences, be this in their minutiae or generality, are to be discovered rather than predefined or prescribed.

The relationship between individual and personal elements of viewing, and social and shared aspects is evidently complex. Rather than attempting to quantify or define individual processes or elements, it is instead intended to explore meaning-making, understanding and the 'what it is like' of looking and viewing. The aesthetic experience is inescapably situated in the world. By taking a qualitative, phenomenological approach to its nature, rather than attempting to filter out, aggregate or circumscribe

such situatedness, it is intended that the research will acknowledge, explore and allow its character to flourish.

This research will, therefore, gather individual accounts of encounters with art to ask the question 'What is it like to look at a painting?'. Participants will be given the opportunity to look at and respond to an image in a self-guided manner. The experience as it unfolds for each participant will be the focal 'data' of the research. Whatever activities a viewer undertakes or considers to be important, will be treated as such. To get as close as possible to the nature of art-viewing, participants will be interviewed as they look rather than asked to describe their experiences in retrospect.

Chapter Three - Methodology

Willig, (2001) advises, that the adoption of a suitable methodology should involve: A clear statement of the research question; The identification of the epistemological orientation of that said question; Consideration of the implications of that position and its benefits and limitations, before finally committing to the appropriate analytic strategy.

The proposed research question '*What is it like to look at a painting?*' due to its exploratory focus on individual experiencing, lends itself to phenomenological enquiry. The aim of this chapter is to discuss this orientation in greater detail. It is intended to outline the selected approach, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and describe why this is considered to be most appropriate for the project. In addition, criticisms and constraints and the position of the researcher in relation to the research will also be addressed.

Natural Science Vs Human Science

As we have seen, the extant psychological literature regarding art-viewing is overwhelmingly of a quantitative nature. Such research has its roots in positivism and the natural science paradigm. The epistemology of the natural sciences is one of objectivism. This position specifies a clear separation between the knower and the known. Meaning, and ultimately truth, are properties of their objects regardless of any human consciousness. This view contends that we exist within a sole universal reality which can be approached and investigated in a systematised, measured manner. Theory, therefore, aims to apprehend and characterise forms which are pre-established in the world. Investigations yield objective knowledge and truths from which the researchers are impartial.

In such a formulation, the person happens upon this pre-existing world and the objects in it, rather than being an individual who perceives, interprets or constructs their reality (Ashworth, 2003), their ability to make sense of, or meaning from, their world is deprioritised or disregarded.

Crotty (1998 p. 27) writes, "Whereas people ascribe subjective meanings to objects in their world, 'science' really ascribes no meanings at all. Instead, it discovers meaning, for it is able to grasp objective meaning, that is, meaning is already inherent in the objects it considers"

The application of the methods and assumptions of the natural sciences to human subjects has long been suggested to be problematic. It was in response to such concerns that Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Wilhelm Dilthey developed the ideas which have become the basis of today's psychological phenomenology. They argued that the methods of the natural sciences were unsatisfactory for applying to humans and their mental acts and lives as, rather than simply responding to stimuli, living subjects responded to their responses and understandings of what these stimuli might mean. Human phenomena according to Dilthey "cannot be expressed in a simple formula or explanation. Thought cannot fully go behind life, for it is the expression of life" (Polkinghorne, 1983 p. 25)

In the 1960s and 1970s, a 'crisis' in the psychological sciences and related disciplines was born out of critiques directed toward the application of a positivist mandate to human subjects (Banister et al., 1994; Parker, 1989). This crisis precipitated a proliferation of qualitative research methods. Today qualitative approaches are far more widely accepted and made use of (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008)

Qualitative approaches as previously noted, are widely varied (Atkinson et al., 2001) but do share key underlying commonalities. At a foundational level, qualitative approaches are interpretative in that, rather than attesting to a direct relationship between the world and our measurements or investigations of it, our understandings of the world and the people in it are interceded by various mediations. There is a notion, therefore, that quantification omits or averts elements of human experience.

Rather than treating our subjectivity as problematic, qualitative approaches use the recognition and integration of our unique position in the world as self-referential beings to cultivate a new way of investigating human issues. Hunt, (2005 p. 358) reminds us "we are already what we are studying" therefore we can empathetically *understand* the focus of our investigations. This is not the case in the physical sciences where, as we do not have this kind of relationship to our objects of study, we instead use *explanation*. As the famous maxim goes: "We explain nature but we understand mental life." (Dilthey, 1979 p. 89).

Underscoring the importance of recognising the unique qualities of the interpretative position, Burman, (1997) argues that 'finding out more' or aspiring to extend quantitative research using a qualitative approach undermines its integrity. According to this view, one is creating a wholly *different* and neither necessarily competing nor complementary, inquiry in relation to the quantitative work. This quite strongly

polarising conceptualisation reflects one of many positions on a continuum regarding the potential for synergy and mutual illumination between qualitative and quantitative approaches. Less divisive perhaps, to those of a qualitative leaning, is the notion that it is because of, not in spite of, our constant immersion and interaction in the world that we can begin to intuit understandings and develop knowledge about worldly and human phenomena. This engagement is what grants us modes of seeing and experiencing and the means to develop and learn about them.

Phenomenological Psychology

There has been a long history of phenomenological theoretical thinking regarding art and aesthetics. Mikel Dufrenne (e.g. The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience 1953) and Roman Ingarden (e.g. Aesthetic experience and aesthetic object 1960) wrote extensively on the subject. Heidegger (in The Origin of the Work of Art 1950), Merleau-Ponty (in Eye and Mind 1964) Gadamer (in Truth and Method 1960) and Sartre (in L'Imaginaire 1940) have all engaged with considerations of art viewing, whilst Husserl developed a theory of image consciousness (in Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory, 2006). Psychological phenomenology can continue this interest fruitfully as has been evidenced by Roald (2008). Phenomenology particularly lends itself to an investigation of the viewing of paintings as they have an inherently contextual and intersubjective aspect. This is due to its aim to situate understanding within a shared human life-world and its commitment to the exploration of human experience in an open and unassuming manner as will be explicated below.

History

Founded by Edmund Husserl (1859– 1938), phenomenological philosophy was birthed of several fundamental aspirations. Husserl suggested that it was only our subjective experience of the world which was knowable, rather than an objective reality (Valle et al., 1989) In this way it offered a counterpoint to positivism. Phenomenology made its focus, aspects of consciousness (the way things were given in the form of sense-making and meanings) and their objects (the things themselves or the essential structures that conferred the 'what' of something) in a way in which the dominant methods appropriate for physical phenomena, could not (Steinbock, 1995).

Conception of Consciousness

The attention to consciousness and its actions generates some key aspects of the phenomenological approach which are beneficial when conceiving a study regarding art

perception. Intentionality describes the concept of consciousness as always directed towards something. This 'something' may be a real object in the world but might also be something imagined. Consciousness is accepted to be non-sensorial. Although it is the means by which we encounter physical phenomena, consciousness can also be self-aware and aware of irreal phenomena such as ideas and numbers.

Applicability to Art-Viewing

Considering the lack of a cohesive account of what a picture or image *is*, what art is, or what kind of object or objects of consciousness either might constitute, a methodology which allows exploration of the mode, or modes, of appearing, while assumptions about the reality of the object are deferred, is particularly apropos.

In addition, often in art viewing research, assembling a question, measure, or group of variables, that adequately capture the experience, has proved problematic. Bipolar scales are critiqued as in fact inaccurately representing co-existing constructs (positive and negative affect). Measures of cognition are criticised for being limited to the number of sub-scales employed. Models of aesthetic encounters are faulted for ignoring pre-viewing knowledge or anticipations.

Phenomenological approaches, on the other hand, have been earmarked for studying phenomena which are abstruse and where relatively little understanding is available (LeVasseur, 2003) and can help elucidate and "make explicit" things which are intuited or known implicitly but not coherently put into language (Finlay, 2011, p. 1).

Situating Paintings and Viewers

Art can depict aspects of our world and ourselves in that world or, be otherworldly and abstract. Art is of our world, created by people from physical and social worldly stuff. Art is intertwined with human life. Socially, art is held to be greatly significant. Institutions and galleries exist solely to produce and display art. Art is often said to reflect cultural aspects of its time. Different art 'eras' have been linked to different societal values and events. Many Religions use art in their practices and have restrictions on what art may show, and in secular society, art has often been the subject of censorship and debate. A study exploring art, therefore, needs to have an underlying conception of worldliness and the human position within.

> "The world perceived through the scientific grid is a highly systematic, well organised world. It is a world of regularities, constancies, uniformities, iron clad laws, absolute principles. As such, it stands in stark contrast with the uncertain,

ambiguous, idiosyncratic, changeful world we know at first hand" (Crotty, 1998, p. 28)

The existing body of art viewing literature has implicated numerous factors as influential in the aesthetic experience. These are often overlapping and in the context of a positivist approach can be 'confounding'. Phenomenology takes a different stance towards the multiplicity of structures which constitute (or by which we constitute) our world.

Husserl and his student Martin Heidegger developed similar notions of our worldliness with slightly differing emphases. Heidegger like Husserl saw all experience as occurring "within a world" (Heidegger, 2010, p. 83) Heidegger's perspective was that experiences, perceptions and imaginings, were never isolated, but were enmeshed in meanings and associations (and that these would inevitably be present in any investigation of experience). The apprehension of any object, real or otherwise, occurred within the context of a meaningful life-world. Locating research within such a world establishes a completely different purview to the one described by Crotty (1998).

Husserl described every perception as having its background of perceptions (Husserl, 2012) no object or experience is located in isolation but rather against a backdrop of other objects within the surrounding world. Each comes with a unique body of essential possibilities or potentials and this is what Husserl calls the 'Horizon'.

This conception of a world of multi-potentialities, envisioned by both Husserl and Heidegger, which both unites and differentiates experience, is particularly befitting when approaching such amorphous encounters as those with paintings. In images, very *different* people can apprehend the *same* aspects or conversely the same images can prompt very different reactions.

Situating Individual Experience

The fundamental nature of considering human subjects in their relationship to the world is manifest in Heidegger's notion of Dasein. Heidegger uses the term Dasein to refer to the distinctly human way of being in the world. Dasein *exists* as being-in-the-world. But being-in-the-world (In-der-Welt-sein) does not refer to a material or objective presence as an object would be placed *in* a receptacle. Rather it is used as one would 'in-labour' it "designates a constitution of being of Dasein" (Heidegger, 2010, p. 51). To have existence is to be determined by existence. Dasein is distinctive or unique in that unlike physical objects, it can make being its own concern.

"Existence, instead, always already means to step beyond or, better, having stepped beyond" (Heidegger, 1982, p. 300). Dasein is conceived of as a self-relating being who relates or extends out to that which is not itself. In this way, Dasein may be influenced by other Dasein and objects in the world.

This is particularly resonant when considering our relationships to art and products of culture that are physical objects but also intuitively have a complex embedding in the world. Intersubjectively, they are painted by someone, viewed by someone and both of those people have their own constellations of historical, cultural and personal contextualising factors. In addition, art viewing may involve the creation of mental objects of many different kinds, imaginings, narratives, metaphors and judgements which all occur in relation to an existing structure of meanings and understandings. Personal, intersubjective and self-altering experiences have been chronicled anecdotally, as has the potential of paintings to encourage reflection and increased self-awareness.

The Phenomenology of Looking and Seeing

As we have seen in the literature review, experimental psychology approaches perception according to a particular formula. Stimuli or input are received and then processed by our sensory faculties before being compiled into some intelligible form. Colours and shapes, in terms of wavelengths and frequencies of light and relationships of angles, are translated by our physical apparatus into something recognisable. Vision is a computation, organisation and attenuation lead to recognition and response.

Phenomenology approaches looking and seeing in a quite different way with some of the more famous phenomenological accounts of vision being presented by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002; 1968). Merleau-Ponty considered our perceptions including vision to be neither purely sensational nor purely interpretative. Here the world and our awareness of it is lived, perception and the objects of it intertwined each realising the other. In Merleau-Ponty's view we engage with the world, not, through a series of stimulus inputs which we then organise into an intelligible form, but rather as already sensible and understood. Our 'lived-awareness' an enmeshing of all the potentialities of our senses so that, as described in Phenomenology of Perception (Merleau-Ponty, 2002), we can see the hardness of glass, or warmth in the fold of a fabric. We are part of a sensuous world "already pregnant with an irreducible meaning..." (p. 25). Merleau-Ponty regarded the eye not simply as an organ. He assigned no discrete functions to our pupils, irises or retina. Rather the eye was conceived of as an opening to the world and

of the world. Vision is, according to this philosophical conceptualisation, inherently and intractably laced into thinking and being. The eye opens a world to us and so locates us in the world. Thought is embedded in perception, perception in thought.

The natural science approach as described by Crotty (1998) considers the *appearance* of objects. It seeks to document and measure what is intelligible. Its "*fundamental bias is to treat everything as though it were an object-in-general—as though it meant nothing to us and yet was predestined for our ingenious schemes.*" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 1)

Phenomenology helps us resist dividing and dissecting aspects of perception. Natural science imparts that we organise input from the world around us according to various principles. In contrast from Merleau-Ponty argues that rather than treating vision as what occurs when something "*goes from things to the eyes, and from the eyes to vision*" (p.8) we should approach vision in terms of *appearings*.

Phenomenologically, the self and the world are not made of discrete elements, one which may be met and appraised by the other. Things in the world are not neutrally external and apprehended by the onlooker. Rather what we see or engage with makes sense because we already have some relationship to it (as encapsulated by Heidegger's notion of Dasein already discussed). Things are not just out there waiting for us to adequately or accurately perceive them, rather they are out there because they are part of our existences. Our world of perception is sensuous. Our lived experience of things is never as impartial distinct objects; it is of our knowing of them. In appearing they come forth or come to be themselves. Looking and seeing according to a phenomenological perspective concerns this sensuousness, it involves our lived experience of things, it is about "how the world becomes the world" (p.14).

Psychological Phenomenologies

The Phenomenological Philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger and their followers has been developed for the discipline of psychology. Contemporary academics such as Giorgi (1985), Ashworth (1999), van Manen, (2002) and Smith, (1996) have offered related but distinct approaches.

A discerning feature in modern psychological phenomenological approaches has been the role played by interpretation, the actualisation of which has been particularly divisive throughout its development (Giorgi et al., 2007). Alternative strands of Descriptive (eidetic) and Interpretative (Hermeneutic) phenomenological approaches have reflected this divide. As art is intimately tied to interpretative activity, the forms

and extent of which are unclear, particular attention will be paid to this divergence as a methodological consideration.

Descriptive Phenomenology

Giorgi (1989; 2009) translated Husserl's philosophical phenomenology into a programme for psychological research. Key to this descriptive approach is the aim to uncover the general framework of meanings of a phenomenon. Analysis remains close to the descriptive data obtained, acknowledging "all its richness and complexity" (Finlay, 2009, p. 10) and conclusions are based only on what is elucidated by direct consideration of participants' experiences and the intuitive variation thereof. (Giorgi, 1985).

The data sought by descriptive phenomenologists reflects lived experiences rather than predicted happenings, interpretations, or speculations (Wertz, 2005). The succeeding stages of analysis aspire to describe, rather than interpret this material.

Although there are several forms of descriptive phenomenology Giorgi (1989) suggests some key unifying features. The research is descriptive rather than interpretative, employs phenomenological reduction and involves the search for essences or essential meaning structures (see also Giorgi, 1997).

For Husserl and subsequent psychological phenomenologists, the 'phenomenological reduction' referred to, was a practice which aimed to locate and bridle our everyday assumptions. The engagement with the world through the usual contextual experiences which we often take for granted, that he described as the 'natural attitude,' was to be 'bracketed' or suspended, the investigative focus thus 'reduced'. Influences and a priori ideas from outside the context of the phenomena in question were put to one side in order to try and access its central forms or essences. By performing the reduction the mind becomes clear thus allowing these essences to become apparent (see for example Giorgi, 2007; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

The aim of descriptive phenomenology is to reveal essences or essential meaning units. Because of this, original individual accounts are deprioritised to focus on generalised or overarching structures. Although idiographic analysis may occur as part of the initial process, the resulting descriptions are inattentive to the individuals involved. Instead, idiographic details become generalised or subsumed. The attempt to disclose general essential structures has the potential to enclose and reduce human being, where our existence encompasses a dynamic of becoming that is arguably irreducible.

Interpretative: Hermeneutic

In contrast, interpretative phenomenology emerged following the work of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur who submit that interpretation isn't an additional activity that people do, but rather it constitutes a fundamental aspect of our being. We are embedded in a historically, socially and linguistically meaningful world. Being-in-the-world is a state of knowing, meaning-making, and understanding. It is engaged and reflects "the whole manner in which human existence is interpretative" (Moran, 2002, p. 253) Life is "a fundamentally hermeneutic process" (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998, p. 7).

This perspective is reflected in the phenomenological endeavour. Unlike Husserl who aspired to bracket preconceptions from his phenomenological enquiry, Heidegger felt simply encountering or describing something was itself an interpretative act. "Knowing is a mode of Da-sein which is founded in the being-in-the-world, as a fundamental constitution, requires a prior interpretation." (Heidegger, 2010, p. 58). When we experience something, we always experience it as something that has already been interpreted. Part of Being-in-the-world involves having fore-conceptions of what we conceive. This kind of interpretation is primordial rather than explicated, it is the result of our experiences of our own interpretations and of those of others around us. There is not, therefore a value-free, external observation point from which we can adopt a pure unbiased position from which to proceed.

Hans Georg Gadamer, like Heidegger, emphasised the fundamentally interpretative condition of human life. Similarly, again to Heidegger's thought, interpretation was infused with the experiences of the person, 'forestructures of understanding' which were made up of historically and socially located presuppositions and biases.

Gadamer's emphasis was on intersubjectivity and he suggested that through co-participation, co-understandings could be developed in a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 1988). Understandings according to Gadamer, occurred between people through their dialogues and these were experienced not just known. Gadamer describes the hermeneutic experience as something which therefore allows us to see differently or in new ways. Previous knowledge or understanding is not rejected but is retained and incorporated in a new form. Hermeneutics happens in the tension "between strangeness and familiarity to us - between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. *The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between*" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 306).

In interpretative approaches (again varied and varying e.g. Van Manen, 1990) following the thinking of Heidegger and Gadamer, consciousness is not isolated from the world. Meanings, historicity and cultural practices form pre-understandings which are inherently with us in the world and from which we cannot detach. We are constituted by the world and its pre-given nature and simultaneously we constitute the world through our existence.

This understanding then indicates a phenomenological reduction (key to descriptive approaches) both inappropriate and unattainable. It is not a concept without relevance, however, Larkin et al., (2011) remind us that in hermeneutic approaches researchers might beneficially associate the original conception of the reduction with an "important commitment to open-mindedness and researcher reflexivity" (p. 323) and Finlay (2011) describes the adoption of the phenomenological attitude as a "special stance - open and non-judgemental" in which "researchers seek to put aside pre-existing ideas and assumptions" (p.4).

Rather than a reduction, acknowledgement of the hermeneutic circle is undertaken. Here preunderstandings and givens are regarded as unavoidable and indeed necessary, for the process of understanding. Furthermore, it is accepted that these understandings will be altered in the course of sense-making. Meaning is therefore regarded to be contextual and historical and presuppositionless understanding to be impossible (Dilthey, 1977).

There are several back-and-forthings, which have been identified as important for one to consider when undertaking such work.

An awareness of one's preconceptions and fore-understandings is important, but simultaneously may be preventative of developing new or clear insights. In the same way that we see with our eyes but cannot directly see them, we may not be aware of what we consider to be pre-given or of our particular positions. Insofar as we may arrive at new understandings, we might also newly understand was already there.

With this as a consideration, Smith (2007a) reminds us that any "fore structure is always there but it, in fact, is in danger of presenting an obstacle to interpretation. Therefore, priority should be given to the new object rather than to one's preconceptions" (p. 6). Meaning may be contextually and historically embedded, but is also dynamic, re-reflected and altered during and by, the processes of investigation. Presuppositonless understanding may be unobtainable, but a merging or slippage from pre, prevailing and post-suppositions may be.

Crucially, a pivoting or movement of orientation through the hermeneutic circle is described (Smith, 2007a). From a point of concern with an awareness of one's own experiences and leanings, we turn towards an outlook "where the participant is the focus as I attend closely to the participant's story". Our engagement is now closely attuned to the account we are being given and not to our role as researcher. And yet, ever-moving back-and-forth, our role as researcher and its potential impacts are also not to be ignored or taken for granted. As meaning-making proceeds, such positions are moved through and between, a series of generative, interpretative loops, understanding and meanings always "open to revision and supplementation" (p. 7).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis – IPA (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith, 1996, 2004) has its conceptual roots in hermeneutic phenomenology and a firm commitment to idiography (Smith, 2007). In line with this, the key epistemological assumptions of the approach are as follows: An understanding of lived experience is vital to an understanding of the world. Individual, first-person, subjective knowledge is key to forming understandings of lived experience. Each participant is considered to be the expert of their own mental lives. Experience is considered multifaceted, both according to the particular and the universal, the individual and their worldliness. We each make our own worlds uniquely, and yet we make them of communal resources.

Rather than being divergent, the person and the social are mutually constituting (although not necessarily in the same ways). Participants (and researchers) are understood to be culturally and socially situated. We are part of a world of linguistic, physical and historical structures which we form about ourselves in our own inimitable ways. Researchers similarly are enmeshed in this world and engagements and interpretations cannot be made from an isolated or value-free position.

There is not considered to be a direct connection between participants' accounts and experiences, rather, a process of subjective and inter-subjective meaning-making allows the researcher to become 'experience-close' (Smith et al., 2009, p. 33). IPA describes this inevitable dual interpretative activity as a double hermeneutic, participants are involved in sense-making and the researcher is, in turn, making sense of this sense-making (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Art is a ground rife for such engagement and an approach which encourages the researcher to be aware of and consider their involvement with existing ideas and

assumptions is vital. Not only is there a huge amount of pre-existing theoretical work about how we might view art, but there is also research and thinking into how we ought to view art. Images themselves come with implied or intended meanings and may depict their own 'worlds' with an additional layer of associated potential assumptions and biases attached. Figures, colours, and meanings themselves constitute and are constituted by the world of the frame and may have their own historical, social and cultural embeddedness. Paying special attention to sense-making and the role of presuppositions, in this case, seems paramount.

Smith (2004, p. 1) describes three central features of IPA as that it is "idiographic, inductive, and interrogative." This unification makes it particularly suited to the exploration of art-viewing.

Idiographic commitment

The idiographic commitment of IPA allows a detailed examination of the experience in question to be undertaken. Interestingly much of the language used to describe this has suggestions of an artistic nature, for example, Eatough & Smith (2008) describe "the texture and qualities of an experience as it is lived by an experiencing subject" (p. 14). In its detailed approach, IPA produces *thick* descriptions, identifies "patterns of meaning" (Larkin & Thompson, 2011, p. 104) and addresses "layered meanings" akin to layers of paint (e.g. Finlay, 2014)

The idiographic approach offers an alternative to nomothetic enquiry which collects group information and seeks to establish general laws. The aim is to produce an in-depth examination rather than uncover broadly generalizable statements. Generalisability in art-viewing research has presented problems where processes are difficult to delineate, define or compartmentalise and where points of comparison are ill-defined. A more fine-grained and detailed exploration of the phenomenon is called for before broader more general constructs can be suggested.

Inductive

The inductive nature of IPA lends itself to research questions where little is known about the phenomenon or that are more exploratory in nature. Smith, (2004) writes "IPA researchers employ techniques which are flexible enough to allow unanticipated topics or themes to emerge during analysis" (p.43). Often art-viewing research is driven by the content of the 'stimulus' or the art (is it abstract or representational) or by pre-existing expectations of the viewers' responses (measured by preferences or either/ors). An

inductive approach allows aspects to disclose themselves to us and guide the research rather than constrain it or categorise it artificially by naturalising subjective divisions.

There are many existing theoretical constructions of art-viewing, however, each addresses the experience from its own specific conceptual vantage point (Cognitive, Referential, Perceptual) and yet attempts to explain it holistically. IPA allows the *what is it like* to emerge from the data rather than be imposed upon it or mould it and to proceed from a place of orientation towards discovery.

Interrogative

IPA encourages researchers to take up two hermeneutic positions. Following Ricoeur (1970) a hermeneutics of empathy and a hermeneutics of suspicion are employed. The former evolves remaining close to the participant's account, imagining oneself in their position, the latter involves adopting a more sceptical or questioning stance and "probing for meaning in ways which participants might be unwilling or unable to do themselves" (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p. 14). Tam (2008) described the difficulties his participants had in disclosing their experiences with artworks. Interactions with art may be particularly complex requiring both fine-grained and multi-layered interpretative consideration.

IPA in relation to other qualitative approaches

IPA belongs to a body of experiential approaches all of which have different focuses and offer different ways of approaching and conceptualising research.

Discursive approaches are typically noted as particularly contrasting. This is due to their focus on the role and structures of language in shaping experience and producing meaning (Reicher, 2000). Discourse Analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA: Kendall & Wickham, 1999) for example, pay particular attention to language in this way. There is a great degree of internal heterogeneity and ongoing development within such methods. However, broadly speaking, in discursive approaches, attention is focused on, in the case of FDA: "subjectification – the materials/signifying practices in which subjects are made up." (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p. 91). And in discourse analysis: "categories, constructions and orientations through which a sense of agency […] or a moment of understanding are displayed". (Wiggins & Potter, 2008, p. 73).

Where meaning is considered as generated from external structures, apparently acting upon the person, there is a risk of deprioritising consideration of the subject as a free-willed meaning-maker. IPA emphasises lived-experience as a position from which meaning can be constituted and attends to the personal significances within it. In IPA, discourses and language matter but the individual does not become subsumed or eclipsed by the extra-personal. Art-viewings have been suggested in the literature to contain emotional, cognitive, and highly personal acts of meaning-making as well as inter-subjective elements. IPA attends to the personal and individual as dynamically situated within and also acting upon such constructions and orientations and thus appeals to the nature of the research question

Art has associated with it, disciplines with their own linguistic terms and discourses embedded. Additionally, there was a significant body of research within the literature which tended towards the 'how to' of art viewing, encouraging people to look at art in a 'better' or more fruitful fashion. These concerns, while interesting in their own right and suggestive of discourses which might be rewardingly analysed, are not the focus of this study. The aim here is to examine the 'what it is like' rather than the 'what it should be like' or 'why is it like' and this is the direction most accessible using IPA.

In addition, much of the literature has implied bodily responses during art-viewing and paintings also invite a physicality in terms of perspective and viewing position. Nightingale & Cromby remind us "language is never a perfect mirror of materiality" (Nightingale & Cromby, 2002, p. 705) and with its attention to the role of the body and embodied subjectivity as *experienced* IPA allows for any such considerations to emerge rather than reducing the body to a canvas for the inscription of social forces reminding us "

Narrative analysis examines the stories people tell and re-tells them in an accessible framework. Attention is paid to chronology, sequence and considerations of location and plot. Narratives are understood as a way of constructing reality (Murray, 2008). Narrative analysis is usually directed at experiences that have developed over time. This study is concerned with the idiographic details of a discrete viewing and aims to access aspects of experience not only in the form of narratives people have created or constructed.

The limitations of both these positions are suggested by the conclusions of Colbert, Cooke, Camic, & Springham's (2013) study. This work described the way participants incorporated personal meanings into their art-viewings and by doing so were able to

supplant existing stigmatising structures regarding the psychoses they dealt with. Not only did participants' personal meaning-making allow them to overcome existing dogmatic structures and create a new sense of community, but there was also far more than a change in narrative or language involved in this transformation. Their experiences of illness were physical, both bodily and involving a relationship with the artworks as objects. It was also interpersonal as it involved others attitudes, and highly personal in sensed, intuited and felt ways. Such complexities, one might argue, could not be represented fully by a specific focus on language or narrative.

Emphasis on meaning-making and experience as residing in either the language acts we perform or which are available to us degrades the notion of free-willed subjectivity and self-constitution. On the converse, our world is not completely of our own making, either through storying or our own isolated subjectivity. IPA resists such categorical positions allowing the researcher to acknowledge the importance of language in shaping meaning, but also consider the ways that identity and experience are constructed from and in non-linguistic aspects. "The phenomenological method consists of the ability, or rather the art of being sensitive – sensitive to the subtle undertones of language, in the way language speaks when it allows the thing themselves to speak." (Van Manen, 1990, p. 111).

IPA was developed with an understanding of the person as "cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical being and assumes a chain of connection between people's talk and their thinking and emotional state" (Smith & Osborn, 2003). However, this connection is accepted to be complex and potentially confusing. People may not know, know how to articulate (or want to do either) their thoughts and feelings. The researcher's position is to consider all these aspects of the person when they make interpretations from their speech.

Narrative analysis encourages the research to look for contradictions and discontinuities, linguistic and metaphorical expression and ways in which the researcher and 'narrator' interact and the beliefs and motivations underlying the account. 'Narrators' are also placed within the context of a wider social world with attention being paid to how engagement in the world occurs through narrative. All of which is consistent with the aims of IPA.

IPA also considers context and worldly engagement. IPA's hermeneutic stance is the "Our nature or being as humans is not just something we find (as in deterministic theories), nor is it something we make (as in existentialist and constructionist views);

instead, it is what we make of what we find." (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999, p. 212 in Eatough & Smith, 2008)

Indeed, the orientation of IPA has historically been to dialogue with other psychological approaches. This is also reflected in its theoretical conception of the world-bound person. Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2008) remind us "This epistemological openness is quite unique among qualitative approaches in psychology. Because of this, IPA researchers can make cautious inferences about discursive, affective and cognitive phenomena." (p. 14).

In sum, IPA is consistent with and most suitable for the research proposed as it is committed to an exploration of experience on "its own terms" and not pre-emptively or post-emptively reduced to "predefined or overly abstract categories" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1). It allows the study to explore a common but multifaceted experience, firmly anchored in the participants' accounts whilst encouraging the researcher to attend to the influence of presuppositions and pay attention to our "own lack of preparation" (Bernet, 2012, p. 566) and unknowing, for the phenomena we explore.

Part Two

Study One

"*What you see is where it takes you*":

An experiential analysis of five participants' personal accounts of looking at paintings

Chapter Four – Study One: Introduction and Method

The nature of the 'aesthetic experience' has been addressed in various ways in the extant literature. Explicitly preconceived categories (representational and abstract art) and implicit assumptions (art-viewing involves sequential or hierarchical processes) often guide investigation.

The study presented here aims to 'go back to the beginning' by taking an inductive, idiographic approach to its investigation. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, which not only incorporates but notably prioritises these factors, was selected to this end.

To explore the question 'What is it like to look at a painting?', participants were invited to select an unfamiliar image and were then interviewed during their real-time looking. Where other studies used viewers' retrospective accounts of viewing multiple paintings and artworks, this study aimed to provide a more fine-grained investigation of individual experience.

The five participants each chose a different image which they had not seen before but which they wanted to talk about and the discussions of these five paintings formed the basis for in-depth analysis.

Method

Rationale for looking at the painting in real-time

Visual methodologies have recent been fruitfully incorporated into qualitative psychology (Reavey & Johnson, 2017). Often images are presented to participants to help elicit or access what is otherwise difficult to engage with. Photographs and art created by participants (particularly by marginalised groups) have also been used. This has suggested a range of benefits. Participants have been given the opportunity to generate their own research material. Creating images has been used successfully to facilitate participants' explorations of their experiences and has been demonstrated to aid communication and exploration of difficult topics (Attard et al., 2017)

The use of paintings here was not related to any conception about a particular social group or to aid the expression of a specific type of subject. The painting was not used as an alternative to language or as a conduit to some other type of experience. Instead, viewing the painting and discussing it together allowed the researcher and participant to

engage in the activity which was the subject of the research. The painting was part of the experience so was present in its unfolding.

Clearly, there is a complex relationship between our inner thought and public speech. There is no claim here to replicate or capture the exact content of a participant's internal thoughts when viewing a painting simply by asking them about it in the moment. However, by conducting the interview whilst looking at and talking about the image together, over a period of time as one might look at a painting and consider it, the hope was to become closer to the experience.

Conducting museum or art gallery based interviews had been considered. The benefits of this would be to allow viewing of original works in their intended size, luminance, texture and physicality. This was decided against in favour of using a reproduction for several reasons. Allowing the viewer to pick the location of the interview and conducting discussion somewhere private and quiet was both ethically and practically more appropriate than doing so in a public place. The research on comparisons between museum and non-museum based viewings demonstrated mixed results and indeed art appears and can be experienced in all manner of locations. Generally, it was felt that viewers might feel less constrained and restricted in their conversation if it was not conducted in a public place, particularly one associated with many expectations regarding art and art-viewing.

Preliminary Research

To assist in selecting participant criteria and designing the interview schedule some preparatory work was carried out. This involved observing the general behaviour and interactions of people in art galleries. The types of comments and people made about the paintings and amount of time people tending to spend looking at them were noted.

Participants / Criteria

IPA requires a fairly homogeneous sample, recognising that actually determining the criteria for this homogeneity is itself an interpretative issue (Smith et al., 2009).

Participants were self-described art-enthusiasts. There were no strict criteria used to categorise 'art-enthusiasm', in order to resist artificial definitions. Rather, during recruitment, I described looking for people who 'liked art, were interested in art and would be comfortable enough to talk about art'.

Art-enthusiasts were chosen because they were the people who actually engaged in the experience. There are many 'types' of viewers, from the virgin to the naive to the reluctant, all waiting to be investigated. However, at the inception of the project, it was difficult to predict how well the interviews might go. It seemed judicious to select a group already familiar with the experience in question. It was deemed appropriate, to initially involve people who would hopefully be comfortable and able (from their perspectives) to discuss a painting (and possibly) find it enjoyable.

Participants did not have formal art or art history education aside from an occasional lecture or drawing class. Professional artists were also excluded. The rationale was that professional experience (education or occupation) would provide different or additional discourses which a person might draw on during the discussion. Such cases are of legitimate interest, but again, a different study. In addition, given the weight of literature regarding the differences between experts and novices, it seemed prudent to exclude artists or those with formal training from the sample to avoid challenging the homogeneity requirement of IPA. Participants were aged between 35 and 65, three male and two female. They were all Londoners, living and working in the city, educated to at least degree level.

Recruitment

Recruitment was purposive. Participants were recruited via word of mouth or word of e-mail. They were friends of friends, colleagues of colleagues. None were direct personal acquaintances.

Participants were sent an initial invitation to take part in a study about art-viewing. They were informed that the study consisted of a face to face interview which involved looking at a painting and talking about it with the researcher. It was made clear that there would be no questions involving right or wrong answers and that formal knowledge of art was not a requirement for the interview.

Ethics

Ethical Approval for the project was granted by the Birkbeck Research Ethics Committee.

It was ensured the painting contained no violent or explicit content. Acknowledging that what can be found distressing may be highly personal, content generally considered to be objectionable was avoided. Gory or bloody scenes, depictions of death and images clearly provocative of religious, racist or political insult were avoided.

The impact of engaging in the interview was considered. Finlay (2008b) points to the possible emotional impact of reflection. In addition, the literature has indicated that potentially self-questioning or disruptive states may arise in response to art. The need for sensitivity for the duration of the encounter and preparedness for the discussion to become personal and emotional remained paramount. Viewers were reminded at the onset of the interview that they were free to leave or terminate the discussion without need for explanation. If viewers expressed any discomfort during the interview they were asked if they wanted to continue, pause, or end the discussion. One interviewee found that the picture she looked at became more upsetting as she viewed it over time. At particular points, she covered some parts with her hands. In this case, we agreed to refocus attention and change the direction of the discussion. She explained that she was motivated to discuss what had upset her but felt emotionally overwhelmed. Following her lead, we therefore, reoriented the conversation to a more abstract consideration of her concerns. Instead of talking about the personal experiences of the children depicted she described the social situations which engendered their position.

As detailed in the Interview Section, Consent and Anonymity were treated with the utmost care. Participants were fully informed before interviews and debriefed afterwards.

Researcher Safety

The majority of participants preferred to be interviewed at Birkbeck. Others kindly invited me to their workplaces or homes. All were known well enough to the people who referred them to me that I considered myself safe at all times. Someone was always informed when I went to do interviews off-campus and an agreement was always in place for me to contact a designated person once I had finished.

Consent

Participants were informed in advance that they would be looking at an image and discussing it. They were informed both verbally and through written information sheet that they would be recorded. They were given the details of how their recordings and subsequent transcriptions would be treated. They were informed that they could terminate the interview at any time. Samples of the study consent form and information sheet were supplied before participants agreed to be interviewed to support fully informed consent. The participants' openness and generosity were notable. Most

expressed the desire to assist in academic research and they were interested in the endeavour itself.

The Interview

Interview schedule.

The interview schedule was developed from a range of influences. Observations made during the preliminary gallery visit such as the aspects of paintings which people had referred to and the types of conversations they had, were drawn upon. The types of questions which might correspond to or sit well with such engagements were considered. A visitor, for example, had pointed out the fabric of a dress in an image being quite specific about texture and use of light. Another had had a strong overall response to a painting. I tried to think of questions which would not inhibit such diversities. I considered how to speak to areas in the extant literature which were prominent such as preference, liking, judgements or appraisal and also facilitate areas which may have had less attention such as the nature of looking over time and notions of aboutness (as opposed to a sharp distinction between intellectual and affective response). A draft schedule was piloted on family and friends and some alterations made. Questions asking about associations' people might make to elements outside of the painting such as memories or other artworks were removed. In practice, they were too directive and did not flow naturally within discussions. The resultant schedule consisted of three areas and is included in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Interview Schedule - Study One

Preferences

Why did you choose this painting?

What do you think about the painting?

Prompt – Is there anything you like or dislike about it?

Viewing

What is it like to look at it?

Can you describe what it was like when you first saw the painting?

    Prompt – what parts did you look at?

Can you describe what happened as you continued to look at it?

Thoughts and feelings

What do you think the painting is about?

Can you tell me about it?

- Prompt: if someone who wasn't here asked you to describe it what would you say?

Interview Procedure

The first step in the interview procedure was to review the terms of the study and consent agreement. Participants were given to opportunity to ask questions and the audio recording of the interview was discussed.

Participants were informed that the interview was to be digitally recorded, that the recording would only commence when they agreed and they would be aware at all times of recording taking place. They were reminded that they could ask for the recorder to be turned off at any point in the interview. One participant asked for a break in the interview to use the bathroom. Other than this, recordings consisted of a single uninterrupted discussion.

After this was established and before recording commenced, participants were invited to select the painting which was to be discussed.

The Coffee table style art book 'art' (Belton, 2003) collects a large number of paintings ranging in date, style and culture. Participants were asked to, in their own time, select an image which appealed to them and which they felt happy to talk about. They were asked to select an image which they had not seen before and would be comfortable to look at for the duration of the interview. No criteria were suggested regarding what they might feel about their chosen image. It did not have to be a painting which they felt was 'good' for example. The researcher left the room briefly at this point to allow the process to go on undisturbed.

On return and once a painting was chosen, the recorder was turned on and the interview began.

The interview started with the question "Why did you choose this painting?" and continued organically as participant and researcher looked at the image. The aim was to achieve an exploration of getting "experience close" to encountering the image in the moment.

During the interview, participants were free to look at information present in the book about the painting such as its title and the name of the artist if they wished as it was their own viewing experience.

The Interview followed a semi-structured format using the aforementioned schedule as guide. The inductive nature of the research was privileged and discussion was primarily directed by the comments, interests and focus of the participants. In practice participants naturally covered most of the scheduled questions without prompting. They would say, for example, 'now I've looked a bit longer' and go on to describe how their interpretation had changed.

Participant Debrief

Following the interview, the participants were given the opportunity to add anything to the recorded part of the conversation and then offered the opportunity to discuss anything they wanted to off tape, such as to ask for any details they felt compromised their anonymity to be changed. They could also ask for any details they regretted giving to be removed at this point. Participants were informed they could contact me with further concerns and questions as needed.

One participant asked for confirmation that their real name was not going to be associated with their interview or quotes from it in the write-up and they were reassured of this. None of the participants requested any information or changes to be made in

their transcripts in the weeks following the interview. One participant's pseudonym had to be changed due to a conflict with another participant's real name in the second study.

Transcription

Participants were allocated a pseudonym immediately upon commencing transcription so that there was nothing to associate their identity with their transcript.

Recordings were transcribed verbatim. The Alternative Abbreviated Instructions for Transcribers (Poland, 1995) was used. Example notations include:

- Short pauses to be denoted by a series of dots …
- Longer pauses by indicating as such in parentheses (pause) (long pause)
- Similarly (laughing) (sighing)
- Emphasis is indicated by capitals: he did WHAT?

It was recognised that emotional context, sarcasm, body language and other nonverbal forms of communication are not captured well on audio recordings. It is sometimes difficult to, therefore, conflate the expression of lived-experience occurring in interviews to what becomes transcribed as text. For this reason, details such as long pauses, laughter, descriptive gestures (in several instances participants covered areas of the image in relation to expressions of distress or disgust) or significant movements (one got up and walked around to look at the perspective from different angles and distances) were included and notes were taken during the interview as an aid memoir where necessary.

Analysis

Analysis followed the steps laid out in (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Each transcript was analysed individually. The analysis for each participant was completed before moving on to the next and approached independently. This was to maintain the idiographic focus key to IPA. Each individual analysis proceeded according to the following steps.

Reading

The transcript was read in its entirety several times for familiarisation. It was approached fresh with the intention, as far as possible, to remain uninfluenced by the other interviews conducted or by any previous analyses.

As described in the methodology section, phenomenological research attests to the undertaking of the epoché, phenomenological reduction, or suspension of the natural

attitude. The form this takes depends upon the particularities of the approach adopted (Finlay, 2008a). IPA, as a hermeneutic and interpretative method, does not ascribe to the notion that a complete separation of researcher from existing beliefs and preconceptions is either possible or desirable. Rather researchers are steered towards the adoption of a phenomenological attitude or stance. This is described as a position of open-mindedness, thoughtful involvement, and active self-reflection. In accordance, during reading and subsequent analysis, a balance is sought. Whilst attempting to treat each case individually, we try to be mindful of potential influences including those from previous analyses. In this way, it is possible to consider whether new interpretations and emphases are indeed suggested by the data in question, or, have been overly influenced by what was already in mind.

Once a familiarised with an interview, a close line by line examination of the full transcript began.

Initial Notes

Initial notes were made in one margin concerning language, recurring motifs, ideas and points of interest. Underlining or highlighting and the use of different colours to categorise notations or relevant groupings was helpful. Sometimes single words or a particular use of pronouns stood out. Where a participant explored multiple interpretations of the same feature in an image, different coloured highlighting was used to differentiate these narratives or meanings.

Emergent Themes

Next, a series of Emergent Themes were developed and recorded in the opposite margin. Here, interesting and significant aspects of the participant's account, as suggested during the initial noting, were given concise, more abstracted descriptors.

The goal, when developing these themes, was to apply an increased level of interpretation to the data whilst remaining grounded in the participant's account. Smith & Osborn (2003) note "the skill at this stage is finding expressions which are high level enough to allow theoretical connections within and across cases but which are still grounded in the particularity of the specific thing said." (p. 68). As such, Emergent themes represent a distillation of important and pertinent aspects of the participant's account.

Figure 3 reproduces initial notations and emergent themes from an extract of Marian's interview regarding the painting *The Gross Clinic*.

Figure 3 Marian – The Gross Clinic. Reproduced extract of the annotated transcript

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Initial Notes
Elements which attract – a physical aspect of depiction Unsureity in interpretation – it's very weird The viewing developing over time Construction of narrative –'lead character' Emerging elements – the pronounced scalpel Elements of attraction – I'm drawn to it Experimenting with narrative Emotionality as absence –cold and detached A sense of brutality	M: Er well I suppose I was attracted to his… this limb whatever it is, I still can't see what it is, I can't tell if it's a person or a bit of a person, it is very weird um there's amputation going on there as well by the looks of them yeah, and then obviously the more you look at it you see detail like this, the, for me, the lead the lead er character, I don't know if you call someone in a painting a character, the lead character's hand suddenly bloodied with a very pronounced scalpel and then I'm I'm secondly drawn to this guy here who seems to be looking away. I don't know if its shock or he's got blood in his eye or something but I think that's quite interesting erm… And then latterly the reason I think I said, I think, it was quite detached and cold. Someone seems to be transcribing something in the back er so yeah so it's quite er it's quite a brutal image actually for different reasons… Page 2 Lines 11-40	'Attracted', looking and working it out over time Weirdness, mystery Inquisitive approach Attending to details to discover and make sense/form narrative Calls him 'character' as in a narrative or real person? Almost as if the scalpel sticks out of the image. 'Suddenly' – temporality – drawn to – has direction Shock or blood, different ideas tried out Multiple reasons – brutal presentation Quite a blunt strong description

Clustering

The next stage of analysis involved looking for patterns and relationships between the Emergent Themes. In order to explore such patterns in a flexible manner this part of the analysis was conducted on paper (rather than electronically). The emergent themes were copied from the transcript onto individual note cards. These cards were laid out over a large clear area so that they were all visible.

To explore meaningful connections between themes and groups of themes, cards with potential relationships were moved together. Moving emergent themes around physically provided a means to adaptably explore their relationships. Interactions between themes were compared and reviewed by positioning and repositioning cards in different configurations. Relationships and tensions became apparent in an observable and palpable fashion.

Clusters of themes began to collect organically. Sometimes they were drawn together by a particular emergent theme. In other cases, similar themes combined to expose new meaning as a collective. In the excerpt above, for example, the Emergent Themes 'Unsureity in interpretation – it's very weird' and 'Experimenting with Narrative' became associated through the notion of ambiguity they shared. The two themes 'Elements of attraction – I'm drawn to it' and 'Elements which attract – a physical aspect of depiction' are clearly similar and naturally gravitated towards one another.

As clusters were formed, an overall structure of the themes began to emerge. Some emergent themes collected readily into clusters but others appeared to be more isolated or disconnected. Dominances and redundancies became apparent. After thoroughly exploring the data to look for different connections, a small number of the emergent themes did not appear to feature significantly in the overall structure. These were set to one side so they could be revisited at any point during the subsequent work.

Checking-in with the transcript

By habitually referring back to the text as emergent themes were grouped together, the participant's meaning, as it was in the original transcript, could be checked. This helped keep the interpretation grounded in the data. The emergent themes and the clusters they formed, were reviewed in relation to the specific words of the participant. This helped to ensure that they were truly representative.

It was important to provide an interpretation of the participant's experiences of viewing the painting and not get drawn into direct interpretations of the image itself. Some

elements in the paintings were particularly provocative or evocative, for example, the bloodied hands of the surgeon in the extract above Figure 3. In such cases, checking back with the transcript allowed confirmation of what was being represented. The aim was to remain engaged with the viewer's experience of looking and viewing, and with the nature of their interactions and respondings. To capture *their* meaning-making not my own responses to the painting. Re-reading the participant's specific words helped to ensure this was the case.

The quotes and sections of transcript underlying emergent themes were also re-read to ensure they were correctly represented and that they made sense in the context not just of the emergent theme but also in terms of the new cluster formed.

Following the data

The processes of clustering and checking back with the data described are iterative rather than linear. Whilst conducting this stage of the analysis, different configurations of themes were produced and disassembled. Some 'pieces of the puzzle' fit and were retained whilst others needed to be reviewed and restructured.

During this period, many note-cards which were moved into different configurations. Keeping track of ideas and chains of thought sometimes became demanding. To this end, it was in some cases useful to assign potential clusters and associations between themes with a temporary descriptive label. It was also helpful to photograph as a record, notecards presented in a particular formation. This way parts could experimentally be moved around but the original ideas and arrangements could always be returned to.

Superordinate Themes

Finally, a series of thematic clusters which were felt to most strongly represent the data was produced. Each cluster could now be regarded as representing a Superordinate Theme and was named to best reflect the meaning it captured.

Smith et al., (2009) describe the different ways that themes might collect into clusters and so ultimately become Superordinate Themes. For example, **subsumption** occurs when one theme draws others towards it and thus the resultant cluster is named after that centralising theme or concept. In cases of **polarisation** themes representing contrasting or opposing content are grouped and the Superordinate Theme is named to reflect that tension.

In practice, a combination of these factors tended to inform the development of clusters and subsequently Superordinate Themes in an intuitive and organic fashion. For example, the group of themes involving attraction (Elements of Attraction and Elements which attract – physical aspects of the depiction) noted in the extract of transcript <u>Figure 3</u>, became part of a larger collection of themes describing Marian's experience of 'Provocative Elements' of viewing. This Theme and the emergent themes which contributed to it are presented in <u>Table 6</u>.

<u>Table 6 Example of Emergent Themes Clustered to form a Theme</u>

Theme: Provocative Elements	
Emergent Themes	Quotes
Curiosity – compelling	*I really want to know what's going on here* (11,17)
The draw of brutality	*I'm drawn to it being cut* (11,14)
Aspects of attraction	
- Bloodied hand	*hand suddenly bloodied with a very pronounced scalpel* (2,31)
- Character	*drawn to this guy here who seems to be looking away.* (2,34) *that's an interesting question why is he looking away?* (6,24)
The unknown (this thing) provokes curiosity	*interesting that he's obviously just done something to this thing* (1,32)
Wanting to know – generates interest	*the more I think about the the thing I'm most attracted by is I kind of want to know who the tall chap is with the shiny forehead* (9,18)

This group, in turn, became part of the Superordinate Theme 'What draws me to it'. In this case, the participant's original expression was used to name the resultant Superordinate Theme. This was because it was felt to capture the essence of the theme well.

Care was taken to look for areas of divergence within the data and include these within the analysis where appropriate. Emergent Themes which were set to one side earlier in the process were reviewed to this end, to check if they in fact represented cases of divergence and a small number were reintroduced.

The following Table 7 describes the full analysis in the case of Marian. Four superordinate themes and the themes underlying each of them are detailed.

Table 7 Marian viewing The Gross Clinic – Table of Themes

Superordinate Theme One: What draws me to it	
Theme	**Key Extracts**
An instinctive pull towards the subject	*there's something scientific going on here um so that in and of itself would attract me* (2,15)
	'I can't detach the subject' 'and it would have been part of the reason I originally turned to it'. (16,37)
	I think that's relatively unusual subject… (10,38)
	I was just curious and it was an interesting subject (11,25)
	Yeah I may just have a sick mind I don't know (11,10)
	so it's much more of a gut reaction (14,9)
	I dunno maybe I wanna be a bit Victorian I don't know but it's a period I think it's really interesting…. (16,7)
Provocative Elements	*I really want to know what's going on here* (11,17)
	I'm drawn to it being cut (11,14)
	hand suddenly bloodied with a very pronounced scalpel (2,31)
	drawn to this guy here who seems to be looking away. (2,34)
	that's an interesting question why is he looking away? (6,24)
	interesting that he's obviously just done something to this thing (1,32)
	the more I think about the the thing I'm most attracted by is I kind of want to know who the tall chap is with the shiny forehead (9,18)
The human element	*it's a piece of history and its people'* (9,6)
	'portrayal of people in images rather than objects or things or landscapes because I find them most interesting', (2,11)
	er it's about human flesh and there's blood erm (1,16)
	so it's intimate because it's visceral slightly (6,8)
	here's something happening to a human body (6,6)
	we don't tend to see this visceral stuff very often (10,19)

Table 7 continued

Superordinate Theme Two: Meaning-making activities: Exploring the content of the image	
Theme	**Key Extracts**
Working it out. Making sense of what is depicted.	*'the more I think about it I wonder' 'I don't know erm'* (10,15)
	'well if it's a cadaver I sort of assume' 'er I'm just going to speculate on this I would then assume this guy had introduced what was about to happen' (13,3)
	I've just seen there was an audience behind the guy that's transcribing which I hadn't spotted before so that's clearly an operating theatre' 'now I've seen those guys,' (6,38)
	'can't quite work out where abouts on the body this is' (8,29)
Forming ideas of character	*these guys all look quite detached* (1,17)
	that seems to be a slight erm you know when you're disgusted and you do that [motions] (3,21)
	these guys seem to be working very closely together (6,4)
	this guy, I don't know I'm guessing, in the context of the picture (7,12)
	I have to assume having now spent a couple of minutes thinking about it that this guy's disgusted (6,15)
	Um then these guys… I wonder if er I would have thought at that stage you'd be quite nervous, (7,20)
	that must be quite a vulnerable thing to feel (10,10)
	this chap over here that appears not to like what he's looking at (12,37)
Thinking about the key figure	*Well I spose because he seems most central to the image. On a very mundane level he's bigger than everyone else* (2,1)
	now I've seen those guys, that guy clearly must be a professor or something erm…. Yeah…. (7,3)
	that's crystal clear and this guy's clearly important enough to have made an incision if that makes sense (9,29)
	his demeanour and his posture and his position in the picture (12,21)
	he's both a part of what's happening and not a part, (2,39)
	he's just stood there a bit statue-like (13,4)

Table 7 continued

Superordinate Theme Three: Concerning Context(s)	
Theme	**Key Extracts**
The context of the painting's subject	*I suppose this is representing that period between kinda more barbaric medicine where you guess to actually having some notion that the human body was understandable* (17,10)
	that just cites it as a kind of capturing a little piece of history erm (5,2)
	There's almost an element of documentary to it, (12,25)
	Yeah it seems a weird thing it's neither you, I can't, you wouldn't paint this because you are committed to the idea of surgery (15,1)
	or it represents a particular thing er in er particular time in history that society or thought was important to represent (15,6)
The context of painting as an object	*I can't imagine the average painter would set up an easel or board in in er in ere r surgery theatre* (15,10)
	'there wouldn't have been that level of photography to capture it properly' 'I can't imagine that's drawn from memory or painted from memory' (15,20)
	it does make me wonder then who this painting would have been painted for (14,33)
Superordinate Theme Four: The reflections on interpreting	
Theme	**Key Extracts**
Interpretation is tentative	*but I don't know. I'm obviously guessing* (7,23)
	I don't know I'm guessing, in the context (7,12)
	but I could be wrong.... (9,23)
	but it could be that's me interpreting it, it could be anything, (3,21)
	I could be missing a trick and maybe it's all about this chap (12,36)
	'I think these are griper things' 'if I've got that right'' I'm sure I could fantasise all sorts of things'(6,18)
Issues of Knowing: Actuality versus inference	*I'm just going to speculate on this I would then assume* (13,37)
	I feel like I'm making stuff up um so its lack of understanding (10,29)
	I just realised that's quite a safe picture actually because I do get it to a degree even though I've got questions. (12,6)
	because it doesn't matter whether I'm right or wrong on it (16,12)
	when that emotion is er validated or not through finding out what the artist was thinking I'm not sure erm (15,39)

During the analysis, elements that might not initially have appeared consummate, gravitated together as relationships between themes shed light on new meanings. For example, whilst the theme 'An Instinctive pull towards the subject' described the way Marian related to the image *The Gross Clinic* in an ideological and holistic sense, the theme 'Provocative Elements' was more concerned with specific, visual elements of the depiction. These themes were unified, however, through a newly emergent relational meaning. Both concerned the viewer's experience of being drawn or attracted to the image in some form.

When tabulating the themes, consideration was given to the order in which they were presented. In this case, the themes describing initial interactions with the painting were put first followed by those with emphasis on later aspects of the experience.

Subsequent Analyses

All five transcripts were analysed using the method described. As previously noted, each analysis was completed before beginning the next and each was attempted fresh and without direct reference to the others in the set.

Cross case analysis

The five individual analyses were then compared to look for patterns between cases. This process involved collecting the Themes for all the participants and clustering them into Master Themes representing qualities shared by the group.

Analytic procedure

For each individual analysis, a summary table detailing the themes developed (i.e. without quotes) was printed out and each participant's table was marked with a different colour for identification. These tables were then laid out next to one another on the floor in order to begin to look 'across' the cases. The Superordinate Themes and constituent themes for each participant were therefore collected and could be compared.

First relationships between Superordinate Themes were considered. To do so, the tables for each participant were cut up initially only to separate the data at this higher level. Each Superordinate Theme with its themes listed underneath could be moved in its entirety. In this form, the Superordinate Themes for each participant could then be compared. As previously, where connections were indicated, the associated pieces of paper were moved together forming a visual representation of these relationships. By continuing this process, in much the same manner used in each individual analysis

(building relationships between themes based on areas of convergence and divergence, tension and similarity and checking back with the transcripts) a series of initial thematic clusters was gradually formed.

Ordering and positioning of Superordinate Themes accounted for most of the clustering. The emerging structure was then fine-tuned by paying close attention to the underlying themes. In some cases, though several Superordinate Themes suggested a cohesion, one or two of their constituent lower-level themes were rendered, through this new association, incongruous. A cluster of Superordinate Themes might contain a number of lower-level themes which needed to be reviewed and moved as new relevance's were exposed. Here such themes were cut out individually. This way they could be moved to a more representative cluster or extracted and retired. As the themes were colour coded by participant and their original relationships documented in copies of the summary tables, it was possible at all times to locate where in each individual analysis a theme had come from.

Most of the data were used in this process. Again, themes which did not appear to feature significantly, or fit into the evolving structure, were placed to one side. They were revisited and re-examined for their relevance periodically and a small percentage were eventually retired from the set.

When a thematic structure felt to best describe the data was finally developed, each cluster could be considered as representative of a Master Theme for the group. These Master Themes were named, (as in an individual analysis) according to the meanings that they represented. The table of Master Themes for the group is presented in Table 8

Saturation

When looking for patterns at group level, it is recommended to consider how many participants a theme is evident for. Although there is no 'rule' one guideline suggested is that a theme should be present for at least two-thirds of participants (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The sample in this group was small and so the aim was to only allow for a minimal number of themes which did not occur for all participants. However, attention was not only paid to the recurrence of themes but also to their significance. A particular strong or rich theme present for fewer of the participants might be regarded as more compelling than a theme evident for them all but only in a minor way. Again, the more intuitive, natural emergence of themes and relationships is emphasised.

Table 8 Cross Case Analysis - Study One

Master Theme 1: Elements of Engagement		
Theme	**Viewer - Painting**	**Theme from individual analysis** **Key Words**
Groping out	Charles (*Expulsion*)	Initial Impact *but the central figure leaps out at you….* (3,7) *it's very very striking* (1,6) Human connection – cry for help? - *'the hand that is groping out at us'* (1,13)
	Jean (*Ship and Red Sun*)	Leaping out *leap out and grab you* (1,21) Alerting by colour *the red stands out a lot* (1,30)
	Katherine (*Nymphéas*)	Non-visual perceptions *I can just hear some birds* (14,3)
Attracting attention	Marian (*The Gross Clinic*)	Provocative Elements *blooded fingers with the scalpel just seem very prominent* (9,29) Thinking about the key figure *the thing I'm most attracted by is I kind of want to know who the tall chap is* (9,18)
	Jean (*Ship and Red Sun*)	Unusual contrasts - compelling *'that attracted my attention' 'a real contrast'* (2,7) Directing of attention *like a road sign I suppose…* (1,30)
	Henry (*Viewing the Cherry Blossom at Asukayama*)	Fascination of the alien *'attention was also caught by this guy'* *'because I don't know and it's alien'* (13,37)
	Katherine (*Nymphéas*)	Representation –effect of photorealism *they really capture attention because you still know what it is but it's kind of shown in a different way* (8,38)
Drawing In	Henry (*Viewing the Cherry Blossom at Asukayama*)	Artistic techniques *almost to remind you that this is a picture um or draw us to an interesting thing* (10,23)
	Jean (*Ship and Red Sun*)	Portentous aspect – a draw *definitely what draws you in […]so that's maybe why I think it's ominous…* (3,6) It draws you in - easily *it's not as if you're having to work really hard at trying to work up an interest in it* (10,30)
	Marian (*The Gross Clinic*)	Ideas of character – desire to explore *drawn to this guy here who seems to be looking away* (2,33) Provocative Elements *I'm drawn to it being cut* (11,10)

Table 8 continued

Master Theme 2: Deeper Exploration		
Theme	**Viewer - Painting**	**Theme from the individual analysis** **Quotes/ Key Words**
Emerging realities	Charles (*Expulsion*)	Beginning to explore allegory *I don't know whether this is Eve leaving the garden of Eden or what* (1,25) Developing Alternative Interpretations *which could easily be plant erm a sort of a hint of the crown of thorns or that that's very tousled* (4,3)
	Henry (*Viewing the Cherry Blossom at Asukayama*)	Seeing beyond the perceivable *there's a language of sensibility there which is just infinite* (18,23)
	Jean (*Ship and Red Sun*)	Fluidity of Interpretations – co-existent/multiple *I think different things as I look* (4,19)
	Katherine (*Nymphéas*)	Idea of place – evolving *What you see is where it takes you…* (12.30) Desires influence growing interpretation *yeah I want it to be Southern France* (12,7)
	Marian (*The Gross Clinic*)	Experimenting with alternative interpretations *It could be something completely different* (3,4) Forming ideas of character *yeah I'm sure I could fantasise all sorts of things* (6,15)
Awareness of tensions and contradictions	Charles (*Expulsion*)	The Real and surreal *but at the same time this isn't a realistic scene* (12,35) Between reality and abstraction i*t's in essence an informal picture that's rigorously informed*! (14,33)
	Henry (*Viewing the Cherry Blossom at Asukayama*)	Similarity in difference *it's both a figure in a landscape technically but actually it's a figure laid on to a background landscape* (3,13)
	Jean (*Ship and Red Sun*)	Abnormalities/Anomalies *A ship unless it's… unless there's something wrong, is a certain way up relative to the horizon'* (3,39)
	Marian (*The Gross Clinic*)	Historical and modern – contrasting contexts *even though I think its 19th century it still feels very modern to me,* (17,4) Bleeding of character into context *he's a part of it […] and yet somehow he's detached* (12,39)

Table 8 continued

Master Theme 3: Emotional Resonances		
Within painting emotionality	Charles (*Expulsion*)	Empathic discomfort *Er it's a sort of nude exposed figure in an a hostile environment* (3,28)
	Henry (*Viewing the Cherry Blossom at Asukayama*)	Familial intimacy *The child sort of half looking up at the mother its very sort of intimate there's an intimacy there* (10,36)
	Jean (*Ship and Red Sun*)	From image to mind - it makes me think of *And yeah, yeah I think it does, the ship looks vulnerable* (9,9)
	Marian (*The Gross Clinic*)	The body – intimacy *it's intimate because it's visceral* (6,6) Forming ideas of character – developing emotions *you'd be very nervous I would have thought cutting into flesh*, (7,20)
Self-reflections	Charles (*Expulsion*)	Discomfort at awareness of position as viewer *sort of implicit er implicated n in whatever is happening to her….* (14,23) Confusion over cause of emotional response *being afraid not really sure of what there is to be afraid of…* (10,12)
	Henry (*Viewing the Cherry Blossom at Asukayama*)	Consideration of cultural position on felt response *perhaps er the Japanese would be keyed in to have a greater emotional response* (15,3)
	Jean (*Ship and Red Sun*)	Wanting to know –self-questioning *um well what is it that you look at paintings for?* (13,34) The lure – meaning to self as viewer *so I feel it's revealed some of my…* (12,24)
	Katherine (*Nymphéas*)	Longing – awareness of personal response *I feel relaxed and it's lovely and it's so I erm, so it is, it's a bit disappointing that it's not real* (13,22) Evokes questions of personal lifestyle *but I don't know if that would be running away* (14,9) A medicinal effect *This is just like 'breathe', calm down, enjoy, you know. If you need to stop its ok,* (7,39)
	Marian (*The Gross Clinic*)	The meaning of interest re self-perception *Yeah I may just have a sick mind I don't know,* (11,10)

Chapter Five - Study One: Results

The Paintings: Before presenting the results of the analysis, here are the paintings selected by each of the participants, along with the name of the selecting participant and, below the picture, a short quotation from them by way of an introduction to their initial perception of the piece. While reading the following analytic account of the experiential themes, the reader may find it helpful, occasionally, to look back to the paintings.

Charles • *Expulsion*
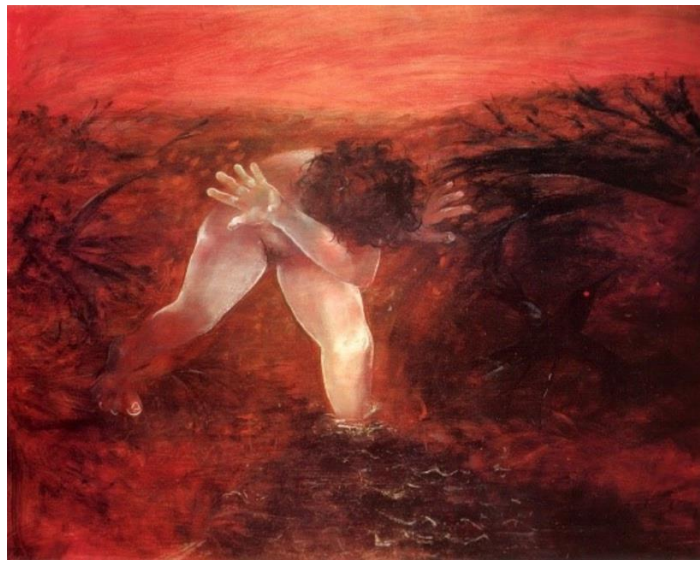
I don't know whether this is Eve leaving the garden of Eden or what, [...] erm...but what's being flee... er fled from is unclear..so... very dramatic very er and very dynamic though there are very few elements in it (Charles)

Henry • *Viewing the Cherry Blossom at Asukayama* at Asukayama

When you first look at it you see a single scene, um you just see this group of figures, in a landscape and the landscape is unified and the whole picture is unified by the line of cherry blossom... it's just held together.... by that...(Henry)

Jean • *Ship and Red Sun*
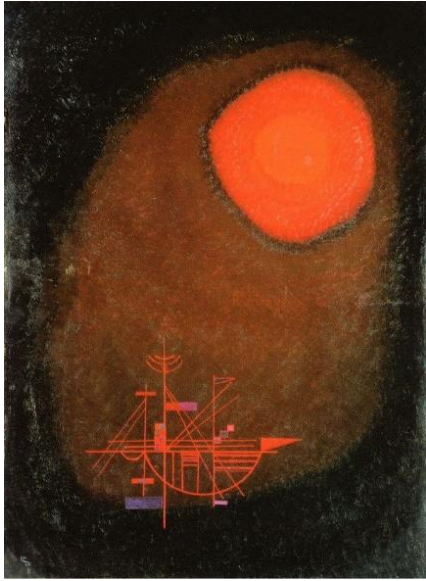
It makes me think of a, of a strange sort of ship with a very um ominous sky dominated by a red sun and the red suns hazy glow against this black background um and the ship is very much dwarfed by this big red sun…(Jean)

Katherine • *Nymphéas*

I think there is… it's it's playing with an idea erm because this is so-called… like this is an impression but we can still see what the painting is about, the… you know the flowers the pond and stuff like that yeah (Katherine)

Marian • *The Gross Clinic*

It's from the past and it looks slightly barbaric erm… I'm sure modern surgery looks equally barbaric but erm it just looks weird having Victorian gentlemen in erm long coats kind of cutting people up (Marian)

The analysis revealed three Master Themes. These are summarised in Table 9

Table 9 Summary of Master Themes and Themes - Study One

Master Theme 1 Elements of Engagement	Master Theme 2 Deeper Exploration	Master Theme 3 Vulnerability and Intimacy: emotional resonances of viewing
Groping Out	Emerging Prominences	Within painting encounters
Attracting Attention	Awareness of Tensions and Contradictions	Self-reflections
Drawing In		

Master Theme One: Elements of Engagement

The first Superordinate theme 'Elements of Engagement' describes how the viewers experience arresting aspects of the paintings. Often these were encountered at the inceptive moments of the viewer's interaction, however, elements of the paintings which in some way affected the viewer's attention could be experienced at any point with during their looking as different details were noticed. The Superordinate Theme consists of three themes, Groping Out, Attracting Attention and Drawing In. These themes are not suggested to be categorically chronological. The experiences they reflect do not necessarily happen sequentially or discretely. They describe *types* of experience that may happen simultaneously or in an overlapping fashion. What makes these occurrences qualitatively different, is the direction and origin of the sensed dynamisms in space that they describe. These themes concern the apperception of an area in-between the painting and viewer. This region can be breeched or bridged and the themes are distinguished by the different movements across this space which they illustrate.

"Groping out".

The experience described in the Groping Out theme is that of elements of the painting reaching out from the page or canvas. These elements have a sense of physicality, may have a direction and in some cases also may also have a motivation. Charles is a 'fifty-something' male who spent some-time examining the contents of the art book before he chose *Expulsion* to look at. He explained that the image was unusual to him and that this contributed to his decision to discuss the contorted figure in an orange fiery landscape.

Charles began his discussion of *Expulsion* by considering the central figure:

The articulation of this very sort of erm… striking pose with
the, the woman it must be, crouching down er you couldn't
have your arms in those positions, so the hand that is groping
out at us it is actually, you probably couldn't do that, well
maybe you could maybe you could maybe it's… it's palm out
and it seems as if almost the shoulder is dislocated (1,13)

Charles describes the pose of the figure in *Expulsion* as 'striking'. The word has two relevant meanings. Something conspicuous, unusual and perhaps extreme and also the action of striking and impacting something. Both here have implications of a force emanating from the image.

The physicality, of the abstraction of 'striking' in this context, is echoed in Charles' sense of the physical bodily contortion of the figure. The shoulder is seen as almost dislocated into an unnatural position by the hand's effort to reach out of the page. There is an inescapably tangible nature to Charles' description of the hand groping *out*. His reaction suggests a strong sense of physical presence about the image, and this physicality has forces of movement or action attached to it. He notes that the woman is posed crouching down giving the impression that she may be ready to spring forth, as he later describes:

The background is providing mood you have to look at it quite
hard before you discern anything else but the central figure
leaps out at you. (3,7)

Here the central figure leaps out *at* you, (rather than toward you for example), as was the case with the hand groped out 'at' us, lending a perhaps threatening tone to the experience. The manifestation of striking assumes a slightly different character as there are intimations that aspects of the picture may have desires towards you the viewer. Be this 'striking', something metaphorical or felt more literally, there is still the sense of a pushing, from the image towards Charles.

Now let's turn to Jean's description of *Ship and Red Sun.* She begins by explaining her choice of image:

Yeah so I think this [indicates the other picture] the colours of
this don't leap out and grab you… […] but this one definitely
you know, it's mostly black and red and those are real….
danger colours I suppose. (1,21)

Jean uses a comparison with the image on the opposite page of the book. She does so to emphasise the intensity of what she experiences as discharging from her chosen picture. The colours of the other image "*don't leap out and grab you … but this one definitely*".

Again the term 'leap out' is used, and again this is a specifically directed movement. The colours leap out and grab *you* rather than just forming a mindless eruption. There is a definite sense of movement *from* the image *towards* the viewer. In this case, it is not a figure or specifically depicted aspect, but the colours which leave the sanctity of the painting and rise out at the viewer.

This impregnation of the gap between painting and viewer is, as was for Charles, associated with a sense of unease. The viewer is grabbed, the specific colours involved are associated with danger. This form of engagement feels abrupt and perhaps involuntary. Is this the shock of being alerted or warned like the peel of an alarm bell or the discomfort at being suddenly grasped by something unsafe?

The hand groping out of *Expulsion* and the sense of danger leaping out of *Ship and Red Sun* are quite combative descriptions. Not every participant experienced the elements which came out of the painting in such a dynamic way. Marian, a working professional woman, selected *The Gross Clinic* because it intrigued her and because she (felt she) didn't have specific knowledge of what it depicted:

Obviously the more you look at it you see detail like this, the,
for me, the lead the lead er character, I don't know if you call
someone in a painting a character, the lead character's hand
suddenly bloodied with a very pronounced scalpel (2.29)

It's, it's his slightly blooded fingers with the scalpel just seem
very prominent (9, 29)

This extract is from Marian's account of viewing *The Gross Clinic*. It has a somewhat different feel to it. There is an impression of Marian coming upon or apprehending some matter protruding from the painting. Rather than the 'bursting out' at her seeming all-encompassing and characterising the image in a sort of total momentum, a single aspect perforates her looking. The hand is initially *suddenly* bloodied, as though this

might have just occurred in the image or this has just broken into her viewing. The object of the scalpel has a physical presence as if pointing out from the page.

Marian's description brings forth notions of running one's hand over a flat surface and suddenly meeting a sharp object, like a rogue nail in a plane of wood. The disturbance then makes what was before unnoticed a focal point. The scalpel very prominent and pronounced, there for her to find rather than finding her.

Katherine picked the image *Nymphéas* because she had a particular fondness for other paintings by the artist Monet. She had not though, seen this particular image before. Katherine's experience of elements coming out of the image takes quite a different form in her viewing of *Nymphéas*.

> *Yeah the… and the contact with nature I haven't had that a lot*
> *in my life so I think that's another thing that is important……*
> *yeah…. Don't see that many animals in it, I can just hear some*
> *birds but I don't see that many animals which is a good thing*
> *because I'm not a big fan of animals (14,3)*

She hears the sound of birds coming from the painting. Her description can be taken to mean I can *only* hear some birds or I can *only just* hear some birds as though the sound is quiet and distant. Either way, the effect is very different from the more determined presences experienced by the other three viewers.

The "groping out" of the artwork may take diverse natures depending on the painting, the viewer, and the combination thereof. They may be experienced as both gentle and beautiful, or alien and unnerving. These descriptions are very personal to both artwork and viewer. What is common is the sense of unfurling, emergence, protuberances, force. How this might be perceived, or indeed created by the viewer, may occur in an endless number of iterations.

Where the dislocated arm pushing out of *Expulsion*, or the Scalpel in *The Gross Clinic* seem capable of creating holes, in *Nymphéas*, the elements floating from the painting appear to fill them. Katherine talks about not having much contact with nature in her life and the sound of birds warbles out in response.

Attracting Attention

In the Groping Out theme, elements of the painting projected out from the artwork. Here, in the Attracting Attention theme, the locus of the activity experienced by the viewer appears to change. Talking about *The Gross Clinic* Marian says:

> *Er well I suppose I was attracted to this… this limb whatever it*
> *is, I still can't see what it is, I can't tell if it's a person or a bit*
> *of a person, it is very weird. Um there's amputation going on*
> *there as well by the looks of them yeah, (2,26)*

Marian is now attracted *to* 'this limb or whatever it is' the ambiguous body part being operated on in the picture. Unlike in the Groping Out theme, where the emphasis was on an element of the painting apprehending the viewer, now the emphasis is more concerned with the viewer and their own apprehending. Marian experiences *her* attention as being captured by something in the artwork.

In this extract, it appears engagement is uncoordinated and smattery. Not everything is fully perceived visually or intellectually. Still, Marian describes being attracted to elements of the painting though she cannot completely discern what they are. The attraction feels quite instinctive and intuitive but also slightly dislocated. Marian uses the term 'very weird' to describe this only partially disclosed object and her associated attraction to it.

There is a second element in *The Gross Clinic* which Marian describes as attracting her attention later in the viewing.

> *I spose the more I think about the the thing I'm most attracted*
> *by, is I kind of want to know who the tall chap is with the shiny*
> *forehead cos he seems to be the central point in this and*
> *actually but what but the stuff that's actually happening is not*
> *him that's the interesting thing he's very still here it's all*
> *happening round him um but he seems very much the thing of*
> *importance in the picture but I could be wrong…. (9,18)*

The attraction here is somewhere different; it is more inquisitive, whilst in the first instance it was more visceral. The central character stands out as a point of interest, a thing of importance in the picture. Marian describes the central character as tall with a 'shiny forehead' and we can follow her initial gaze to the focal point of light on his head and take in his height and centrality. We can then imagine his presence on the page and

in the scene before continuing to follow her description and allowing our gaze too, to flow outward and take in more of the image and notice the 'all that's happening around him', a blur of busy but unimportant activity. Whatever form the attention takes, the elements in the image which the viewer becomes attracted to are experienced as foci for it. The shiny forehead amidst a sea of activity attracting intellectual curiosity, the free-floating limb initiating a visceral pull.

Jean, a working professional who came to the interview in her lunch break, quickly opted to look at *Ship and Red Sun* because of its bright colours and contrasts. Here a wider compositional sense of the artwork, compared to that identified by the previous viewers, attracts her attention,

> *Well definitely the colours but also as I say the erm*
> *composition with this big red circle [laughs] and so that that*
> *attracted my attention then when I looked at it it looked very*
> *unusual because it has this the the circle and the the sort of*
> *fainter circle that's round it are very erm un-mathematical but*
> *then down here there is this incredibly precise mathematical*
> *almost diagram also in red that is a real contrast with the*
> *hazy, and um free form kind of shapes. (2,7)*

Whereas Marian was attracted to a partial limb and tried to discern its context, Jean describes the large red circle in the Kandinsky image as acting similarly for her. She is more successful in perceiving aspects of the surroundings and why they contribute to her interest.

Initially, there is an attraction to shape and colour, the 'big red circle', 'then when I looked at it' she notices is the gestalt of the composition. Jean describes her attention being attracted to the contrast between a hazy, free organic element of the artwork, and a mathematical precise part of the painting.

What is interesting in this passage is that 'attention' can be conceptualised in different ways. Jean says the colour attracted her attention. This 'attention' feels like catching something from the corner of one's eye, instinctive, a reflex. She then explains 'when I looked at it' and continues to describe the way in which the composition was unusual. This second attention feels more controlled, directed and cognisant.

Just as elements which extend from the painting may be experienced more abstractly or physically, so, many attention attracting elements take different forms. As already

discussed, there may also be different ways of experiencing attending itself. For example, the instinctive sort of attention initially described here is different to that described later in the same passage and to that described by Marian in *The Gross Clinic* expressing the more slowly generated intellectual curiosity related to the shiny headed central character.

Like Jean, Katherine's attentional engagement is more of a gestalt nature, rather than being related to any specific detail or details.

> *When you like, speak from a point of view of like er you know*
> *people who grew up in the 21st century, we've seen so many*
> *um photographs, you kind of become numb in a way, you don't*
> *take them seriously, so I think that paintings like this…. They*
> *they really capture attention because you still know what it is*
> *but it's kind of shown in a different way. (8,38)*

Here Katherine discusses the impressionistic rather than realistic style of the painting *Nymphéas* and how this attracts her attention. It is a holistic impression of the painting which captures her focus. Contrasting aspects are described again. Unlike Jean who related the precise and the organic, in this case, the comparisons are not within the painting itself, but between the painting and other paintings and other images. Photographs, the most realistic representations of real-life, become numbing and trivial. This abstract painting becomes arresting because it depicts reality in an alternate fashion. "*You still know what it is but it's kind of shown in a different way*".

The first two themes describe aspects which may protrude from the image, apprehending the viewer and the viewer apprehending the image, their attention orienting towards some aspects of it. These apprehensions, like the nomenclature, can be understood in the sense of simply to notice, to notice it, but also to grab, to grasp it; they can be both passive and active or also mean a nervous anticipation.

Drawing in

The Theme 'Drawing in' describes instances where viewers feel beguiled, harnessed or pulled in by the paintings. In the previous theme, it was the viewer's attention which moved, a feeler originating from them and reaching towards the image. Here the origin of momentum is the image. A force residing in the painting draws the viewer towards it. Whilst to attend to something suggests some volition or at least awareness, something can pull you towards it even when you have not willed it or your back is turned. Unlike

the first theme where aspects reached out of the painting, now some force works to pull in (like a black hole).

These differently directional and located energies may be experienced by the viewers in relation to the same pictorial elements depicted. The themes here are not diversified by what the viewers are looking at, so much as how they experience the looking. A colour or expression may feel striking at first, later looking at it may feel very different. As Jean describes:

> *I think definitely what draws you in is this this contrast*
> *between the darkness and the the very vivid orangey-red*
> *colour um… and again I s'pose you know, when I said the*
> *word danger… black and red are the colours of danger erm*
> *and, and so that's maybe why I think it's ominous… (3,6)*

Here it is the elements which initially leapt out at Jean and then subsequently captured her attention that now go on to draw her in. The contrasts, the colours, the dangerous feel. Somehow separable elements experienced in the first two themes have become entwined in her perception. They mesh or net now as time passes "*and so that's maybe why I think it's ominous*" becoming something more specific and tangible, a developed idea of ominousness drawing her into the painting. Marian similarly explains:

> *I'm drawn to it being cut but I'm particularly taken by this*
> *guy's hand just how blo… I spose just how bloody and brutal*
> *that looks, it's not, it's a hand with a scalpel with bloody*
> *fingers but it just seems very brutal in the context (11,10)*

The scalpel was an element of the painting which originally stood out to Marian (*very prominent*) and the 'guy' one who captured her attention. Now these elements re-surface, entwined to guide her into the painting. The act of cutting draws her to the image and, in a more literal leading *"I'm particularly taken by this guy's hand"*. Marian describes being 'taken' by the central character's hand into the painting, the accidental double meaning reminiscent of some macabre marriage, a walk down the aisle into the world of the image, its blood and brutality.

Henry, a mature man educated far beyond degree level and with many interests, picked *Viewing the Cherry Blossom at Asukayama* because of his particular fascination with Japanese culture, he described an experience of the artist guiding his focus through the position of a figure depicted:

So he's heading out of shot, um he's not part of this, erm he's
not with them in a in a sort of communal sense um whether
he's whether his attention is being caught by something but
that's irrelevant what's the artist is trying to do there? it's like
again in western art sometimes when a hand or something
goes across a frame or outside it almost to remind you that this
is a picture um or draw us to an interesting thing and what's
the artist doing there I don't know what the artists doing there!
I do not know! (10,23)

Reading this extract, particularly if one does so aloud, we can almost re-experience Henry being pulled into the image. The cadence of his speech increases and becomes more rhythmic like a train gathering steam. He moves in his looking animatedly from one part of the image to another, one element to the next. He becomes excited at the prospect of what there might be to discover in the image *'I don't know what the artists doing there! I don't know!'*.

There is an additional element alluded to in Henry's account. A sense of reward. Henry describes being drawn in towards; an 'interesting thing'. So, as he is drawn into the painting, both by gaze and by curiosity there is this experience of being potentially rewarded with something pleasing to ponder and explore, as though a whole new world has been opened before him.

Indeed, the rewarding element of being drawn in is present in Jean's account of *Ship and Red Sun*:

And then there's something about the the contrasts that make it
quite pleasant and because it's like I said, it's got these danger
colours, it's, it's not as if you're having to work really hard at
trying to work up an interest in it, it, it, it draws you in and
then gives you a little rewarding task to complete in terms of
looking at this spindly thing. (10,30)

Jean also describes the sense of a reward present upon being drawn into the painting. Here though there is less suggestion of excitement. Rather than implying an opening of ideas there is more of a carrot on a stick feel reminiscent of Pinocchio being lured to the land of toys (by the promise of never having to go to school again). There is quite a distinct change in the way Jean talks about the elements of the painting now, in

comparison to how she perceived them in the earlier subthemes. The 'mathematical object' has become a 'spindly thing', stripping it of its strength and weakening it. The contrasts are now merely 'quite pleasant'. You don't have to work hard to work up an interest and you get a 'little' rewarding task to complete. It is as though upon finding she has been some way tricked Jean has turned the process of being drawn into the painting into something childish or insignificant. The need for Jean to undermine the potency of the artwork highlights the powerful nature of the experience of being drawn in. It is one she now feels she needs to return to and subvert, so unsettled is she by the injustice she feels has been done to her.

> *I felt a little bit um, of a sucker […]Yeah so I I kind of feel I got*
> *sucked in by this one… because it did look very striking and*
> *different but I'm not convinced that um that it's the most*
> *interesting painting in the book….(13,34)*

Getting drawn into the painting for Jean is quite a different experience than for the other viewers. There is a strong sense of being conned or tricked or that getting drawn in is a negative thing. The reward isn't really adequate; she's not convinced that um that it's the most interesting painting in the book….

However for others, the reward can be more fulfilling, a macabre wedding in *The Gross Clinic*, an exciting prospective archaeological dig into the history of an alien culture in *Viewing the Cherry Blossom at Asukayama*. These experiences appear far more substantive than Jean's encounter with the colourful but ultimately empty sweet wrappers here in *Ship and Red Sun*. The commonality is that once again the energy which was originally released from the painting is now experienced as pulling the viewer back into the image. How this drawing in is experienced may occur differently depending on the nature of the image and of the viewer, just as was the case in the Groping Out and Attracting Attention parts to the Master Theme.

The relationship between themes

The themes are not intended to characterise static or isolated occurrences, rather, a separate description is given to aspects which may occur synchronously or asynchronously, being differentiated by type, not time. To provide a description of those moments where elements appear to stand 'out' of the image and those moments when attention is 'attracted to' them, and when viewers experience a 'drawing in' to the image, it is necessary to slightly artificially unbind, what is fluid.

Henry's description here, of his encounter with *Viewing the Cherry Blossom at Asukayama,* captures the moments described by the three themes flowing together.

> *These ones stand out much more um my attention was also*
> *caught by this guy hey here we are again, all over on the right*
> *here you know which in a sense is perhaps a lead into the*
> *picture um… perhaps yeah it's a speculation that almost that*
> *the hand would draw your eye in along the arm, yeah… and*
> *and lead you in to the picture and here possibly is the servant*
> *figure who leads you up to a main thing so again perhaps…*
> *and that again to me is fascinating because I don't know and*
> *it's alien… (13,37)*

The extract begins with elements once again standing *out* from the image consistent with the Groping Out theme. Then Henry describes his attention being 'caught by this guy hey here we are *again*'. We can feel his gaze moving over the picture and then catching on the hook-like presence of the male figure whom he feels sticks out of the image. There is something niggling and insistent about this character, 'here we are again', creating the feeling of an elastic band pulling you back into position.

The attention here has on one level quite a basic visual feel to it, the perceptual attracting of attention happening more instantaneously. Additionally, there is an intellectual attraction occurring more slowly. And again the attractors of attention in the image are qualitatively different, there is a figure within the painting 'this guy' and also an idea, of an alien culture Henry doesn't understand which creatures wonder and intrigue.

Henry also indicates a fascination that is generated, like the curiosity Marian described feeling. The figure is guiding him *in* to '*a main thing'* he doesn't understand because of the cultural context of the painting, a piece of Japanese art. This resonates with the idea of being drawn in described in the third theme. He is drawn in by the enigma of a potentially unknown alien story.

We can see in this segment how the experiences described by each theme might interact or overlay to form a continuous whole. Interaction between viewing and image is dynamic; elements happen continuously, back and forthing and building on top one another to pave the way for the more creative work we will explore in the next theme Deeper Exploration.

Master Theme Two: Deeper Exploration

The Second Master Theme, Deeper Exploration, describes the way viewers undertake more extensive, self-directed activities exploring the artworks more imaginatively and intellectually. The theme is made up of two subthemes, 'Emerging Prominences' and 'Awareness of Tensions and Contradictions'. Each describes an activity a viewer might undertake during this exploration.

Emerging Prominences

As the viewer becomes more involved with the painting and takes more time to look at and explore it, the landscape of the image changes and evolves. The viewer becomes immersed in the material of the painting and forges matter from it. The experience of this may involve noticing small details or creating narratives involving larger structures encountered within the image. The surface of the image becomes malleable, an earth which may be walked upon or inside, a creative epoxy out of which imagined wonders may be pulled or moulded.

> *I don't know whether… the, the title is Expulsion, I don't know*
> *whether this is Eve leaving the garden of Eden or what (1,25)*

An idea which Charles experimented with during his viewing of *Expulsion*, was that the figure in the picture might be Eve being driven out from the Garden of Eden as per the Biblical story.

> *Erm she's bowed down as if as if either extremely tired or as*
> *moving forward very fast or erm ere r I think actually erm*
> *under attack ducking…. It is unclear what she is running away*
> *from it could be anything volcano to a forest fire to er to*
> *indeed er the, the wrath of God (2,16)*

Here Charles' interpretations appear quite exploratory. Initially, he suggests several interpretations of the figure's position. The first two are very different, bowed down as if extremely tired or moving forward very fast, but there is nothing to suggest Charles finds anything confusing or problematic in visualising these two conflicting analyses, he appears to be comfortable in experimenting with the narrative he is creating

Whereas initially, instincts and intuitions had been reacted to rapidly, now more self-directed moments may be taken, to attend to, or make meaningful, interesting or arresting elements. In the first Theme, Charles had noticed the figure's posture. He now

connects this prominent element of the image to his conceptualisation of the figure as Eve.

Exploration appears to be an unpressurised activity for Charles at this point. He accepts the ambiguous nature of the information the image gives him '*It is unclear what she is running away from'* and is content and confident to construct the rest of the narrative himself. We can see this experimental style of exploration leading Charles through multiple interpretations of the scene before again returning to the Eve allegory. He ponders what she might be running away from making several suggestions before finally arriving at the wrath of God.

> *I mean all the the the the the hair is very carefully done both the*
> *the the pubic hair and the er hair on her head but the hair on*
> *her head is again flecked with the red which could easily be*
> *plant erm a sort of a hint of the crown of thorns or that that's*
> *very tousled er the figure is posed when looking down we don't*
> *see a face at all um so again that's is is unusual in in any kind*
> *of composition so that you might not see a face at all a face is*
> *essentially deliberately buried . (4,2)*

There is a very tactile dimension to Charles's description of 'Eve'. We feel we can touch her tousled hair and get an impression of it being littered with debris. Her face is 'buried' adding depth to the image evoked; with prominences come troughs, the picture becomes a three-dimensional scene. The 'hint of the crown of thorns' is interesting because not only does it suggest spikiness and penetrance, but Eve did not herself wear such a headpiece. The Crown of thorns is associated with Christ and the Birth of Christianity and as we don't *see a face at all* Charles has peppered his interpretation with many different connotations.

We can see that a controlled, self-directed exploration of the image, has allowed Charles to create the Eve character out of certain details only briefly noticed earlier in his viewing. Primarily the figure's posture, drawing her up from the floor of the image like a golem from clay and making what was once flat both physically and fictitiously multidimensional.

Henry also hones in on a female figure in *Viewing the Cherry Blossom at Asukayama*, however, it is not her character but her fashion and clothing which he becomes enthralled with.

> *Ahhh her dress is just….. a masterpiece of of erm of*
>
> *dressmaking and design and her care in selecting because*
>
> *there's huge emphasis laid on selecting the fabrics and the*
>
> *layers of fabrics and which layers you put on top of each*
>
> *layers and which patterns you put on top of which patterns and*
>
> *on top of other patterns and so on, modern western fashion has*
>
> *nothing… you know we think we're into fashion but… peanuts*
>
> *by comparison to what these people were up to. (16,35)*

In Henry's vision of the female figure's dress in the painting, the image is far from flat. Instead, layer upon layer of fabric is created in his imagination. Looking at the picture itself, such a dress is quite hard to discern, so the degree of Henry's creative work is not to be underestimated. Indeed, we can hear his excitement and appreciation "*ahh*" as he folds and positions the image, building a new work of art out of its depths.

Henry is not just seeing the dress itself, with its multiplicity of layers and numerous types and patterns of fabric. He is also seeing the process which went into choosing the pieces of material and the layers and layers of time spent creating this wonderful garment. The dress he has created or pulled out of the fabric of the image initially feels like a museum piece beautifully and carefully displayed to show its full elegance and style. It then becomes something more dynamic, a woman or dressmaker carefully and almost magically creating this work of art. We feel Henry's marvel of 'The Dress' and the Japanese sense of aesthetics, he describes it as something not really comparable to Western fashion. This adds to the sense of awe and almost unreality in his description.

> *The the type of fabric whether it was sort of gauze or whether*
>
> *it was opaque or translucent and so on erm which one you put*
>
> *on top of which one so the pattern beneath shone through and*
>
> *there is all sorts of language and ways of describing this and*
>
> *then the choice of colours and which colours went with others*
>
> *and of course patterns… ah… there's a language of sensibility*
>
> *there which is just infinite (18,17)*

There is something dreamlike to Henry's realisation of The Dress. Here types of fabrics are specifically imagined, patterns of those underneath shining through those on top almost ethereally. The combining of these fabrics and the choice of colours has a language of 'infinite sensibility' which again has a quite magical tone. There is certainly very special regard paid to this as he speaks with 'ah's and pauses for breath.

Both Charles and Henry infuse particular elements that they encounter in the images with their own existing knowledge and ideas. The two accounts do have different emphases though. Whilst Charles's exploration of the Eve allegory appears to be more image-led ("*It is unclear what she is running away from it could be anything*") Henry had discussed his pre-existing passion for Japanese art and culture and here, in particular, we get the impression of a person bringing a long-standing dream to life "*ahhh her dress is just..... a masterpiece*" and thus being more viewer -imagination led.

In spite of this difference, with its description of a breathtakingly magical colourful beautiful garment, Henry's extract does carry with it an allusion to Joseph's technicolour dream coat, so perhaps there is a commonality in a subtle unintended religiosity? The clearer commonality is that both Charles and Henry, as they explore the images, find a palpable element emerging from the artwork, Eve as a character rising from the ashes in her *Expulsion*, the Dress with its layers, the light shining through. Neither remains flat or lifeless on the page.

Much of Jean's initial engagement with *Ship and Red Sun* related to contrasts in the image between two elements, the ship and the planet-like objects. Here, however, an alternative interpretation, one of rupture, is allowed to emerge.

> *No no I think it definitely you know I think different things as I*
> *look at it so that idea of this not being a sun with a glow but*
> *actually part of a solid… this whole thing being like a solid*
> *planet that's crust has… has broken here so it's sort of… the*
> *volcanic stuff is oozing out, that's something I didn't see*
> *initially when I first looked at it um… (4,19)*

As Jean looks at the image, the whole piece becomes the crust of a planet with a split oozing lava or 'volcanic stuff'. The sun object now changes from a whole planet to a hole in a planet, in a complete inversion of depth and space. In this interpretation, the oozing suggests slowness, giving the image a temporal dimension, whilst the 'crust' again has a tactile sense similar to that of Charles's description of Eve's thorny crown *Expulsion*, as though it might bumpy or jagged. There is 'stuff' is oozing 'out' of the planet giving again a sensation of surface features, that the planet is full underneath the skin we see and that the lava is pushing out of the broken crust to move upon the image's surface.

The conception of layers or layering echoes Henry's description of the fabric of the dress, whilst again the surface of the image becomes not flat but scabrous and rough, a fiery landscape of elements being expelled which resonates with Charles' ideas about *Expulsion*.

An element which emerges as prominent for Marian as she looks at *The Gross Clinic* is, like Charles, the posture of one of the figures in the painting.

> *That seems to be a slight erm you know when you're disgusted*
> *and you do that [motions] or er I do that at horror films erm*
> *that's what that looks like, but it could be that's me*
> *interpreting it, it could be anything, he could be wiping his*
> *nose erm as I say he could have something in his eye erm*
> *maybe it smells maybe he doesn't like the look of it not sure….*
> *(3,21)*

In this case, it is not the central figure, though she does pay attention to him at other points in her viewing. The figure she examines here is one making a gesture that seems odd to her and which arouses her curiosity. Now, drawn into the image, she is committed to trying to understand his action.

Marian physically replicates the character's gesture describing instances when she herself would make the same kind of motion. She uses this as a basis to imagine the character's possible frame of mind and to perhaps offer some kind of empathetic insight into his emotions.

It is worth noting here that Marian is engaging in a form of emotional interaction with the image which one might expect to be discussed in the Emotional Resonances Theme. Overlap between themes, especially those in the interpretative section, is inevitable; however, for explanatory purposes, the emphasis placed by the viewer on the content of the experience is taken as a guide. Here Marian predominantly discusses her sense of exploration and interpretation rather than her emotional interaction.

In exploring possible interpretations of the character's behaviour, Marian's suggestions are at a level of complexity beyond that which could have occurred in the first theme Drawing In. Marian imagines possible smells occurring within the scene, she pictures the look of the operation not as she sees it as the viewer but from this somewhat minor character's perspective. She conceptualises his possible state of mind that he may be disgusted - and suggests the possible physical sensation he might be experiencing - of

having something in his eye or needing to wipe his nose. There is something quite experimental about her activity here, as though she is trying out different interpretations to see which best fit.

We get the sense, of her inhabiting the landscape of the image thinking about the physicality of the character, imagining looking through his eyes, and the way his body might feel. Being in the painting. Again, Marian's explorative activity creates, from details in the painting something with physical and fictional depth and space, a place one can move around in with a freedom way beyond that granted by a flat surface.

In a similar sense, Katherine is eager to climb into *Nymphéas* and have the image be a place she can escape to.

> *These colours are lovely! In this painting its er it's it's like it's*
> *you know that this, I think this is like spring or like summer*
> *you know, its er I love being there, it's too hot I think it's…*
> *the weather is lovely, you don't get tired you just enjoy it*
> *(4,12)*

In this initial extract, Katherine's description of her 'Place' is quite confused, evident of it being in its inceptive stage. She begins by talking about a surface feature of the image, the colouration, but then moves to describe being 'in this painting' as though becoming more deeply immersed. It is as if the place, and an imaginative experience of it, is being created as she speaks, her attention divided between experiencing and creating. *I think this is like spring or summer* (creating) *I love being there* (experiencing) the back and forth-ing possibly causing the slip of the tongue (it's too hot). There is an odd temporal dislocation in the extract caused by the evolving nature of the imaginary place she is describing.

> *I can see like the weather is nice, I'm actually in this place*
> *now it's amazing! The weather is nice but it's not hot, I can*
> *wear like what I'm wearing now and to me I know that it could*
> *be afternoon but to me its early morning, we're talking about*
> *6, 7 o'clock in the morning, so um and the sun, the suns been*
> *up since like 5 or something but erm and I'm just there walking*
> *and I come upon the painter… (14,9)*

Later the concept of her 'place' becomes more precise in its details. It has a specific place in time and has a permanence- she imagines what has been going on previously;

the sun has been up for a certain period of time. She imagines being there in a practical sense in terms of what she might be wearing. Also present is quite advanced thinking about her place being a co-creation, beyond what is depicted in the image. She acknowledges the place she is describing is personalised '*and to me I know that it could be afternoon but to me it's early morning'* and a product of an assimilation between her imagination and the contents of the image.

Katherine explicitly describes a sensation of being in this special place and there is a sense of construction and creation as she uses elements of the image, the colours and scene depicted to realise an environment that she can walk within. It feels quite surprising, certainly to someone reading the extract, and possibly to Katherine as well, that whilst she is just there walking she *suddenly come[s] upon the painter*. Monet himself has apparently been formed from the dermis of the painting whilst Katherine walks upon it. Again the image has taken on a three-dimensional feel and the viewer, through a process of creative imagination, may explore the within, as well as the surface.

In the extracts from Jean, Marian, Charles, Henry and Katherine, it appears that, while exploring their paintings, the viewers began to experience a sensation of depth and dimensionality from the images. Elements, be they large and grand or small and detailed, emerged from the pages surface or created deepness down into it, covering it with tactile over and underlays.

As viewers engage more deeply with the paintings, splits, troughs and incisions appear, the image becomes a topographical landscape which may be walked upon. Exploration occurs *within* the image and elements are drawn *out* of it.

Awareness of tensions and contradictions

Viewers also apprehend elements within their chosen paintings which they experienced as antipodal or contrary. In some cases, this is an attractive or enjoyable part of the exploratory process, in others, it can be unsettling. Contrariness, tension and contradiction are experienced in different forms in the images, and these forms can be fluid and found multiply within and between images. Let's start with Henry talking about *Viewing the Cherry Blossom at Asukayama:*

> *It's a bit like to me western medieval art which is another*
> *favourite sort of area um the figure is the, the thing you're*
> *meant to focus on and then you see you could kind of take it*
> *out you could cut it out and look at it on its own so its er it's*
> *both a figure in a landscape technically but actually it's a*
> *figure laid on to a background landscape (3,13)*

Here Henry describes the sensation of seeing a figure as simultaneously part, and not part, of the image. It is both a figure in a landscape and laid on top of a landscape, a part and yet apart. This is a positive thing for Henry - he likens it to western medieval art *'another favourite sort of area'*. One gets the impression that although Henry is talking about something quite technical, his experience is not without an affective component. He uses the word *laid* onto a background which is associated not only with collage which would be entirely appropriate but also implies a gentleness and care. He speaks of focusing on the figure, taking it out and looking at it, like a precious doll that one might take time over and cherish. In this case, the contradiction, of the figure being simultaneously part and not part of the image, contributes to the painting's appeal.

Marian also describes an element in *The Gross Clinic*, as importing this part and yet apart characteristic:

> *But this guy seems very confident, um very detached which I*
> *know I said at the start but he's detached because he's both a*
> *part of what's happening and not a part, he's a part of it*
> *because he's clearly been involved in this process because of*
> *his hand and the blood and scalpel and yet somehow he's*
> *detached and looking away from it but equally doesn't appear*
> *to be addressing anyone, he's just stood there a bit statue-like*
> *which again makes me think he must be the, if I was guessing*
> *he would have to be the focus of the painting and then then it*
> *becomes almost portraiture rather than a snapshot of*
> *something in progress… that's how I would… guess… (12,39)*

In this extract, Marian discusses the central character and his detachment from the scene occurring around him "*he's both a part of what's happening and not a part*". Initially, her observations could be said to be quite different from Henry's. Whereas Henry described a figure being technically detachable from the background of the painting,

Marian is describing a character's detachment from a process taking place around him. His detachment is occurring within a narrative she has created with regard to the image. However, as she continues some commonalities begin to emerge.

As Marian reflects on the nature of the central characters detached pose, she arrives at an image of him "*a bit statue-like*" and then "*almost portraiture*". Her interpretation has developed into one of a statue, an object one could very much take out of the image and hold, and a portrait, a still, in the middle of a painting showing an active process. In this sense there are two 'part and not parts' being described by Marian here. One which exists within the narrative she has constructed regarding the image, and one more physical and visually based which bears more similarity to Henry's description.

A further commonality, between Charles' and Marian's descriptions, is that they revolve around a focal point, a main figure or germinate element. An element of the image which, in some way, gives a dualistic or antipodal feeling to the viewer. The experience of discovering these germinate elements need not necessarily be the same. For Henry it is positive and something which adds to his appreciation of the artwork, in Marian's case there is more a feel of detective work and curiosity surrounding her description.

Jean's experience is different once again:

> *You know when you see a ship you know… you immediately*
> *think of the sea and horizons and the ship you know… A ship*
> *unless it's… unless there's something wrong, is a certain way*
> *up relative to the horizon and that all makes me look at this as,*
> *as something that's um putting the ground here or the earth*
> *below and the 'something' above but actually when you look at*
> *it um, that just does come from the from the assumption that*
> *this is a ship… because actually there is no horizon line*
> *there's just this ball of redness and the ship thing is just*
> *floating in empty space… (3,39)*

Jean begins by drawing our attention to the Ship element she sees depicted in *Ship and Red Sun*. There is something quite ominous in her narration, one is taken from seeing a ship on the sea with a horizon full of promise, to empty space and a void, nothingness. There is a feeling of almost dismissal, as the identity of the ship is made ambiguous and rendered an *assumption.* And the recognition that this threatens to pull apart other

aspects of the image which were associated with your ideas about reality "*when you see a ship you know… you immediately think of the sea and horizons*".

Noticing tensions and contradiction can sometimes be unsettling then as well as enjoyable and exciting. Sometimes viewers appear more content to hold these in their interpretations, whilst others for they become untenable as Jean goes on to remark "*because actually there is no horizon line*".

Jean's description differs from Henry's and Marian's in a second way. The emphasis of the tension and dislocation is inversely located. Marian and Henry have discussed an element of the painting relative to the background be it narrative or physical. For Jean, it is the background which is wrong. Whereas the ship should indicate the "*earth below and the 'something' above*" actually what she sees is quite different. Jean is describing a contradiction which seems to originate within the artwork as a whole, in its fibre, rather than just an element one might cut out or detach like an unusual character.

A similarly diffuse form of tension emerged from the participants' deeper exploration of the artworks. It differed again, in that it was rooted not in the painting per se but in the social ideas it evoked in the viewer – Marian:

> *So this I spose seems to me slightly old fashioned and alien and dark but also relatively modern, there's something scientific going on here um so that in and of itself would attract me (2,15)*

> *It's gonna sound weird but it just looks modern to me because I can't detach the subject so to me it looks like 19th century scientific progress and it would have been part of the reason I originally turned to it […] there must be a whole series of paintings like this by different artists um over I don't know a 50 60 70 year period kind of portraying modern events so even though I think its 19th century it still feels very modern to me, it's a very modern subject matter […]maybe I wanna be a bit Victorian I don't know but it's a period I think's really interesting…. (17,8)*

The contrast Marian brings to light in these extracts is not about a narrative imagined within the image, it is not about the style of artistic expression or idiom, nor does it involve any central figure or focal point. Although it is linked to the subject matter of

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the painting, this is not the predominant feature of the tension aroused. Rather, it is a subjective anachronism concerning the social ideas and ideals Marian feels the image represents.

Marian describes finding *The Gross Clinic* modern as well as "*slightly old fashioned and alien and dark* and *19th century*". She clearly feels this isn't a typical or obvious reaction to the image as she prefaces the statement with "*It's gonna sound weird but*". Marian explains the route of her interpretation of modernity, in her sense that the artwork not only portrays some kind of operation or demonstration of amputation but that it also represents scientific progress.

The associations between medical advance, scientific progress and modernity are subjective and based in Marian's social and cultural values and beliefs. For example, modernity to another viewer might be associated with making less use of and restricting the advancement of, scientific knowledge. It might instead be reflected by an image based in a holistic, homoeopathic setting. In Marian's case, scientific progress is a positive thing and "*would have been part of the reason [she] originally turned to [the painting]*".

Marian says "*maybe I wanna be a bit Victorian*" and we get a sense of her appreciation of the achievements of the era. In the contradiction, between the artwork from the 19th century and the feeling of modernity it elicits in her, Marian finds something she can positively relate to, the value and importance of scientific progress common to both. It is as though she has resolved the tension she experiences when viewing her image by relating both aspects to a social value which is inspirational to her.

There seems to be some inevitable contraposition adopted when one views a painting. Paintings encourage us not only to see what is there but also, more fundamentally, to see what is not there. We are directed to attend to a canvas, designed with a view to being looked at, and yet we are intended to see people there, their stories, their individuality (as Henry and Marian do when they negotiate the seeing of figures who are also characters and may, in addition, be representative of real men and women).

We are intended to see things made out of what they are not, meanings which aren't the properties of paint or brush strokes (and yet they are). Jean sees the loss of an orienting horizon, Marian sees social standards, sees the painting being painted within itself, Henry sees the temporal and historic and also the universal. None of these things 'are'

there in front of them, in the image, in the paint. This essential struggle is perhaps best explicated by Charles as he speaks again about his encounter with *Expulsion:*

> *Er there are the the the little bits that fade off into er into er re*
> *re a sort of dreamscape ah so so so it's not its er it's a still*
> *impressionistic rather than realistic alright we've got these*
> *realistic elements in it er and it and it and it and it plainly*
> *although its represents something that we it is representation*
> *it's not abstract er it represents a situation which, in which we*
> *could imagine ourselves it doesn't er present a situation that is*
> *something we would see it if it were happening in this physical*
> *world ....(13,6)*

In this extract, Charles discusses finding the painting to contain both a sense of realism and of impressionism. Whilst not innately a contradiction, for Charles, as he experiences *Expulsion*, there is an apparent irritant or contravention reflected in their co-existence. Charles describes the image as representing something that we could "*imagine ourselves*" but that we would not "*see it if it were happening in this physical world*". There is an interesting infraction notable in his description. What is *really* depicted", (or put on canvas by the realist part of the painting in this case) is that same material that we might experience in our *imagination*. And what is represented by the impressionistic style, what is implied in abstraction but not actually on the canvas, is anything we would "*actually see*" in the real physical world.

> In this way, as well as experiencing this duality between realism and
> impressionism, Charles is also drawing a duality between imaginary and
> intuited, and 'real' or physically perceived realities. The demand to see what is
> *not* there, and see what *is* there as what it is not. As Katherine suggests:

> *It's not that what, what you see… it's not just the first layer …*
> *What you see it's where it takes you… (21,29)*

Tensions and contradictions were realised or understood by the viewers in different ways. They were located in different aspects of viewing and the viewers' experiences of their existence varied. Some viewers appeared content to observe or explore contrasts as part of the painting, for others they were to be resolved - successfully or unsuccessfully.

There were both commonalities in the exploratory activities which the viewers undertook but also areas of divergence. These differences were driven both by the

differences in the artworks viewed and also by the viewers themselves. Not only did the paintings come to, or actively become, brought to life by the viewers, they also became bases for narratives, interpretations and visualisations. These meanings were not unified. The way viewers responded to conflicting, incongruous or complex aspects was itself diverse. More consistent, however, was a sense of lapsing actualities. A sort of intuited ontic tautology whereby experiencing some aspect of the painting as real also undermined that same reality.

Master Theme Three: Vulnerability and intimacy: the emotional resonances of viewing

The previous theme 'Deeper Exploration', was about exploring the landscape of the image in an extended, narrative and conceptual sense. Affective components were present during these activities, however, the focus of the experiences described was towards construction and co-construction, enquiry and discovery.

This theme 'Vulnerability and intimacy: the emotionality of viewing', concerns the affective aspects that viewers identified during their looking. Emotional experiences emerged in two forms during the analysis. There were those which emphasised emotional elements within the painting, and those related to self-reflection. In both cases, the viewer feels, responds to and engages with emotions. What differentiates the themes however are the emphasis of their positioning and the directed location of the emotional action occurring. Are vulnerabilities and intimacies more strongly associated with something in the image, or do they represent something the image makes the viewer feel about themselves? Is something emotional encountered in the painting or does something act upon the viewer?

Within painting encounters

Jean's interpretation of *Ship and Red Sun* had affective aspects running through it.

> *It makes me think of a of a strange sort of ship with a very um*
> *ominous sky dominated by a red sun and the red suns hazy*
> *glow against this black background um and the ship is very*
> *much dwarfed by this big red sun… (2,28)*

Here she describes an emotionally laden scene. The ship is described as strange and dwarfed. The words, especially the latter with its double meaning, give a sense of something unfavourable or unattractive, perhaps disfigured. The sky 'ominous', further

contributes to this adding a foreboding tone. The red sun dominates the sky evoking notions of force and power. Its glow, however, is hazy, disinterested maybe, in the insignificant ship creature below.

The emotional substance Jean injects into the image allows anyone reading her extract to appreciate its evocative nature. She explains:

> *And yeah, yeah I think it does, the ship looks vulnerable but*
> *also I guess it looks vulnerable partly because, like I said,*
> *normally where you see a ship you expect to see a horizon*
> *and there isn't one here so the ship is kind of, you know the*
> *suns by its nature suspended in space but ships are by their*
> *nature…are suspended on water whereas this one seems to*
> *be out of its natural environment which may be what makes it*
> *look even more vulnerable. It's just floating in space*
> *alongside the sun (9,9)*

Jean here is more descriptive regarding her interpretation of emotion in the image. The ship, she says, looks vulnerable. This is possibly due to it being removed from its intended surroundings. The affective aspect here isn't just that which is attributed to the depicted ship, Jean also explains "*It's just floating in space alongside the sun*" again creating an emotionally imbued narrative. Whereas originally the ship itself was 'strange', here its vulnerability is exacerbated by the surroundings. Clearly out of place, not only is there a sense of dislocation and disconnection, Jean creates a feeling of emptiness amplified by this 'sun'. It is the only spatial tether, ambiguous, impenetrable, unknowable in its intentions.

The motif of feeling for a vulnerable figure, isolated in a hostile environment, continues in Marian's experience of *The Gross Clinic*.

> *Well I think I spoke about them being quite detached and*
> *quite cold and I don't know I spose if you if this person is*
> *alive and being operated on and you're in the middle of this*
> *auditorium surrounded by chaps erm with er slightly lethal*
> *instruments on them just cutting into your flesh that must be*
> *quite a vulnerable thing to feel (10,10)*

Marian's recognition of vulnerability in *The Gross Clinic* contains a description of a human body denuded and exhibited. The body is felt to be vulnerable and exposed in

several ways. Reminiscent of Jean's account of the lonely ship floating in space, the figure here is in the middle of an auditorium surrounded by men Marian has described as cold and detached. The atmosphere is similarly one of alienation and isolation. The 'chaps' are without individuality but come as a faceless crowd of others. The figure is positioned at the centre of an intimidating and overwhelming space 'surrounded'. Marian also expresses a sense of a more raw, bodily threat.

That Marian feels both for and with the figure in this image is quite remarkable. The body depicted is reduced to its most basic physicality, the biological elements which feel pain and seek to avoid damage. They have no gender, name or personal history. Marian however, slips into their position as she imagines *"you're in the middle of this auditorium"* and them *"cutting into your flesh"*, rather than *they're* in the middle, cutting into *their/his/her* flesh. The vulnerably is felt not just for the figure in the painting but for Marian and all of us. Being at the mercy of anonymous men who 'just' cut into your flesh as though lacking the necessary gravitas whilst lying at the centre of an auditorium exposed and alone is clearly impactful.

Vulnerability appears again for Charles in *Expulsion:*

> *Er it's a sort of nude exposed figure in an a hostile*
> *environment er that's a er sort of er universal sense of our*
> *our our bodies in the world I suppose perhaps I'm too high*
> *flown about it um… (3,28)*

Charles at first describes a very raw basic empathetic connection to the figure in *Expulsion*. One to which we might all relate as human beings; a recognition of being embodied. The figure is nude and again exposed, the connection is penetrating. Charles relates to this as a fellow human being who likewise experiences being enfleshed and corporeal. Although Charles is male and the character represented in the image is female, at this point she is simply a 'figure'; gender is irrelevant, eclipsed by their shared humanity. Charles describes a sense of 'our bodies', again reminding us of a mutual appreciation of unprotected physicality that Marian similarly alluded to.

The sense of vulnerability in Charles's description presents itself in different ways. The figure is exposed not just to the elements in a hostile environment, she is also a reminder of the inevitable condition of our bodies *"in the world"* as Charles puts it.

It is through our bodies, inescapably, that we experience the world, and the vulnerability of this, especially when the environment is hostile, is something Charles clearly

recognises: a '*universal sense*'. It is through the vulnerability seen in the image and experienced empathically, that Charles is reminded of his own (and our own) human condition. One not just of being embodied but of being worldly embodied.

The vulnerability Charles describes as feeling for, and with, the figure becomes strangely echoed in his manor of interpretation at this time. Whereas at previous points in his interview he was comfortable and confident to experiment with multiple interpretations of the image, narrative and diegesis, now he seems less secure and self-assured '*perhaps I'm too high flown about it um…*'. He continues:

> *Um…. I don't know… erm… I sort of er the peculiar sense of*
> *sympathy with somebody I have no knowledge about at all*
> *erm… one sort of imagines oneself in a similar situation…*
> *but erm (long pause) erm I don't really have anything more*
> *to say on that… (3,20)*

Here Charles's connection to the woman in the image is more intimate. Rather than thinking about universality; he explains '*I*' have a sense of sympathy. She is more than a just figure, but is 'somebody' to Charles, and is described with more of a sense of individual personhood. The sympathy again has an instinctive feel, he describes having 'no knowledge' of the woman in the painting and yet feels sympathetic towards her as though there is some instinctive or intuitive pull of their joint humanity.

His inclination, after all, is to *share* her discomfort, not feel mockery, anger or any host of other possible emotions towards her. In spite of claiming to know nothing about her, Charles also feels he can empathise with her position. He describes this feeling as 'peculiar' as though it is in some way disconcerting. Certainly imagining oneself in such a vulnerable, exposed position must be uncomfortable and indeed there is a real feel of discomfort when Charles concludes "*but erm (long pause) erm I don't really have anything more to say on that…*"

Not all the emotional responses to the images were associated with vulnerability and dislocation. Henry's response to *Viewing the Cherry Blossom at Asukayama* was quite different.

Although just interestingly it's right the tips of his right
fingers just overlap onto the dress there so that he is part of
that group, whether he wants it or not um contrast.....
contrast this child being led by the hand the mother assuming
mother looking down at the child the child sort of half
looking up at the mother its very sort of intimate there's an
intimacy there um the the clothing is obviously matched um
they're, I would make the assumption they're mother and
child um certainly from my western cultural assumption

Boy if I saw that in a western picture I'd be saying mother
and child mother and child mother and child so I'm making
the same assumption here, um… and and the lovely sort of
lines through there… and she's again an almost sort of ....

A lot of western artists do this sort of triangular thing mother
and child sort of the virgin and child effect with that kind of
triangle may just sort of the line through her hat coming
down to there the line of his dress and there's a unity very
very strong sense of unity and an intimacy there which is
completely at odds with these ones here. (10,36)

The sentiment Henry expresses here is not one of isolation or empathy with the body of a figure exposed or alienated. At this moment in his encounter with *Viewing the Cherry Blossom at Asukayama,* there is a warm bond expressed between himself and a sentiment he sees within the image. Henry describes a "*very very strong sense of unity and an intimacy*" in the mother and child relationship he interprets between two characters in the painting. Such is the strength of this bond that it transcends the cultural chasm which has dominated his looking thus far, taking on a religious significance; "*the virgin and child effect*".

Henry's description of the intimacy that he sees between the two characters is very detailed, encompassing technical, interpretative and imaginative, as well as emotional aspects of the image. Henry describes the characters looking into each other's eyes, the child up at the mother, mother down at the child. We follow this gaze as he connects the two making eye contact, appreciating the warmth he creates between the pair. Henry also remarks on the matching of their clothing – that this is 'obvious' to him when one looks at the image, shows the strength of the sentiment he feels.

Henry describes the structure of this third of the triptych, the positioning of the characters on the page, as 'lovely'. He appreciates the lines formed by the shapes of the outlines of the figures' bodies. This adds to the bond between them and the intimacy created in the image.

The overriding or prominent experiences described in the Emotional Resonances Theme were those which are allied to experiences of vulnerability and dislocation or their converse, warmth and connection. Henry here feels warmly connected to his fellow viewers and feels the warmth of the connection he perceives between the figures in the image.

Self-Reflections

Katherine's emotional response was tied up in her view of herself and how she felt she should approach her life. It was also duplicitous, positive emotions becoming reminders of absences which in turn created sadness.

Katherine previously described the notion of being in the natural environmental depicted in the image where the "*weather is lovely*" and she "*loves being*". In this extract, she describes a point where she imagines coming upon Monet at work in this place.

> *And he's just like there, himself being very calm without any*
> *other people, just himself focused on the scene and trying*
> *to… trying to erm put it on canvas for the rest of us to see,*
> *that's the image that I have I don't, I don't see the painter,*
> *the author as being vain, I just see him enjoying, just*
> *basically feeling what I'm feeling. (12,32)*

The emotions Katherine associates with this encounter with Monet are warm and admiring. Monet himself is feeling what she is feeling, in contrast with what was described in the previous theme, where viewers might have reflected on feeling themselves what they imagined a character was feeling. There is no vanity, the work is created for us, to allow us to see this scene (our ideal place). The positive response Katherine experiences is, however, double-edged.

> *I'm feeling um, I'm feeling a bit sad that I'm not there, that…*
> *I am feeling a bit sad, I'm feeling a bit sad that like, this is*
> *the moment that I look at the painting and um I kind of I feel*
> *the you know, I feel relaxed and its lovely and its so I erm, so*
> *it is, its a bit disappointing that it's not real, erm, it is erm it*
> *is as I've said it's a bit sad but the good thing is that you can*
> *always look at it again (13,22)*

Although Katherine has had a pleasurable and gratifying experience finding Monet within his artwork, there are other emotions which come into play. She describes feelings of sadness and loss at the lack of permanence of this beautiful world.

The doorway in and out of this world seems to be through the eyes and gaze allowing the image to be lost and re-awakened *"ok but then like I look away and it's gone…"*, *"the good thing is that you can always look at it again"* in a repetitive process of love and loss. Katherine feels sad when the image and the lovely world she can enter through it is lost to her, expressing a sense of disappointment that it is not real. But there is some comfort as she can, by once again casting her eyes on the painting, return.

> *Erm yeah on the one hand I wish I could like just stay, erm*
> *but I don't know if that would be running away if that's the*
> *idea of me kind of trying to run away from my problems or….*
> *Or if that's actually what's supposed to be done – I don't*
> *really know (14,9)*

The image provokes another emotional response in Katherine. This relates to her sense of self and her approach to her life. A dilemma is represented, is escaping the city life to live in an area more like the one in the painting the right thing to do as the image brings her happiness, or does this represent escapism in the other sense and avoidance of her problems? As she had earlier intimated: "*It does other things like make you question your lifestyle" (2,18)*

Self-questioning and one's position in the world in relation to emotional responding to the image was tangentially remarked upon by Henry as he discussed different senses of felt connection to the image:

> *Again I think perhaps er the Japanese would be keyed in to*
> *have a greater emotional response because as soon as they*
> *say cherry blossom they all go 'aaaaaaah, cherry blossom'*
> *and that has a raft of associations for them um I spose you*
> *know if this is a picture of bluebells I might be going 'oooh*
> *bluebells' (15,3)*

Henry feels his lack of emotional responding to the titular Cherry blossom in the painting may be related to his cultural positioning. As a Western person looking at Japanese art, or as any race of person not having grown up in Japan and having regularly witnessed Cherry Blossom season, the flowers do not, he feels, for him, generate an instinctive emotional pull. By using the example of bluebells however, he does imagine what such an attraction might be like for someone more culturally attuned. There is actually a stronger sense of emotion and empathy here for his fellow viewers than for the image, as Henry imagines and brings to life Japanese companions to view the image alongside.

The empathic connection Charles established during his viewing was discussed in the previous theme. Here the way in which he experiences this when the focus turned towards himself is discussed.

> *When we were talking about your reactions to the painting I*
> *think you mentioned a sense of sympathy?*
>
> *Yeah yeah um yeah a sense of erm of erm er of erm errrr….*
> *Almost of of a fear…. Erm but um um being being being*
> *afraid not really sure of what there is to be afraid of…*
> *(10,12)*

The extent to which Charles feels an empathetic connection to the figure in the painting is evident here as he, in something of a state of confusion, appears deeply affected by the fear he perceives the woman in the painting to feel. He struggles as he searches to describe the experience he is having, there are protracted 'erm's and stutters in his speech as he grasps for the correct language.

Charles appears simultaneously aware that he is not inside the image and so is 'not really sure of what there is to be afraid of…' and yet so strong are the senses of sympathy and empathy he describes experiencing, that his sense of fear pervades and

undermines his knowledge of this position of safety as a viewer outside the artwork, as though his body may experience a similar fate.

There is a second component to the emotionality of Charles' discussion:

> *She's got her arm held up to protect herself so it's almost*
> *almost as if when you look at her you are assailing her or*
> *assaulting her in some way erm and she's protecting herself*
> *you feel because the hand is held up towards the the the the*
> *viewer (13,29)*

Charles describes an emotional response to his role of being a viewer and what that means to him. He ascribes the looking in this case, to be an assaultive act. As though by observing the figure's nudity and exposed flesh one is bringing her torment into being or invading her in some form. Looking can be violent and damaging.

> *Er again it adds to the sense of unease erm…. Because*
> *actually it's its sort of makes one feel more sympathetic but*
> *ones also made to feel and I hadn't thought about this before*
> *in the sort of implicit er implicated n in whatever is*
> *happening to her…. (14,23)*

Charles's position, of feeling simultaneously a sense of being both the viewer and the viewed, becomes more complicated and problematic in this extract. The woman's stance, of the hand held up in a gesture of protection, adds to the sense of sympathy he feels towards her, but also heightens his feelings of guilt and implication in her plight or suffering. The gesture magnifies the duality of Charles's affective response to the image, escalating his discomfort in viewing the artwork and also strengthening his link to the image by personalising his connection to it. He feels sympathy towards the figure in the image and yet he feels directly implicated in her misery. The same hand that 'groped out' now incriminates. *Expulsion* then could now be understood as Charles expelled from his place of security as a viewer and into the confusing position of one both within and watching the scene depicted.

Self-questioning elicited by emotions also occurred in a more personal intimate form. We have already discussed Jean's experience of being drawn into the image. She expounds upon this aspect of her viewing to describe in greater detail the self-reflective emotions this galvanised.

> *I felt a little bit um, of a sucker, because I think if you do, like*
> *I say that's, that's how I tend to be if I go to an exhibition cos*
> *I just don't have stamina to look at lots of things for… […]*
> *um well what is it that you look at paintings for? That's*
> *really going to um not just fulfil a momentary interest, but*
> *really kind of challenge you or make you think, um and make*
> *you carry on thinking after you've stopped looking at it and I*
> *think it's…*
>
> *If I were an artist I'm sure I would be you know, that's a*
> *balance you have to strike, you've got to draw the person in*
> *and then kind of reward them for, it's a horrible way of*
> *describing it really but um… Yeah so I I kind of feel I got*
> *sucked in by this one… because it did look very striking and*
> *different but I'm not convinced that um that it's the most*
> *interesting painting in the book…. (13,34)*

Jean's extract here introduces a dialogue involving the feeling of being a 'sucker'. Admonishment vies with exoneration as she ponders the origin of her original enthusiasm for the painting. Was she naive and 'sucked in' or does art set out to do just that? And if so, what kind of engagement does that provoke?

These questions relate to the way Jean feels about herself and her ability to access and view art. She associates being a sucker with not having stamina, and with a more superficial engagement rather than one which could "*challenge you or make you think, um and make you carry on thinking*". Jean, in an attribution that has a slightly childish feel to it, describes "*the person*", (thus establishing a disassociation from herself), who might perceive reward from this more basic type of interaction.

> *Having looked at it and thought about it, I feel I've*
> *been…. definitely sort of drawn to its luridness, so I feel*
> *it's revealed some of my… (12,24)*

She talks about being drawn to the lurid nature of the image and that this in some way exposes her. We cannot be certain as to what the "*my….*" would have become but it seems as if she feels in some way similar to that which has happened to the image. She like the painting has been exposed under her gaze as being less profound than she initially had hoped.

The viewers did not find the paintings emotional in the most obvious sense, rather the viewing experience apparently had the potential to expose, and the paintings had some property to enlighten or reflect what was previously below the surface. The responses this aroused in the viewers, ranged from profound discomfort to comfortable acknowledgement.

Emotionality was experienced in multiple forms both within and between viewers' encounters with the artworks. It also seceded and succeeded them. Sometimes, such as in the case of Charles and *Expulsion*, an affective relationship was formed between a figure within the painting and the viewer outside. Then via a sort of porous empathy, the positioning of within and without of the painting became blurred. This seemingly left the viewer not only deeply affected in their imaginings of the emotions occurring within the image but also deeply affected emotionally within themselves even after looking had ended. To present an example of a form of divergence, Katherine also felt an emotional bond between herself and a figure within the image she viewed. Hers though was a projected vision of the painter Monet and (now similarly to the other viewers' experiences), this too led to internal emotional repercussions.

There was clearly a great network of paths via which emotional connections could be made. Importantly there was regularly a sense of connectedness. The emotional work and experiences never existed in isolation they were always towards figures, elements of the image real or imaged, or indeed from the image towards the viewer's themselves. Such connections elicited the experiences of intimacy and vulnerability typical of the theme.

Finally, emotional responding also seemed to alert viewers to their wordiness. This took different forms for different viewers suggesting instances of being socially, personally or bodily in the world. The sense of culture causing an embargo on affective response to certain aspects of the image, a feeling of our human bodies unequivocally physical in the physical world, a sense of self and personal values and judgements.

Overall the Superordinate Themes described the ways in which viewers not only engaged with the paintings but also that that engagement was embedded within a mass of interdependent contexts. Narratives were constructed, or interpretations made, reflected upon, and then changed or revised, or judged. Or this caused emotional responses. Conversely, meaning making could happen because of emotions and also prompt engagements.

Chapter Six – Study One: Discussion

"*The eye altering, alters all*"

- William Blake

Elements of Engagement

The first Master Theme, 'Elements of Engagement', contained descriptions of outward and inward forces connecting the viewer and image. This resonates with the description of a 'communicative dimension of aesthetic experience', developed by Csikszentmihaly and Robinson (1990) during their experiential analysis of art-viewing. The communicative nature of art is suggested in other areas of research too. In health and therapeutic work, the potential of art to facilitate conversation is of particular focus (e.g. as Gelo, Klassen, & Gracely 2015). As a theoretical query, the way in which the artwork as an object, a flat surface marked with brushstrokes and paint, might communicate the totality of what is depicted or represented, is the subject of a wealth of conjecture and debate. [6]

The communications described in the current study presented in a different form. Highly salient were the experiences of viewers as positioned in space relative to the image and their impressions of an interactive area functioning as conduit for dynamic exchanges between them.

In the three themes which make up this Master Theme ('Groping Out' 'Attracting Attention' and 'Drawing in'), communication takes place through the expanse between image and viewer. This shared arena is not a gap which separates them but rather a connective tissue joining them together. The hand which gropes out at Charles, the sharp scalpel which glistens at Marian; these 'depicted' aspects afford the same located realness as the viewer's own spatial position. Simultaneously, elements of the image which are experienced as emanating from it, are brought into being by the viewer's sense of physical presence in front of them. The realities of the image are seemingly experienced as equivalent and relational to those of the viewer. Viewer and image meaningfully embedded in a shared world.

Experimental psychology often approaches image-viewer engagement as a feature or result of the perceptual system. Particular colours or configurations are more likely to draw our gaze or capture our attention than others, for example, Koide, Kubo, Nishida,

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[6] Dominic McIver Lopes, 'Sight and Sensibility' (2007) gives a comprehensive account.

Shibata & Ikeda (2015) linked eye movements to salient features of images or Nascimento et al, (2017) who looked at the appreciation of colour.

The attraction of attention is the purview of the second theme. In the accounts here, there is no indication of pure pre-meaningful perception. Elements which attracted viewers did so because of the understandings and associations attached to them. Jean did not feel attracted simply to the red in the image, she described it as a danger signal or beacon. Her pre-knowledge of what red 'is', present at the inception of her looking.

In 'Elements of Engagement', what distinguishes each theme, is the position and direction, the valence, of the communication in space. The orientation of momentum between image and viewer. In 'Attracting Attention' the viewer describes orienting themselves and their focus in relation to particular elements of the image. In 'Groping Out' and 'Drawing In', aspects of the image are experienced as outwardly forceful or inwardly compelling.

Much of the psychological research discussed in the literature review posits that viewing proceeds sequentially; first, the viewer responds to 'lower-level' features and once this 'input' is assimilated, higher-level cognitions and interpretations occur (Belke et al., 2010; Cupchik et al., 2009; Pelowski et al., 2017).

In such accounts, the more basic aspects of the image provide sense-data which direct the viewer to the formation of an understanding. In contrast, the experiences described in 'Attracting Attention' are far more integrated. *"the thing I'm most attracted by, is I kind of want to know who the tall chap is with the shiny forehead cos he seems to be the central point in this"* (9,18). Marian is not only attracted to a point of light in the image, this light *is* the shiny forehead of the surgeon, she also recognises him as focal in a narrative or contextual sense and this is a composite part of the attraction he induces. So-called salient features are not, in the experiencing of art suggested here, elements from which the viewer builds an interpretation thus resulting in an experience (of thoughts and emotions etc.). Rather they are experienced, colours are of skin, of skies, contours are of swathes of clothing or landscapes.

Philosopher and psychologist John Dewey (1859–1952), makes the distinction between a signpost, directing one towards a city and the experience of that city itself. (Dewey, 2005, p. 88). Here concepts act to direct one towards an experience but are not the same as that experience. This analogy captures well the difference between the outlook of perceptual/processing accounts and those reported here. Describing the visual pathways

or neural regions which facilitate object perception only direct us to or serve as a recipe for, the actual nature of what these encounters are like. The same way recognising a friend, experientially, has nothing to do with one's fusiform face area in the brain flooding with blood.

In the cases described here, the capture of viewers' attention and their subsequent meaningful interpretations did not appear in a linear or cause and effect fashion. Rather, that element attracting attention *was already* meaningful, it was part of the city the viewer experiences. Elements which attracted the viewer did not lead them to an experience but rather they constituted one.

Like Marian's ideas about how characters may appear and what that signifies (the depiction of the particular surgeon in a way to suggest his 'centrality' in the situation), viewers bring their own understandings of the world to the viewing. These pre-knowings act upon and react to, aspects of the world portrayed in the painting. This forms a continuous reciprocally anticipating whole or the "*precession of what is upon what one sees and makes seen, of what one sees and makes seen upon what is*", as described by philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964a, p. 188).

Merleau-Ponty approached the relationship between image and viewer as an inter-dynamic world of experience. In his writings about painting he further rejected a distinction between image subject and object. Rather those aspects were fluently unified in perception. According to this perspective, the painting, its surface, composition, depicted reality, and the viewer and theirs, are of the same stuff, they belong to the same "flesh" (p. 163)

The theme, Drawing In, presents the sister experience to Groping Out, viewers describe an awareness of forces compelling them towards the image *'I'm drawn to it being cut but I'm particularly taken by this guy's hand'* (Marian), *'I kind of feel I got sucked in by this one'* (Jean), rather than aspects of the image moving out or toward them. These suggestions of physical, bodily and spatial relations in art-perception are acutely dissimilar to the conceptions of 'body sway' and pictorial-space generated by depth-perception, offered by experimental investigations (Ganczarek et al., 2015; Zoi Kapoula et al., 2011).

As with the other themes, instead of emphasising a separation between image and viewer, the space between them is connective and constituted by both. Again there is recognition of a physical polarity within a dynamic shared space. This outward and

inward flowing, over the conjoined viewer-image space, further speaks to Merleau-Ponty's comments on painting: "*There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen, what paints and what is painted*" (p. 167). Similarly, in the accounts described here, the co-constitution of meaning has a course, a rhythm, and push and pull, a directionality bringing the image to life as one's breath in the lungs, rather than the intake of sense-data which is then mentality arranged.

Meaning and interpretation, and the object-aspects of the image form a communication wherein one cannot exist separately from the other. Henry, in his viewing, describes being drawn physically via aspects of composition, to an idea or a point of thought "*something goes across a frame or outside it almost to remind you that this is a picture um or draw us to an interesting thing*". This drawing is not just a pull towards an idea nestled in the depiction, it is part of one. The reality experienced as drawing him in is also the very notion that it is part of an image (and so should not have properties which act in the real world). Still in this experience, the attracting element is not bound to the image itself but can be an aspect of something across or outside of it and understanding which slips over and between parts of a single world.

Paintings both represent things in the world and are things in the world, and this world is one and the same (Heidegger, 1993). When Katherine describes viewing the Monet painting, her seeing itself becomes impressionistic: "*I think that this is an **idea** of erm, of a contact with erm with nature and I think that this erm painting could relate to a lot of places in the world, because it's er… simply for the reason that it's blurred so it, you can't see clearly what kind of flowers there are*" (15.24) an idea, an impression of a place, vague but with distinct characteristics, is communicated to her through and echoing, the style of the painting.

Charles's seeing becomes metaphorical within the half real, half surreal style of the painting he describes as "*a sort of dreamscape ah so so so it's not its er it's a still impressionistic rather than realistic, alright we've got these realistic elements in*" (13,7) this amalgamation of representational and abstract elements creates for Charles a world with the same dualistic components "*it represents a situation which in which we could imagine ourselves, it doesn't er present a situation that is something we would see it if it were happening in this physical world.*" (13,12)

Cumulatively, 'Elements of Engagement' suggests an alleviation of traction between the viewer and viewed during encounters with paintings. When Henry sees the fabric of the

women's dresses in far more detail than exists on the surface, a literalisation of the afore quoted passage occurs. As he sees the image he is "caught in the fabric of the world", and that world is shared and co-created. 'Art discloses the ground of its own appearing'

Deeper Exploration

The second Master Theme 'Deeper Exploration' continues within this vein. Viewers' more sustained, discovery-oriented or creative and exploratory, experiences within a co-constituted environment are described. An immediate difference between the experiences here and those previously outlined concerns the viewer's sense of volition. The interactions captured in 'Elements of Engagement' suggested an absence of control or a sense of being directed, in 'Deeper Exploration', self-directed more deliberate viewing occurs.

The theme first outlines 'Emerging Prominences'. In the accounts recalled here, viewers discovered and explored areas of interest in the image in an extended fashion. Understandings, ideas, metaphors and narratives 'emerged' through the viewing and were examined, considered, fleshed out, and also rejected and re-formed.

To give one example, Jean considers alternative interpretations of the red ovoid in the image:

> "*I think it definitely, you know, I think different things as I look at it so that idea of this not being a sun with a glow but actually part of a solid… this whole thing being like a solid planet that's crust has… has broken here so it's sort of… the volcanic stuff is oozing out*" (4,19)

The development, over time, of this new view, overflows from itself, like the lava newly perceived in the depiction.

As Katherine explains in her description of her 'place' "*What you see is where it takes you…*" (12.30). What you see and understand is what you discover and explore. What you discover and explore is what you see and understand.

The explorative and creative activities of the viewers here often had underlying physical intonations. Structures, textures and topographies were felt and moved about on and in. Experimental accounts of space, dimensionality, depth or momentum in art-viewing tend to treat such concepts as measurements which can be differentially processed by our visual system (e.g. Graham et al., 2010). In Emerging Prominences, dimensionality

and location were experienced as part of a meaningful engagement with the paintings. They weren't perceptions generated by quirks of the stimulus, they were lived.

Experimental accounts may have the tendency to reduce experiences such as those characterised in 'Emerging Prominences' to quantifiable, fixed determinants of place and perceived environment. Such reduction is not only the province of quantitative investigation, however. Other approaches to our mental activities when we view paintings can be equally as prone to the folly of too rigid an application of categorisation.

Csikszentmihaly & Robinson, (1990) outlined an 'Intellectual Dimension' of art-viewing present in their results. Discussion of this dimension illustrated senses of discovery and the active making of meaning similar to those recounted in the theme here. However, their study differentiated two modes within this dimension. In what they called a tendency to closure, formation of understanding existed as a goal which viewers attempted to achieve. Exploratory activity and a desire to discover *new* things in the art were, on the other hand, described as a more 'open' mode.

In the accounts reported here, achieving understandings, and exploring and discovery, appeared to function in a hermeneutic circle rather than in an either-or fashion, or as separate viewing approaches. In one instance, Charles comes to an understanding that the figure in *Expulsion* is moving, and, is moving away from something rather than towards it. Upon this, he suggests "*It is unclear what she is running away from it could be anything*". Charles approaches the question of 'what' is causing the figure to run away as an opening in the painting, going on to further develop multiple possible examples. But also, his initial interpretation that the figure is in flight, is based in this very conjecture. The understanding that the figure is in flight, is preceded by the existence of these same possibilities (a fire, the wrath of God) that she might be running from.

In Csikszentmihaly & Robinson's (1990) account, intellectual engagement (be it closed or open) is treated as segregated from other aspects of interacting or responding. Similar delineation of an intellectual aspect of viewing is present in all the psychologically focussed experiential accounts of art-viewing reviewed. Roald (2007) and (2008) discuss the separability of emotions and cognition in response to art. Lagerspetz (2016) organised his findings into a pre-existing model which separately categorises cognitive and emotional aspects.

Such distinct practices in interacting with art did not typify the experiences recounted here. Rather, a sense of exploration appeared in a far more consolidated fashion. Viewers became involved in the material of the paintings itself, (as particularly evident in the 'Emerging Prominences' theme). What figured more in the experiences was not whether they were determined emotional or cognitive, but rather their qualitative content. The difference, equivalent to comparing the observation that one is swimming a crawl, not a breaststroke, to the feel of the water itself.

Exploration involves felt encounters with whatever unfolds between viewer and image. This unfolding may contain visual aspects, imaginings, potential narratives or more logical or abstract thoughts. Viewers are curious and inquisitive about these aspects and are creative in the activities of piecing them together or fleshing them out. Emotions, thoughts and senses combined into one felt engagement. The persistence of recognising 'intellectual' responses as distinct from emotional or perceptual processes in psychological investigations of art-viewing, does, however, suggest some broader considerations.

Whilst it is impossible here to present a full account of the intricacies of the emotion-cognition debate (Roald 2007 is very informative on this matter), the implication of aesthetic-responding within such discussion, highlights the possibility of a self-fulfilling expectation to be in evidence within the research itself. In searching for information about relationships between intellectual and other viewing modes, are we unwittingly creating or enforcing an artificial divide? Do we distinguish cognitive aspects, particularly from emotional ones, because we are so accustomed to thinking of them as separable? In applying such separations do we miss more influential or incisive divisions or obscure other types of experiencing in art?

The extended explorations described here were not simply intellectualisations in response to a defined, disconnected or static depiction. They were the sustained interpretative actions of the viewer as they explored, imagined and thought about facets of the image. Viewers, via the meanings they made, moved through, descended into and felt the paintings. They described the discovering of aspects and moulding them into being and Being in the same action.

The associated theme 'Awareness of Tensions and Contradictions', described an effect of this dualistic activity. The combining of contextual elements, existing knowledge and understandings, with the particularities of the painting, regularly forged aspects that were not in agreement. Henry saw a figure simultaneously in and on a landscape.

Marian saw a depiction of a real moment in history, she also saw this reality as constructed, posed, in order to form that same depiction. She saw the eminent surgeon both at work naturalistically, but also "*almost portraiture rather than a snapshot of something in progress*".

The defining feature of the combined experiences described in the Second Master Theme Deeper Exploration is not their intellectual nature. Rather the accounts suggest the union of the creative and the reactive. They describe the experiences of 'seeing' something and expounding upon that to see something more or new. There is the deliberate mental activity of exploring, in a palpable earthly sense, what is seen, by seeing more of it into being. It is the controlled breathing, the building the city from within, it is what is given and what is made going hand in hand.

Vulnerability and Intimacy: emotional resonances of viewing

Continuing the discussion of separable aspects of responding, emotionality did emerge as a particular focus in the analysis, in this case in the form of resonances. As described in the Third Master Theme, viewers identified feelings within the image and also exposed self-reflections. Rather than being defined by the experience of emotion singularly, 'Emotional Resonances' described feelings within and about the encounter, considerations of what created them and ideas of what they might mean.

Merleau-Ponty was famous for describing "*When I touch my right hand with my left, my right hand, as an object, has the strange property of being able to feel too*." (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 92). If we consider the image, in the viewers looking, as a co-constituted Being, so, it is experienced as one hand does the other in this account. The viewer-image creation, as much part of the viewer as the paint and brush strokes, takes the position of the right hand, both object of mental touch and able to feel it.

The effusion of self, imagination and creation into the image, which emerged in the analysis, offered rich responsive aspects for viewers to explore. It is also conceivable that it produced the vulnerable and self-reflective components described. The image as it is viewed, is part of the viewer and so as the viewer then explores and probes that image, they become aware of themselves as touchers, probers, explores and also of aspects of themselves that are touched, probed and explored. What this feels like, resonates through the viewing effecting both interpretations, as emotionality ascribed to the image, and through the viewer, as self-reflection. As Jean relates "*I felt a little bit um, of a sucker [...] Yeah so I I kind of feel I got sucked in by this one…*" (13.34)

Emotional interpretations were attributed to many parts of the image. These might be an activity (the operation viewed by Marian in *The Gross Clinic*), a tone (the ominous nature Jean felt in *Ship and Red Sun*), or a figure one empathised with (Charles and the contorted woman in *Expulsion*) for example. There was however a unifying aspect to these interpretations of emotion, many of the responses to what was depicted (rather than self-reflections), involved senses of vulnerability and exposure. These were in turn empathised with to varying degrees.

Charles described the nudity of the figure in *Expulsion* as "*a sort of nude exposed figure in a hostile environment er that's a er sort of er universal sense of our our our bodies in the world*" *(3,28).* Henry, conversely in one sense, reported a warmth from the mother and child dynamic in *Viewing the Cherry Blossom at Asukayama* which was pleasurable. This could again though, be conceived of as an appreciation of vulnerability as he described a mother caring for a baby, a protective act.

Recognition or attribution of emotion to aspects of the image did not seem to take the form of the psychophysiological, reactive or primitive emotions typical of the experimental studies or evolutionary approaches. Nor did the typologies of emotion indicated by the experiential studies of both Roald (2007) and Csikszentmihaly and Robinson (1990) appear consistent with the findings. Rather it appeared that feelings were translated or uncovered through the viewer's recognition, either implicitly or explicitly, of their own humanness and the suffusion of that humanness into the image. It was this sense of Being which appeared to bind the affective experiences together.

In regards to the self-reflective aspects of viewing captured in the second theme, viewers appeared to become aware of their positions in a worldly context. They became more consciously aware of themselves as beings in the world. This occurred in different forms:

Charles experienced an enhanced awareness of his embodiedness both in an empathic sense of being exposed in the world, but also through being "*made to feel and I hadn't thought about this before in the sort of implicit er implicated n in whatever is happening to her…. (14,23).* The experience of shared physical reality becoming a source of guilt or concern.

Henry became aware of his cultural positioning as he explored what might be responsible for his perceived lack of direct emotional reaction "*perhaps er the Japanese would be keyed in to have a greater emotional response because as soon as they say*

cherry blossom they all go 'aaaaaaah, cherry blossom' and that has a raft of associations for them um I spose you know if this is a picture of bluebells I might be going 'oooh bluebells'' (15,3)

Katherine responded to a sense of her individual position in relation to her situation and 'place' in the world. She described a sadness in response to the personal conflicts her enjoyment of the image evoked "*On hand I wish I could like just stay, erm but I don't know if that would be running away if that's the idea of me kind of trying to run away from my problems or…. Or if that's actually what's supposed to be done – I don't really know (14,9)*

The three Master Themes together indicate that looking is inescapably an act of understanding. We make sense of what we see, what we see is what we have made sense of or have a pre-sense of. In the case of viewing paintings, we are presented with a microcosm of interpretable space coloured by the marks on the canvas within it. In this confinement, our engagement with meaning can become subject to our attention. The importance of understanding is unsurprising in some respects given its insistence in the literature. Both the dominant paradigms in experimental aesthetics, the expert/novice and representational/abstract, are based on the acknowledgement that understanding affects viewing.

Similarly, the importance of meaning and understanding as related to emotional art viewing is of course not a novel concept. The literature links many measures associated with meaning to those of emotionality. Complexity, novelty and uncertainty have historically been linked to increased arousal (Silvia, 2005b). Positive emotional responses have been associated with understanding.

Traditional approaches to art viewing have demonstrated a tendency to abstraction, there has been a propensity to separate the how's, the processes, perceptions, perceptual acts, cognitions and emotions. In seeking to comprehend aesthetic encountering, categorisation of mental processes, whilst establishing useful conceptual starting points, may not be appropriate or adequate to meaningfully capture the full actuality. Consideration might more usefully be given to more permeable, fluid conceptions of the viewing, and the synthesis of its co-constructed form. It has been usual to segregate the whos, dividing the viewer from the image or categorising and separating types of viewers and images. These approaches may function to misguide, as they do not attend to what the image and viewer share. That which is inherently integrated, composite and

inseparable. That which through the continual occurrence of meaning-making and the persistence of understanding forms the fabric and Flesh.

 "*it is impossible to say that nature ends here and that man or expression starts here. It is, therefore, mute Being which itself comes forth to show its own meaning. Herein lies the reason why the dilemma between figurative and nonfigurative art is badly posed; it is true and uncontradictory that no grape was ever what it is in the most figurative painting and that no painting, no matter how abstract, can get away from Being, that even Caravaggio's grape is the grape itself*" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 188).

Part Three

Study Two: "People are gazing"

A phenomenological account of viewing Velazquez.

Chapter Seven- Study Two: Introduction and Method

As discussed in the literature review, the majority of forays into the investigation of art-viewing have had a particular focus. Art is approached as an object which is met by our perceptual system. Paintings have features which can be selectively manipulated. Viewers too can be typified and grouped accordingly. In terms of the psychological nature of viewing, responding as evaluations, biological reactions and forms of perception and cognition are characterised, piecemeal. The engaged, lively, sensuous and self- generative experiences recounted in Study One, are apparently lost to such treatments. Art-viewing and encounters with paintings are arguably irreducible to quantifiable units. Instead, experiential accounts shed more and clearer light on the encounters we might have with art. We are not looking at perception, we are looking at paintings.

Study one gave an account of the viewings of five different images, one selected by each of the viewers. IPA requires a sample with a certain degree of homogeneity. Which factors are considered important to this, is a question which does not have a single answer. There are many aspects, contexts and experiences which may differentiate people, some more and some less predictable.

The first study considered the attitude of the viewer towards the image they viewed to be prioritised as part of the homogeneity requirement. Viewers chose the image themselves as one they wanted to talk about and hadn't seen before. Viewers were unified in their decision to view their image and desire to discuss it. This meant sacrificing similarity of the image as viewers have different tastes. The use of multiple paintings allowed for aspects of viewing shared across image*s* to emerge.

In-depth study of looking at art, in the moment, was clearly beneficial. Viewers discussed in detail and with enthusiasm and seriousness, their experiences of looking and viewing. Commonalities across the cases emerged and were illuminative. However, the use of different art-works presented additional considerations. Discussion of an image depicting figures was naturally somewhat divorced from an image depicting moods. Whilst interesting, it was felt that greater depth could be added to the study by working with a single painting.

Study Two, therefore, aims to complement the original findings by re-training the focus. The aspect of homogeneity prioritised is that viewers all experience looking at the same painting. Their liking, evaluations or the desirability of viewing the image cannot be

pre-selected in these circumstances but a uniform subject to view, instead, is treated as the important homogenising factor.

The work to be discussed involves a single pre-selected painting to be viewed by all participants. Here an emphasis is intended to be placed upon the viewer and their experiences comparable in finer focus in front of a single same image. Viewers may have different attitudes towards how desirable the image is to look at, what common factors exist across their responses? What is the substance of looking itself?

Method

The Method for the Second Study followed the same principles as the first. In this section I concentrate on outlining the differences which occurred:

Selecting the painting

The image, Las Meninas by Diego Velazquez, was chosen part by investigation and part by intuition. An aim was to select an image famous enough to be recognised by approximately half of the viewers. This excluded paintings famous to the magnitude of the Mona Lisa and also images by little known artists.

Paintings which had enjoyed prominence in popular culture outside of the art world such as Girl with a Pearl Earring were also excluded. The motivation was not to inhibit thought or reference to other art forms during the interviews. Rather I was concerned that to select an image too strongly associated with a film, song or play for example might generate an outlier when thinking about paintings in general. As people commonly find abstract art more difficult, it seemed more logical to select a classical painting in the hope of making the task more accessible.

A number of 'top ten' lists were consulted to get a feel for which images were considered popular and well known. These included The Guardian's "The 10 greatest works of art ever", TimeOut's "The best paintings of all time" and The Telegraph's "The nation's favourite paintings revealed". Consideration was given to the types of painting which had seemed to generate longer viewings or attract more interest during the original observational work. Friends and colleagues with an interest in or knowledge of art were consulted.

Paintings considered included

- The Garden of Earthly Delights - Hieronymus Bosch
- The Execution of Lady Jane Grey - Paul Delaroche (In National Gallery)
- The Starry Night – Van Gogh
- Ophelia - John Everett Millais (In Tate Britain)
- Apollo and Daphne - Piero

Las Meninas featured on many of the populist Top Paintings lists indicating it to be deemed relatively well known and appreciated.

The painting strikes one as an interactive image, ideal for discussion in a way a landscape might not, at least at first pass. It also combines many of the aspects implicated as important in the literature review. Rather than being a portrait or landscape, the image contains human subjects, physical elements of space and depth and has historical specificity but also depicts enough for one to construct narratives and interpretations naive of any context.

Classical paintings with human subjects seemed to capture a lot of attention during my gallery visit. One particular image, The Arnolfini Portrait, caused some visitors to shed tears. I decided not to use this painting however as I have personal associations with it which I felt would be overly challenging to disassociate from, especially during an ongoing project.

Participants / Criteria

Participant recruitment and criteria were largely the same as the preceding study. Participants in this specific case were again all Londoners, six male and six female, aged 35-65 and educated to at least degree level.

Recruitment

A feature of the recruitment was obtaining a balance of participants who had and had not seen the image before. As participants were not pre-informed of the image to be viewed this was achieved through purposive sampling (and a bit of luck). Sometimes those referring a participant to me had a good idea of whether the person would know the painting or not.

Constructing the sample

Purposive selection allowed the allocation of two categories. Those who had seen the image before and those who had not. Seeing the image before meant either in

reproduction or in actuality and did not necessitate recalling the artist or title. Participants had different degrees of knowledge about the content of the image and its historical context. Due to the lack of control over participants' prior experience of the painting, some excess interviews were undertaken. No interviews were abandoned but some were put aside for future work. Some decisions had to be taken as to which interviews to retain in the final sample. In this case, as most participants had a positive reaction to the image, a participant who had a very negative response was withdrawn as was a participant who expressed reluctance at attempting to engage with the image. Such reactions are interesting in their own right but pragmatically, as not all interviews could be included, it was felt these were most sensible to renounce.

Preparatory Notes and Considerations

Existing materials and information about the painting were not accessed before conducting the interview so as to approach the process in a similar (or inferior) position of knowledge to the viewers. The reason for this was two-fold. One, a sense of fairness to the participants who had the challenging task of discussing an artwork unprepared, and to help establish a sense of co-endeavour in line with the hermeneutic aspirations of the research. Two as referred to in the methodology, although Interpretative phenomenology does not employ a reduction or epoche as such, (Larkin et al., 2011) and (Finlay, 2008a) have pointed to the value of adopting a phenomenological attitude in the sense of openness, curiosity and self-awareness. Resisting advanced preparation about content, context and meaning of the image helped approach each viewing open to the individual participant's meaning-making and understandings of it.

Time was set as aside to review the painting myself and record my initial thoughts and feelings about it. The purpose of this was to have information to refer back to and use as a reminder during later stages of the work. It was hoped this would help me remain aware of and reflect upon my own influence on the interviews and interpretations

Interview

Schedule

The interview schedule was adapted from that used in the previous study to include areas involving the knowing or having seen the painting previously.

Figure 4 Interview Schedule - Study Two

Viewing

<u>What are your first impressions of this painting?</u>

Can you tell me what it's like to look at the painting?

Describing

Can you describe the painting for me?

- Prompt: if someone who wasn't here asked you to describe it what would you say?

<u>You told me about your first impressions, what is it like now you've looked at it for some time?'</u>

Responding

What do you think the painting is about?

How would you describe your reaction to this painting?

Past Viewing *(Additional questions)*

Can you tell me about seeing this image before?

What about any other ways you are already familiar with this painting?

     Prompt – Have you read about it, talked about it with others?

What are your thoughts about your previous familiarity with the image and looking at it now?

End question for all cases

<u>What do you think it will be like once I have rolled up the painting and we've finished looking at it?</u>

     Prompt – Is there anything you will remember?

        What will you do next?

Interview Procedure

All of the participants looked at an A2 reproduction of Las Meninas by Diego Velazquez which had been pre-selected. None of the participants were aware that they would be viewing this particular image in advance of the interview.

Before the interview began, as well as the introductory and consent related procedure detailed in the previous study, it was explained that I was interviewing both people who had and had not seen the painting before. Participants were assured that this was not

with the aim of testing levels of knowledge or art-awareness but rather to obtain a balance of responses.

The image was usually tacked to a desk or wall where the light was good. The participant and I checked we could see it well and that we would be comfortable to look at it for a sustained period.

Similar to the first study, audio recording began once the painting had been revealed and the participants agreed to proceed. The interview began with the question "What are your first impressions looking at the painting?" and continued organically as participant and researcher looked at the image.

Participants sometimes asked during the interviews who the painter was, or where, or when the image was painted. The approach was always one of honesty and to treat the viewing as a joint venture. Any details the researcher did know were shared if requested, but these ultimately were little more than the image title, the name of the artist and the location.

As in the previous study participants naturally discussed much of what was in the interview schedule without prompting. Early in the course of conducting the interviews, it became clear that temporality featured notably in guiding the semi-structured aspect. This evolved naturally in accordance with the real-time aspect of the viewing I had hoped to capture. IPA researchers are often advised to structure their interviews around three broad topics. Although I had initially thought that the areas (bold in the interview schedule) *viewing, describing* and *responding*, would function this way, in practice, three temporal questions (underlined in the schedule above) operated as orienting points. Becoming aware of the significance of these questions was useful as they provided a natural way to re-orient the interview if it lost focus and give myself and the viewer a sense of completion as we progressed towards the end of our discussion.

The schedule had an additional section for the participants who had seen the image before, asking about their previous viewing and what they remembered of it, but again, this usually came up organically.

Analysis

Analysis of each individual case

This followed the same procedure as in Study One. Each of the 12 interviews was analysed individually and each analysis was completed before progressing to the next.

Cross-Case Analysis

The Cross-Case Analysis in Study Two was slightly different from that in the First Study as potential groupings of participants were present. It was decided to explore the significance of these groupings in the first instance and this additionally functioned as a way to manage the volume of data.

Participants were divided according to gender and according to whether they had seen the image before or not. This produced four groups each consisting of three participants.

Table 10 Groups Comprising Cross-Case Analysis – Study Two

Women who had seen the image before	Men who had seen the image before
Women who had not seen the image before	Men who had not seen the image before

The intention was not to cement these divisions into the analysis, but rather to acknowledge their existence and provisionally investigate their impact. For each group, an independent cross-case analysis was completed in the manner presented in Study One. This produced four sets of Master Themes, one for each group.

Initial Comparisons

Approaching the data in grouped form allowed initial contrasts to be explored. It provided an opportunity to think about the way these groups might relate to one another and how participants' experiences might most accurately be represented and communicated. Once the four group analyses were conducted the four sets of Master Themes produced were printed and laid out across workspace so that they could be compared.

Looking at these four large clusters of themes revealed some interesting, unanticipated characteristics of the data to emerge. It became apparent for example, that the distinction between having seen or not seen the painting before was not predominantly meaningful or divisive. The overall pictures presented by these two groups did not indicate a strong distinction between them. Although this was an aspect of the experience which had intuitively felt important, upon reflection, this was not evidenced in the participants' experiences or suggested in the themes developed using such grouping.

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Looking at the themes across groups and returning back to individual transcripts for additional context suggested that whether a viewer had seen the painting before or not was far less influential for example, than their subjective degree of knowledge about it. There were participants who had not seen the image before, but who could tell who the artist was, knew about the people depicted and could determine the historical setting. Equally, there were those who had seen the image before, even finding it highly memorable, but who did not know anything about its context or provenance. This distinction itself was not directly related to participants' broader knowledge of art history (there were no groups of more or less informed viewers), level of education or general historical knowledge. Rather participants were all knowledgeable about art but areas and foci of expertise or interest varied. This emerged as a natural and flexible variation across the whole set of participants and was not something therefore which suggested forming a different set of groups.

Similarly, there was no obvious distinction between genders, both male and female participants made reference to parenthood, fashion and a range of topics which might stereotypically be assumed to have gendered emphases.

Looking at the groups in this way it became clear that there was more commonality between them than difference. This, in turn, suggested that there was far more to be gained from amalgamating the data and considering the 12 participants as a complete set. For this reason, a final Cross Case Analysis was undertaken.

Final Cross-Case Analysis

The final cross-case analysis was approached as previous cross cases had been but with one additional aspect. The Master Themes developed in the four group analyses were used for guidance.

The superordinate themes for each participant (established in their individual analyses) were compiled on notecards to form a pool for the entire set of participants. They were again colour coded by participant and laid out across the workspace as in previous cross-case work. The process of clustering these themes was initiated by referring back to the four tables generated during the group analyses. Practically, these were printed and tacked to the wall over the workspace to be used as a guide. Relationships between individual participant themes suggested during the group analyses were used to begin to arrange and structure the whole set.

Themes from Jay and Floyd for example which had been associated in their group were positioned together again and then reflected upon in the context of the entire sample. In this way such relationships might have relevance to themes from other participants, Beth or Linda etc. and draw them in to form a cluster. Alternatively, these themes might end up moved apart as their meaning was understood differently in relation to the bigger picture.

The idea wasn't to reinstate the group divisions but simply to make use of the ideas about how themes might connect or diverge which had previously been brought to light. The structures developed within the four groups helped indicate where relationships and themes significant for the whole might exist and thus acted as a scaffold or steppingstone for the usual clustering process.

As in previous cross-case analyses, but with the addition of initially referring to the group analyses as guide, the Superordinate Themes for each participant were moved and repositioned over the workspace as relationships and meanings across the cases were explored. Clusters of themes were developed as previously described. Using this process, a set of Final Master Themes was eventually derived, and these themes were similarly named according to their content.

Some of the material was evidently quite dominant. For example, one Final Master Theme 'The Gaze' emerged as one pool of themes drawn together without any lower-level division. The material felt very potent, penetrating and strong and it was only after returning to the transcripts and looking in detail at each of the accounts that two lower-level themes became clear.

The Final Master Themes were ordered according to the point in the viewing that they most emphasised (much like that described in the analysis of Marian in Study One). Where the inceptive moments of viewing were emphasised in a theme, that theme was positioned first (or as Master Theme One). A theme made up predominantly of retrospective concerns was positioned last.

Chapter Eight –Study Two: Results

The Painting: Las Meninas, Diego Velazquez 1656

Findings

Notes on Language

Lots of the language which was necessary to use in the following discussions had the potential to indicate boundaries or implement separations when in most cases the references were far more ambiguous or indicative of permeable relationships. Discussion of something termed 'in' the painting always had a wider context and did not necessarily suggest a concrete 'inside' and 'outside' or split worlds of viewer and depiction. 'In' was often used during the interviews as one might say someone was 'in the corner' referring to a location in the same room as us. At other times it could refer to a point 'in' time or 'in' the narrative. I have tried to reflect this fluidity 'in' the analysis.

This painting also contains a depiction of an artist and was also painted by an artist. During the discussions, I have tried to make clear in each case whether viewers were referring to one or another or discussing them as one and the same. Some viewers knew the name of the artist and even in these cases, the depicted Velazquez could not be assumed to be synonymous in discussions, with the Velazquez who painted the image.

I have often referred to the figures within the painting as 'characters'. The image is commonly accepted to represent actual people who existed and have names. However, not all viewers knew this or were necessarily bound, during their interactions, to who these people might 'really' be. 'Character' therefore seemed the most neutral term to use as it might equally apply to imagined, fictional or actual persons. Where there has been the need to specify a particular character, I have tried to signpost this and for extended discussions I have used the characters (as per historical depiction) names. Where viewers have used their own terms to refer to any particular figure I have retained these in their extracts regardless of accuracy. Again I have attempted to clearly indicate which character is meant in these instances.

Table 11 Study Two Summary of Master Themes and Themes

Master Theme 1: The Gaze	Master Theme 2: Meaning-making: Interpretative Content	Master Theme 3: The Self Conscious Viewer: Concerns with the 'right' way to view art
Intersubjectivity	Families and Social Structures	Getting it right
Implication	Juxtapositions and Tensions	Getting it real: the authenticity of my response

Master Theme 1: The Gaze

> *This painting is all about the gaze and who's looking at who, how that configures how we see ourselves – which I think is interesting. This is these characters, what does that mean to our sense of selves and me as a viewer as well. So it is about gaze. People are gazing.* (10,36) Linda

It is something we perhaps take for granted, but the concept which Linda introduces us to in this extract is actually worthy of exploration. Viewers perceive characters to look. These flat representations of humans, on a two-dimensional image set in the past, are perceived to direct their eye-line purposively and intentionally. This is not a simple biological response occurring, but a supreme work of imaginative dexterity. Furthermore, this looking "the gaze" is perceived as communicative and meaningful. Such interpretation has repercussions for our understanding of the way we construct fictional beings and for the way we perceive ourselves as viewers, as observers and as humans.

The master theme to be explored is "*all about the gaze and who's looking at who, how that configures how we see ourselves*". Within this, there are two aspects, Intersubjectivity, where experiences emphasise communication and reciprocal interactions of various kinds, and implication, where the gaze becomes more value-laden and judgemental. Linda's comments here encompass both notions as she remarks upon people looking at one another and also the way this generates a questioning air – who are those who do this looking?

When Linda describes the characters lookings, they are not passive or meandering. These are looking acts, deliberate, differentiated depending upon their target, interactive

intersubjective. Linda introduces the idea that the gaze may have an implicating, appraising quality. Viewers may be caused to self-reflect or even to be changed, in light of a figure's gaze; "*what does that mean to our sense of selves*". Additionally, they may be caused to become aware of and consider, their position in the role of image observer.

For Linda, the gaze has the ability to locate and apprehend her as a viewer. She identifies two senses of being, her sense of self and specifically *me as a viewer as well*. Such is the evocative quality of the gaze; it can provoke the receiver to consider two distinct roles or even selves, the person being looked upon and the person looking back at the painting.

Intersubjectivity

In the experience of viewing, how flat and two dimensional are these depicted characters? Apparently, they can complete looking acts which can affect the viewer, cause them to think or change them? Here William introduces the vivacity of the characters looking. In this case, he is referring to the painter depicted on the canvas rather than speaking metaphorically about the artist of the painting itself:

> *The painter, looking straight out to you, up, straight out,*
> *and that catches your gaze as he is looking at* **you***, as he is*
> *looking at you rather than a window or something. (9,8)*

William describes the allure he feels when he identifies a direct look from a character. It attracts his own gaze. The looking is perceived as being directed 'straight' out of the image towards him. It locates him, specifies him, acknowledges his presence and through doing so, establishes a basic connection between himself and the figure performing the looking act. The painter is looking right at William rather than anywhere else.

Owen also describes synergistic feelings in relation to figures in the painting whom he perceives to be looking at him:

> *I was a lot more engaged with the people in the painting*
> *and how they were looking at me and maybe what they were*
> *telling me and what I could tell them back (11,36)*

Here he expresses a sense of communication between himself and the characters, engendered by their directed gaze (*looking at me*). This gaze has a transmissivity. It allows the *people in the painting* to tell Owen things and supports a movement of

understandings. The gaze is directed, it extends from one animate being to another, moreover, it apprehends.

The Gaze not only establishes a relationship between figure and viewer, it also has an invigorating quality. Via the gaze, the figures in the image transform from inanimate to animate. The gaze for Owen brings about a perceived degree of sentience. In this form, the figures affect the target of their gaze and the receivers of their looking influence them in return. For the viewer, being the recipient of the gaze arouses issues of self-consciousness as well as those of other-consciousness. The intimacy of the relationship established is further demonstrated as Owen considers what he *could tell them back.* This encounter begins with something of a realisation of presences and selves. Consequently, information from both worlds may be passed between those involved.

It is not simply the observation of figures looking out of the image-world which resonates with viewers, participants emphasise the experience of being looked *at,* as Linda explains:

> *Two figures that strike me are almost looking directly at*
> *you are the princess and the dwarf – they're both looking*
> *directly at you and I think the expressions on their faces*
> *they're very humane expressions on both their faces*
> *actually and actually both show this great confessional…*
> *like the dwarf she doesn't seem that interested almost in*
> *what's going on around er… it's almost as if she's looking*
> *at you the viewer – (1,24)*

Linda here explains the engagement which occurs between her and the two characters who are "*both looking directly at you".* These direct gazes are seemingly felt to act as a conduit between the gazers transmitting actively developing understandings. As Linda describes the looks of Margaret Theresa and Maria, she first illustrates an establishment of commonality, the figures look directly at her. She sees in return what she describes as their humaneness. A sort of openness to interaction and sharing of truths. It is difficult not to make a religious association with the term 'confessional', which only functions to emphasise the depth of the connection Linda describes. The word also suggests Linda perceives the potential interaction to be one of openness and generosity. When one confesses they reveal often vignettes of great significance or importance (or sin?). The gaze here brings the characters to life not just as representations bound to a moment, but as continuous people with narratives to share.

The importance of the directed nature of the looking becomes clearer in the finale of the paragraph. As Linda considers the interaction further, another sense develops. The characters move beyond a personable openness to become inquisitive, they gaze through their own context to see her specifically as a viewer. The connection established via the gaze seemingly surmounts all other goings-on. Linda does not leave her viewing position nor do the characters leave their image-world, rather the gaze somehow recognises they are painting and viewer and joins them in any case. It both acknowledges and disregards ontological difference somehow bursting through the space between worlds.

Being seen is captivating for Sasha too, she explains:

> *I think the thing about someone looking out at you from a*
> *painting is about um. Drawing you in, um, you know*
> *making you feel there's a living person in there that could*
> *be looking back at you um and observing you as you are*
> *observing them (11,35)*

Here Sasha describes the enticing power of the gaze. She alludes to the particular draw of perceiving a sentient gaze originating from an image. This gaze is not random. The allure is attached to perceiving a look which is the return of one's own gaze, and the counteraction to one's action as a viewer. Sasha, like the other viewers, describes an animating power present in the gaze. The figure in the image is alive and reciprocating the viewers' eye contact. Furthermore, they too are a conscious, critical observer, a partner in an exchange of looks. Both viewer and figure are aware of one another, both are observer and observee.

The is a dynamic flow to this involvement. Through the mechanism of perceiving a character to be alive and looking, the figure in the image as a living person comes into being and conversely is able to perform such looking acts.

This intersubjective flourishing is enjoyable for Oliver:

> *I like it because it's a very human connection, he's looking*
> *at me, looking at him (2,31)*

Oliver experiences this engaging in reciprocated looking during his interaction with the painting. For him, it is a notably positive experience and it is so because of its 'human' quality. Again through the perception of an act of looking, the figure in the image has become a person, a fellow participant in a social exchange, a living subject just as

capable of viewing Oliver as he is of viewing them. The humanness of the connection is potent in its bi-polarity. Oliver's own human-ness is brought to light through a sense of connecting to a person in the image. This realised person is connecting to him, a fellow living being and they are both present in that moment.

All these interactions demonstrate the ability of the gaze to act as a bridge of consciousness between character and viewer. Aspects of this connection involve openness, communication and reciprocal acknowledgement. They involve the realisation not only of the figures as more than just depicted forms, but also the realisation of the viewer's position in this interaction and hence of themselves as viewer and fellow human alike.

Implication

There is an additional, potent, capability of the gaze. To be in the receipt of a character's looking may involve notions of questioning, appraisal, perhaps judgement or condemnation. Paul introduces this implicating twist to the gaze thus:

> *It's almost as if there are people looking out from the*
> *painting and there's a kind of silent question that quite a*
> *few of them seem to have, a stillness, I don't know sort of*
> *'what do you make of this?' Or maybe something more*
> *complicated than that but, veiled (9,26)*

In this extract, Paul describes his perception of characters' lookings and his experience of observing those looking acts. This dual involvement feels pregnant with an energy that potentiates further engagement and animates the figures in the frame. He tells us "*it's almost as if there are people looking out*" alluding to the life breathing quality resident in the perception of a character's gaze. Through their gaze characters become 'people', real and alive rather than figures brushed onto a canvas. The looking as Paul interprets it, is not arbitrary. Characters look 'out', their gaze is directed. Seemingly their looking, for Paul, possesses an intentionality.

As in many of the aforementioned extracts, the gaze has the power to locate the viewer, to specify their position as a viewer. Paul also senses something additional, veiled, complicated. In this extract, the Gaze is interpreted in the form of an oblique question *"what do you make of this?"*. It is targeted towards a specified 'you'; the question is not '*what is this all about?*'. As the characters are granted a personhood through the gaze, so the person they gaze upon is also brought into view. And the viewer is not only

looked at by their counterpart in the image, their interaction has an appraising, maybe abrasive aspect. The viewer is involved in a communication and the characters have a stillness, waiting for a response.

The Gaze has potential beyond simply that of a tether between viewer and character. It not only establishes a connection, but communiqué of different forms also travel through this bond. Oliver recounts:

> *I can see the painter who is looking at me, trying to say 'are*
> *you interested in what I'm trying to tell you?'. (1,9)*

Oliver, through the perception of an active directed looking, also interprets an appraising aspect of the gaze. The gaze contains and can transmit ideas. But not only is the artist attempting to communicate something to him, he is also questioning Oliver's interest in his teachings. In Oliver's interpretation here, there is an air of superiority associated with the artist. He has something of value to say and as such his gaze has the potential to belittle, should he see Oliver might not be ready to engage.

The Gaze here has allowed Oliver to attribute the artist in the image with the possession of his own mental life and faculties. He has the ability to interpret, consider and perhaps judge others' (Oliver's) mental states.

So far, we have seen the way in which The Gaze can breathe new subjectivity into both character and viewer. That it can bring to life fictional characters and accord them with their own active minds. In turn, this allows the viewer to be located in the viewing experience. Via the gaze the viewer can be implicated, in a reciprocal social interaction and, importantly, this may occur in circumstances not always of their choosing.

Paul further explores the way that the viewer may be required to play an active part in the viewing, with potentially potent consequences:

> *The people looking out, various people looking out er they*
> *seem to be inviting a response erm particularly the painter*
> *in it.... the little girl it might be you know looking you know*
> *'aren't I pretty, aren't I behaving well?' etcetera. The*
> *painter is, it's a bit more not nastily but a bit more*
> *confrontational I think. He's sort of caught in er the act of*
> *painting.... And his... he's got the 'ah yes'... (8,22)*

Paul also describes the characters in the image as 'people'. They look *out* from the inner image world traversing the boundary of the canvas. To Paul, they invite a response and this at first appears to be somewhat a friendly request for acknowledgement. The little girl desires her appearance and good behaviour to be recognised. In spite of her childish (as Paul perceives it) nature, she is capable of an awareness of her audience and of considering their potential reactions toward her.

The painter's looking act similarly is interpreted by Paul as behest to mentally react. He attributes a *bit more confrontational* aspect to this interaction. Interestingly he talks about feeling as if he has caught the painter 'in the act' of painting. A turn of phrase that suggests deviance or nonconformity. The painter's response to this is then a somewhat guilty *ah yes* which could be interpreted as either resigned or belligerent. Why might a painter in the act of painting be considered unorthodox? Is it related to the idea that he is being seen by his viewer?

Owen also discusses the shades of deviance which may be associated with looking in his interpretation of the gaze of one of the maid girls:

> She has a quite, almost accusative gaze as if saying 'Well
> why…. Why are you staring at me so much?' (11,17)

The notion of a figure in a painting being concerned with being overly stared at is really quite powerful in its nonsensical nature. A figure created to be looked at regards her onlookers in an accusatory fashion. She is at once constituted through this looking and also scathing of it. Owen uses the terms 'staring' 'so much', which lends the looking act an intrusive or improper feel. Some boundary has been overstepped in the same way the artist has been *caught* in the act of painting.

It is an interesting idea that the figures in the image, who only exist because they are looked at, might dictate the guidelines by which they are viewed, and, paradoxically, that they might do so through being looked at and looking back. The implicating aspect of the gaze is clearly potent. It may assess and judge, recognise the viewer's faults and even beguile them into impropriety.

In these considerations of intersubjectivity and implication, we have seen that the gaze can be multiply and dynamically laden. We have seen that the gaze can be felt as a warm human connection and equally as a more rousing challenging aspect. That it can call into question aspects of the self and implicate the self as a viewer. It can locate

subjectivity and reflect its shared aspects. It can animate characters and allow them to critically observe their observers in turn.

The gaze perhaps could be likened to a sensuous pathway by which consciousnesses and their objects are brought into being and exchanged. Characters in the image that we might otherwise describe as fictional, are experienced as sentient persons with mental worlds and the ability to produce actions with consequences. They have ideas about what the viewers are thinking and secrets viewers can only guess at.

Master Theme 2: Meaning-making: Interpretative Content

This master theme concerns the content of the image, the viewers' interpretations of what they saw. The master theme is divided into two themes based around the content of the viewers' interpretations. These are Families and Social Structures and Juxtapositions and Tensions.

Families and Social Structures

William describes the sense of family he experiences looking at the painting:

> *And this could be the father perhaps and he's you know*
> *commissioned to make this this port… group… this group*
> *portrait of his family…. Um there is something about status*
> *about it and a real sense of that… of um… that these are*
> *people from a certain point in history, background and a*
> *certain status and placing that through painting (2,3)*

William uses the term "*through painting*" to describe how he feels art is used to convey meaning. The word *through* has a double meaning here. It can be understood in the sense of use as a tool and also to mean to channel or pass through. This is a useful way to help us think about a special thickness that the interpretations presented by the viewers possess as they give accounts of the narrative and metaphorical content of the image.

There are indeed a litany of throughs in William's description. A multitude of boundaries are crossed and communications passed. The status of the family in the image has been channelled through time using the tool of paint. It has also passed through the canvas physically. The boundary between painter and viewer has been passed through, as has the boundary between the world of the image and that of the viewer. Ideas, narratives and metaphors are transmitted both using paint and via paint.

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William's interpretation locates a family within their wider social context. He identifies a father figure and the social class and historical context of his household. He extends the narrative he has created for the family, backwards to into the before the painting was created, imagining "*he's you know commissioned to make this this port… group… this group portrait of his family…..*". Here, characters exist beyond the boundary of the painting physically and temporally, passing through time and through the canvas, whilst the painting is used as a tool to permanently document their status and place it in the annals of history. William's description is multi-layered. It takes into account multiple temporalities and social positions, both inside and outside the image. This gives his interpretation a special thickness, one which is present too in the other viewers' accounts.

When considering the content of the interpretations, issues of social status were flagged as key by William and this was true for the majority of the other viewers. In the first theme, the impact of The Gaze between viewer and character was discussed. Looks within the painting were also perceived as meaningful. Viewers interpreted a story of family relations, intimated interpersonally but embedded in a story of wider social significance. Here Gwen also interprets one of the characters in the image to be a father:

> *Again I think father figure looking wistfully back so you do*
> *feel there's this sort of maybe change happening in how the*
> *family is perceived and what the family is erm slightly*
> *moving away from the former court sort of aristocrat scene*
> *to a more bourgeois family (5,35)*

For Gwen like William, it is the figure in the doorway at the back of the room. She describes this figure as "*looking wistfully back"* as though he is leaving the setting somewhat mournfully. Gwen expands this metaphorically, to represent the leaving behind of an old mode of familial life and the introduction of a new regime.

There are layers of interpretative work that Gwen is doing here. She is conceptualising a narrative about the people in the room and imagining how they relate to one another. She talks about the father 'figure', not 100% sure of each person's role. She is also thinking about the physical mechanics of the situation, the character is leaving the room rather than entering it. In this way, she is taking a two-dimensional, flat representation of figures and not only orienting them in three-dimensional space but giving them momentum and temporal dynamism. In addition to this, Gwen is imagining the demeanour of this man, his wistfulness and furthermore, considering what that feeling

may be related to, in terms of wider society. In Gwen's interpretation, there is a social metaphor delivered through the familial narrative.

Like William, Gwen is imagining and managing many concepts at once. From the private emotional feelings of the father character and the physical direction of his movement on a flat canvas, all the way through to a higher-order social allegory. Her interpretation is rich and thick with apprehensions and ideas and these are manipulated simultaneously and interactively. Oliver's account related considerations of developing family structure too:

> *It's capturing a moment in the erm how do you say – sort of*
> *generation or evolution of their family and they could be*
> *wealthy, you know, landowners, to monarchy to whoever.*
> *So there's something they they're trying to say about the*
> *new generation I reckon – moving forward. (9,18)*

Oliver also recounts an impression of momentum and change. Whereas Gwen saw a departure, Oliver sees an advance. His interpretation is of generation and evolution. He sees the image as a description of the role of the family in relation to wider society and the progression of a family in social standing. The new generation is new not only by age but by the way they relate to the world and society around them.

Not all interpretations of social significance were so oblique. For Jay, the painting suggested a direct comment by Velazquez upon the status of the Spanish Royals at that time.

> *Placing the dog so centrally as well. You know, from a*
> *modern perspective it almost does feel like a satirical*
> *comment. The King and Queen at the back in a a mirror –*
> *the dog even in front of the Infanta… and … you know I'm*
> *not saying position expresses rank but somehow you feel*
> *that that should be more somehow more in the background*
> *to express prominence and precedence but it's not… (7,35)*

Jay sees the image as a piece of critical observation about the Spanish Monarchy, much like today's political cartoons. He interprets the positioning of certain figures relative to others as a form of mockery. The dog is at the front of the image usurping the princess, whilst the King and Queen are a mere reflection in the background. He simultaneously recognises the hierarchical roles of characters in the image, as they would have been at

the time of the painting, and that *he* is viewing it from a particular point in time. The interplay between these perspectives, his own modern lens, and the content of the image created historically, and in addition, his awareness of these, overlap seamlessly without disrupting his viewing.

Jay's interpretation is not without nuance. Rather than relying solely the physical position of the figures which appears too overt "*I'm not saying position expresses rank*" he also perceives a tone or sense of, from the image "*but somehow you feel.*" as though some other part of the image, or part of the experience of looking at the image, has contributed to this interpretation. Importantly this is not one that is explicitly visible on the canvas. This type of responding reoccurred in other viewers' interpretations though the subjects and content varied. As William suggests:

> *I mean kids from this this era from a family that obviously*
> *has land and property erm have children so highly dressed*
> *almost like ornaments there's a real ornamental feel about*
> *them (6,19)*

William describes the children in the image as having an ornamental feel about them. He expresses the notion that they are on display. Primacy is given to expressing their decorative nature and their appearance rather than their identities or potential as human beings. He relates this sense to the family's wealth, ownership and property, as though the children too are objects to be possessed. They are "*highly dressed*" to be presented as symbols of this same wealth.

William uses the term "*feel*", in his description. The children are elegantly dressed but there is something additional which gives him a sense of their ornamental nature. Like the elements which Jay could identify as meaningful only from a sense of, there is also something, or things, in the painting which give William a 'sense of'. And again these things are not clearly identifiable. The image is not directly descriptive of everything that the viewer comes to understand from it. Oliver also describes a 'feel' he infers from the painting:

> *There is er a painting of a couple in the background so*
> *some reference to historic relations of the scene I guess. Er*
> *the little girl is being dressed or gotten ready for something*
> *perhaps her um what would then be a kind of christening or*
> *something. um there's a rather uglier [laughs] kind of*

daughter or relation looking at me possibly saying 'it could
have been me'...

Er there's also a guy in the back in a dark dress or suit or
clothing rather, again there's some kind of symbolism erm
so there's some preparations going on I'm not entirely sure
what but it's important and it's important the moment is
captured so yes (1,24)

Oliver interprets a family transition deliberately set within historical reference points. He identifies personal narratives and inner monologues of characters embedded in their wider social context. The 'little girl' in his reading is being prepared for some kind of ceremonial observation of a rite of passage, or a conversion from one period in life to the next. Her sister is jealous and communicating this to Oliver with an intimacy discussed in the previous theme The Gaze. It is a personal communication and is an interpretation of her inner thoughts.

On a more public level, Oliver interprets the possibility that this transition is significant for the family beyond the immediacy of their personal relationships. The 'historic relations' of the scene are referenced along with the potential importance of the moment being captured for posterity.

In this extract the temporality that Oliver is concurrently imagining is complex. The direct communicative look he is receiving from the "ugly" sister is perceived to be occurring in the present moment for both the character and himself. Oliver is somehow reconciling the idea that they ostensibly exist at different times and yet are communicating in the now. Oliver also references history as relative to the time of the image when he discusses the painting within the painting. Seemingly, so accepted as vital is the world of the image, that referencing multiple time-points on multiple timelines, happens naturally as part of the interpretation.

It is also interesting that Oliver can recognise elements of the image to be symbolic and important without knowing exactly what they symbolise. Elements of painting can be felt to carry meaning, even when the viewer does not know what that meaning is. What is not readily visible may still be a strongly perceived component of the image. This is something also suggested by Beth:

So it's all set out to look wealthy and um well cared for and
precious to the point of a child being particularly a girl

child in those terms, being um a commodity. Um because
she'd have to be married off to someone else, with wealth
and power. (1,35)

In Beth's description, the children have more than an ornamental feel. She imagines the girl child in the centre of the image as regarded as a valuable item to be transacted via marriage, owned by her parents and sold "*off to someone else*". The painting in Beth's description begins to sound like an advertisement displaying the attributes of the child and her background and upbringing. Beth here is imagining the motivation behind the composition of the image before its creation, for a desired outcome scheduled after the events it portrays.

She is also interpreting a double meaning to the image itself. First, of a child beautifully dressed to show her reputable upbringing and background. The wealth of her family and her potential as a wife for a rich or high-class husband. Second, an image demonstrating objectification and ownership, captivity within opulence. These meanings are counteractive so not both explicitly depicted. For Beth to interpret the two, some elements must be inferred, intuited or felt. Again, the image must in some way be understood to contain elements which are not directly visible.

Understandings of non-depicted elements, senses of, intuitions, tones. The ability of viewers to identify symbolism in the image, where they do not know what is symbolised, or importance when they do not know what specifically is important, suggests some special type of interpretable components are perceived as the viewers engage with the image. These interminglings of sensed and understood provide texture and richness to the engagements, fleshing out what is suggested by any concept of singularly visual input. The image as engaged with by the viewer contains some almost primal sensuous contours, those aspects which convey what viewers intuit and sense, but cannot explicitly see.

In interacting with the image, features and properties assumed to circumscribe our everyday environment become altered. Rather than employing magic realism, as per written fiction, where the fantastic or mythical are interwoven with everyday life, here viewers' experiences suggest what we might call a 'flexible naturalism'. Within the special thickness of their interpretations, layering and interweaving of time, place, locations in space and different contextual worlds occurs. During such experiences the natural attitude is unchallenged, nothing strange occurs but its laws nevertheless are altered. We can move between incompatible places and different 'realities' and time

becomes no longer strictly chronological. We can see through walls and look behind objects.

Oliver, for example, did not describe any narratives involving time travel yet he did feel he communicated with the characters in the image, and that the world in the historical painting was brought to life. Indeed, interpretations incorporated a fluid temporality and viewers simultaneous considered multiple time-points on multiple timelines. This is not perceived as irregular but was instead incorporated into the interpretations with ease. Gwen described a man turning to look back at a room from a doorway at the back of the image. She did not specifically or explicitly see the image as erecting to form a three-dimensional structure to allow this to occur, the surface she was looking at remained flat, and yet the figure was able to look back through space.

Contradictions and juxtapositions have not gone undiscussed in the preceding themes. Here again the need to describe tensions occurs. We see how an act we often take for granted, that we create dimensional space and time in viewing paintings, is actually a complex imaginative act. And by the exploration of what this involves we find viewers accepting contradictions involving the world around them and how they relate to it. When we view art, naturalism is magically altered. Time works differently, space works differently. Our relationship with what we assume about the qualities of the world changes. The horizon of how we are in the world is different but the same.

Juxtapositions and Tensions

Much of the viewers' interpretations were directed towards the portrayal of the two central female characters, the Infanta Margaret Theresa and Maria Bárbola one of the two members of the court entourage with Dwarfism. Margaret Theresa is the blonde figure in the white dress and Maria, brunette, stands second from the right in green. Viewers interpreted the adjacent portrayal of these two figures as meaningful. This theme therefore begins with an exploration of the interpretations of this dyad and is introduced by Jay:

> *By putting these in direct juxtaposition he's asking us*
> *'which do you prefer?' And why? And what does that say*
> *about you? (10,20)*

Jay saw the pairing of Margaret Theresa and Maria as a provocative question directed from the artist toward the viewer. We get the sense that, in Jay's interpretation, that Velazquez is using painting as a means to communicate, to provoke, to speak through.

Jay seems to feel Velazquez' eye is critical. In his interpretation, the artist is challenging the viewer to think about which of two figures they find more appealing and what they might represent.

Jay suggests Velazquez is making a point about the power of appearance to prejudice judgement. Or as a provocation regarding one's inner responses to the visual aspects of disability. The viewer is encouraged, as Jay perceives it, to question their reaction should they recognise the contrast they are being shown. There is a somewhat entrapping flavour to this exercise. The viewer is being encouraged not only to recognise a contrast in the image but by doing so, to acknowledge a contradiction in themselves. If the viewer understands the painter's point, he has implicated himself in its meaning.

This is a tension Kitty also alludes to:

> *Um but they've got this front and centre [indicates Maria]*
> *um or maybe that's completely my projection and it was*
> *totally fine um erm and I suppose there's, it's awful really it*
> *sort of brings out your own er sort of er prejudice but*
> *there's something disturbing about the perfect finery dress*
> *with the face which is not really very fair but its jarring for*
> *some reason um*
>
> *That's probably why it's a bit challenging that's probably*
> *why I find it difficult because she got just as much right to*
> *sit there as this girl [Margaret Theresa]*
>
> *Int: Yeah*
>
> *You know of course she does! (5,3)*

Kitty also identifies meaning surrounding the Margaret Maria pairing. For her, the depiction is a source of disquiet and disconcertion. Although she examines the figures relative to one another, the contrasts she perceives are not limited to those found between the two characters.

Kitty struggles with the depiction of the character was dwarfism in "*the perfect finery dress*". She describes this as "*jarring*" suggesting a clash or conflict, one of appearances or benefaction. She also feels that Maria is placed unusually centrally in contradiction with the accepted normalcy of the times. Looking at the image we might question how

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centrally Maria is actually placed and consider how this might relate to the strength of Kitty's feeling.

Kitty draws a comparison between Maria and Margaret Theresa and their rights to their positions. She explains that intellectually she advocates both are just as deserving. This provokes a further sense of contradiction and discomfort as Kitty's instinctive response was to feel disturbed by the placement of a woman with dwarfism in a position suggestive of equality relative to an Infanta or Princess. The painting has exposed a contrast in Kitty between two reactions. One an instinctive disturbance by Maria being given equivalent placement and apparel, the other her belief in the two characters' equality.

Juxtaposition and the resultant difficulties it could present also figured in Beth's response:

> *For a modern viewer to juxtapose this quote perfect quote*
> *which is how she's being portrayed, um next to an imperfect*
> *in their view person, is um is quite er….. horrible really.*
> *Um if you see it in a broader context they're both being*
> *commodified, she's the possession of this girls parents, the*
> *woman with dwarfism erm almost just as much as the little*
> *girl herself because she's going to have to be married off to*
> *some character.*

> *She's got no more free will perhaps even than this woman*
> *um so when you see it like that it's really it's a picture of*
> *chains, of a very pretty prison (3,13)*

Beth's initial reaction to the juxtaposition, as she perceives it, of perfect and imperfect faces, is one of emotion. She finds the contrast, and its purposeful nature "horrible".

Beth then offers a second account of the relative narratives of the two figures from a "broader context". In this second account, Maria is still owned by the family and in servitude, but Margaret Theresa is now in a less favourable position. Instead of the face of perfection, she becomes a figurative commodity, chattel in a marriage cum business agreement. Both are the family's material assets in what she calls "*a picture of chains, of a very pretty prison*". The two are now more similar than opposing.

Beth's awareness of her position as a modern viewer allows her to explore how this might influence her viewing. She is able to contrast her modern lens to alternative

interpretations taking into account other contexts. Her initial emotional reaction was a response to differences between the characters, her second reaction, in contrast, finds their resemblances.

Linda also describes the depiction of Margaret Theresa and Maria as a deliberate juxtaposition:

> *And about how is disability approached and treated and everything else. You do begin to think about that and you're thinking you look at this figure and she seems questioning and self-possessed as I say but, what in a strange way you think was this a good position to be in as part of the retinue of the royal Spanish family who may have had her as part of their status or whatever, but it actually I don't think this painting is diminished whoever this person might be and I think that's a real triumph of this painting.*
>
> *[…] I think they are both in their own ways, those two faces are both very beautiful faces and they are position so they are juxtaposed and I think that's deliberate. (12,26)*

In Linda's interpretation, the beauty in the faces we might infer suggests an underlying beauty in character or person. Here a sense of universality is being depicted through the juxtaposition of differential beauty.

She apposes what she sees as the self-possessed expression on the face of Maria with her role in the Spanish Court. In spite of her situation, Linda conjectures that such a position might not be wholly negative, inserting the caveat "*in a strange way*". She is aware that this view itself contrasts to her own usual opinion of such circumstances. Not only is there a person, self-possessed and independent, in a situation where they are in servitude. It is also possible that the viewer might feel this is a good situation for them, in contradiction to their normal reaction to such imprisonment.

Linda further reflects on these concepts of contrast, in terms of how they impact the quality and morality of the painting explaining "*actually I don't think this painting is diminished whoever this person might be*". She suggests that such questions have relevance for those involved both at the time of the painting's inception and viewers in the present, like Beth able to reflect beyond the context of her modern lens. The pairing

of Margaret Theresa and Maria again caused the viewer challenges and prompt the exploration of contradiction. A recurring schematic.

The dyad of the two figures was interpreted as meaningful. It provoked exploration of contrasts and contradictions both within the image and within the viewer. Viewer's sometimes responded in ways which challenged their own beliefs or morals, the image exposed the possibility that they simultaneously held opposing positions. Viewers were also able to see from contrasting contextual lenses, to reconcile different forms of beauty presented to them, to propose personally challenging narratives and interpretations.

Indeed, the accounts of juxtaposition and tension extended beyond the individuality of the two female characters. Also suggested were slightly more abstract discussions of ideas of deviance and transgression.

The depicting and then undermining, contradicting or contravening, of formal structures or stereotypes, was an interpretation common to many of the viewers. The consequences of this converged and diverged about the central theme. The image could be interpreted as one of transgression or of progression. Both sinister and revolutionary. Jay further explains:

> *Cos we're used to things like people who are influenced*
> *afterwards like Goya and Picasso who did put deliberate*
> *ugly figures in their paintings in order to express some kind*
> *of grotesqueness and consequently the dwarf does express a*
> *feeling of grotesqueness which is being kind of reflected on*
> *the monarchy itself*

> *But of course even if we just leave that aside and I feel kind*
> *of horrible expressing that (7,11)*

Here Jay interprets the painting as both deviant and progressive. If we recall from previous discussions, he had created a narrative which involved his views on the Spanish monarchy at the point in history represented in the painting. The image for him was a political comment, perhaps with satirical tones, on the unfairness of a ruling family born into power and wealth. Here he discusses the inclusion of the character with dwarfism, as a form of grotesquery presented to unsettle and disturb. A deviance from the norm. He explains how other artists who followed Velazquez were influenced by his work and as such he paved the way for subsequent painters. There is a sense of

deviance also in that Jay regards the treatment of Maria as a reflection of the Monarchies ugliness or grotesquery. Velazquez is using the image to make a political comment and one not in line with the status quo of the time.

Jay also reminds us that our norm as art-viewers is to see those who were once thought of as 'grotesques' included in images and that it is because of Velazquez that this has become more usual. At the time of his painting, including such a face in an image may have been far more radical. Finally, Jay himself feels deviant in expressing notions of ugliness and grotesquery in relation to a character with dwarfism. He says "*I feel kind of horrible expressing that.*" describing a clear discomfort. The discomfort, deviance and radicalism in Jay's reading are contextually embedded and he adeptly points out the relevant personal and historical loci.

In Kitty's interpretation, the depiction of Maria represents an individual deviance as well as a social one.

> *I think this one is kind of is is sort of you know the spectre*
> *of illness which I think kind of goes [indicates her*
> *abdomen] you know it's the stuff of night it's the deepest*
> *stuff of nightmares you know the sort of black it's the sort of*
> *I think it's quite sad…….. it runs very deep in people the*
> *that sort of thing um the fear of I you know sort of of*
> *disability and illness and corruption and disease erm er*
> *scares people […] and I've always found that figure*
> *troubling and then I've been troubled by the fact I'm*
> *troubled by it and thought that's horrible and shallow and*
> *mean of me do you see what I mean (11,19)*

Kitty feels a sinister aspect to Maria's presence in a palpably visceral sense. She describes her as "the spectre of illness", the ghost of ill health or disease which won't pass on but instead remains to haunt the living. We get a strong impression of how entrenched this feeling is for Kitty, she calls it the fear which "*runs very deep*". There is the sense of an emotional memory buried very far down inside and hard to fathom.

Kitty suggests that this is something not particular to her but common to humans in general. She considers this fear to be something primal and related to our more base or basic responses. She indicates her abdomen she talks, the place of gut instinct and suspicion. Like Jay, not only is the figure herself troubling, Kitty finds her own reaction

to be a source of much discomfort and ill-ease. Deviance makes for difficult viewing not only in and of itself but also because of the discomfort one experiences in response to the feelings it provokes.

There is an interesting contradiction here. Kitty chastises herself for her response to the character with dwarfism calling herself mean and "*shallow*" and yet recognises her response stems from what she calls "*the deepest stuff of nightmares*" something profoundly rooted within. Linda's response is equally as affect-laden and affecting:

> *So you get a very sort of maternal emotion with this one*
> *character [Maria], which is very unsettling as she has such*
> *self-possession (8,1)*

> *So there's an emotional threat, there's something*
> *threatening about this picture as well. You're not quite sure*
> *where the threat is coming from. Is it coming from me, is it*
> *coming from these people, (8,28)*

> *And actually I think it's also because it's not just about*
> *protective, it's about who are you, are you challenging, are*
> *you like me? They are, in some ways both these faces say*
> *we don't need protection but it's that sort of innocence.*
> *You're not sure, are you just so innocent you're not looking*
> *back towards these characters in the background (16,11)*

Linda similarly interprets a sinister narrative thread in the image. Again we get a sense of contradictory emotional reactions to this element. Linda responds to Maria's presence with a "*maternal emotion*" and then feels disturbed by this as she interprets the character as conveying independence and "*self-possession*". The maternal emotion then seems inappropriate and contradictory.

Again similarly, the sense of emotional threat Linda describes is free-floating and illusive. She is unsure whether it is attributable to characters in the image or perhaps herself. Linda describes a feeling of unease and discomfort, but the source is mysterious. In Linda's interpretation, there is a continuous sense of searching or grasping for the correct emotional reaction. Of trying to work out the appropriate way to interact with innocence. And so as an effect of this, trying to ensure oneself as a viewer is not an assailant or threat. The interpretation of something sinister in the image does not come without a cost to the self.

The transgressive aspects viewers interpreted in the image were not always experienced in a negative manner. For Paul they provoked an alternative response:

> *I'll have much more awareness now of this um, seems*
> *ridiculous, the back of the huge frame that is to our left, that*
> *is something is being painted er and then the the the*
> *darkness above and um… And then that little central frame*
> *with two people looking out at us with I don't know whether*
> *it's a great swathe of curtain or a great blaze of colour as*
> *to what that is ….But I would want to come back to it if you*
> *roll it up so I would say it was inexhaustible, this particular*
> *painting! (13,11)*

Paul found the hidden aspects of the painting a potentiality. The unseen content of the artist's easel was a huge area of secret possibility. The blackness of the top half was not fear-inducing, but exciting. The device at the centre of the image, containing the two figures, was one of dynamic enthral. Paul interpreted either a "great swathe" of curtain conjuring images of a matador's cape being whirled or a "great blaze" of colour the image alight with intrigue and passion.

For Paul, ambiguity was not a source of discomfort but instead was part of the enjoyment and the appeal in the viewing experience. He found the mysterious, unorthodox, unusual, elements of the image to give it an infinite appeal and create an experience of not knowing he would want to return to again and again. What of the cost to the self and experiences of discomfort, other viewers described when engaging with transgressive like elements in the painting? He further explains:

> *It invites you to be in a mysterious place and the mystery is*
> *part of the enjoyment, very much so, being in the dark*
> *looking towards the light and being asked to imagine or*
> *given hints at what is going on there, although you can*
> *never know… (9,3)*

Here we feel there is something of a relinquishing of control. The cost is being in the dark, not knowing, accepting the idea that "*you can never know…*" answers to questions which might arise during your experience. Instead of seeking out a fitting emotional or intellectual response, Paul enters a place of mystery and experiences enjoyment at the cost of certainty and answers.

A sense of adventure, mystery and of giving oneself up to exploration, was an idea identified in other viewers' interpretations more explicitly. Floyd described it thus:

> *I would have thought initially that that guy [in the doorway]*
> *like I said commissioned it and it, you know, would make*
> *sense it's kind of a little bit of er I guess a left-field play, to*
> *also include an artist supposedly painting something else in*
> *the painting. That would I guess for the time have been er er*
> *a pretty wild pretty adventurous pretty inventive. (8,9)*

Floyd here acknowledges the historical context of the image. As discussed previously he is doing the interesting layered ideation, of imagining a potentially fictional character within the image world, at a time before the image was created. For Floyd, the motivations and actions of this person are exciting and quite radical. They are new and there is a sense of exhilaration associated with the compositional decisions made. The decisions made concerning the creation of the image and its content and composition are unorthodox and "inventive". Rule-breaking is seen as progressive, a sentiment echoed by Sasha:

> *And the, the figure right in in the door in the background*
> *he's got that kind of the Spanish explorer types, you know*
> *you see paintings of Spanish conquistador types with their,*
> *with that kind of costume (3,24)*

Sasha and Nora also reflect upon a sense of exploration associated with this same character. For them, this adventurousness expresses itself within the image world in their interpretation of the character's vocation and personal narrative. Sasha calls him a conquistador. Someone who sets out to discover and conquer new territory. Nora echoes this flavour of progress and new world excitement:

> *The people who are interesting and who are not just kind of*
> *erm - the royal family, are just to be be looked at aren't*
> *they or are symbols, are the people who've got lives like the*
> *painter, this guy whose obviously going off on a voyage,*
> *perhaps he's been sent off on a mission by the royal family*
> *or something, he's obviously very important figure and he's*
> *got a very, he's going out the door so he's not stuck in this*
> *quite claustrophobic sort of courtly kind of situation (13,1)*

Nora sees this character as escaping the status quo. Again an explorer he represents freedom, difference and exploration. The unknown again is exciting and interesting whilst the norm is repressive and "*claustrophobic*". Like the image itself, viewers' interpretations of transgression, progressiveness and a sense of deviance and rebellion were reflected upon from different perspectives. Sometimes they were located within a character, sometimes within the formalism and deviation from, the artistic techniques used.

Viewers are apparently capable of perceiving and positioning themselves and the art and artwork within a social contract as they engage with it. In the case of Las Meninas, they interpret the image as demonstrative of a norm, with an element of deviance or defiance interlaced. The specific narrative of this dual interpretation depended upon the individual viewer. For some, it was a sense of the emotionally sinister, for others a political challenge to the status quo, and others a sense of progressive adventure.

In the previous theme which explored authenticity, a desire for a pure un-influenced response to artwork was discussed. Interestingly here some viewers seem to have found it. Often reactions to deviant or transgressive elements were reported as instinctive and irrepressible. These were then followed by self-chastisement and regret. Pure and raw responses to artworks were experienced, but perhaps not quite in the form that viewers expect or desire.

Sasha's comment which appears a little removed from the previous discussion actually deftly summarises what is key to it:

> *So it's this mixture of the formal rules and the kind of*
> *breaking of those rules (4,16)*

Sasha describes a contrast literally embedded in the composition of the painting and also born out in what it may represent and describe. Of through juxtaposing elements, making the viewer aware of rules and stereotypes and then breaking those rules and challenging the ideas which construct or 'frame' them.

Master Theme 3: The self-conscious viewer: concerns with the 'right' way to view art.

The Master Theme discussed here concerns the demands and expectations viewers apparently place on their viewing encounters. How should we go about viewing art? How should we meaningfully engage? What should we feel? What should we

understand? These are questions which appear to constantly influence viewers. In the following discussion, ideas are expressed concerning the form viewing should best take, how viewing should feel and what 'understanding' a painting might mean. Crucially, viewers describe a constant interaction between the tangled values of 'subjective' internal responses and 'objective' externally ascribed meanings.[7] Viewers discuss how they want to approach an image, the information they want to bring to their encounter and ultimately ask the question, is there a right way to look at a painting?

Getting it right

This subtheme captures two concepts which emerged from the data inherently interlinked. Ideas about the right way to approach art-viewing and ideas about right or wrong understandings (or answers). Much of this discussion concerned the role of established meanings and knowledge of paintings. Many of the viewers reflected upon the influence of such information in light of their (ideal) responses to art. They wondered to what degree, when and if, contextual information should influence viewing.

Here Owen introduces us to the issues involved:

> *I want to look at the painting when I'm in a museum for*
> *instance I don't want to read the little thing at the side, I*
> *will eventually but I want I don't want I want my …*
> *judgement to be prejudiced but at the same time it can give*
> *me grounding in general*
>
> *I certainly want to know when this was painted… who it*
> *was painted for, who these people are, um… possibly why*
> *he painted it (5,10)*

Owen describes the idea of approaching an artwork, in the first instance, in a state of unknowing or impartiality. He suggests that this is preferable to familiarising oneself with information regarding the image prior to viewing. Indeed, there is seemingly a value judgement associated with the latter. Owen describes the information typically supplied with museum exhibits as "*the little thing at the side*" a physical description of course, but with additional tones of disparagement.

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[7] The terms 'objective' and 'subjective' are used here not to designate 'fact' from 'opinion'. Rather they should be taken to suggest external commonly agreed upon perspectives and internal personal ideas and interpretations.

Owen does, however, consider some information potentially useful. This is of a 'factual' nature - details of historical context for example. He is less sure of the desirability when the information begins to (arguably) rely more on interpretation "possibly why he painted it". Owen explains that he wants to exercise his judgement, unprejudiced. We might infer from this, that there is some esteem associated with an un-aided individual response. And yet he uses the term 'judgement' (rather than say feelings or reaction) as though there is some existing measure of correctness applicable.

Gwen discusses this interplay in more detail:

> *I think I in some ways prefer to think about it yourself. So I have to say sometimes in art galleries when there's just too much information[…]– I really don't like that I particularly if you can't help reading words because that's what you do and then you you're just really cross that you've done that so I prefer…*

> *[…] Obviously there's a balance its, it is useful sometimes to have some knowledge and often obviously name and then the period and even a little bit but on the whole I would prefer thinking well actually, the painter painted it and you the viewer …. You know it's up for you to do the work to interpret it and look at it and imagine it I think… (7,1)*

Gwen similarly distinguishes between approaching an image having familiarised oneself with associated information and what she feels is the converse "*to think about it yourself*". She too expresses a preference for one mode of viewing over another. Again there are suggestions of value placed on different types of engagement.

Like Owen, Gwen identifies factual information which she feels is acceptable to access. Overriding this allowance, however, is a sense of some demand made of the viewer and viewing. Gwen talks about the difficulty she finds in resisting reading information provided, and the regret she feels when she fails to avoid it. She further explains '*the painter painted it and you the viewer You know it's up for you to do the work'.* It is as if there is a requirement for effort to be made in order to fittingly respond to the work. Indeed, Gwen suggests that interpreting an image should involve an active and effortful engagement. The viewer does the *work*. They look, interpret and imagine. Doing this

work is seemingly something worthwhile and important for Gwen as part of her viewing experience.

Linda similarly places value on independently evaluating art:

> *I think it is useful to know who this is painted by, when it is painted, the context, but I think actually come to it first and then the information – and I do it myself. I'm not being a snob about this but you go around galleries and you see people reading the information rather than looking at the bloody thing and I sometimes do that rather than just say, look at it and what is your reaction to that? And I think this is a painting that calls out for you to just encounter it. (13,15)*

Linda's delineation of approaches to art-viewing is more pronounced. Engaging with the painting first and accessing information after is preferred. However, Linda is simultaneously in agreement with, and wary of, such 'rules', explaining "*and I do it myself. I'm not being a snob about this but*". Such an attitude to viewing is both valuable and potentially overly judgemental and elitist (or snobby).

Here is an example of a double-edged sword that art viewers seem to struggle with. Linda has ambitions to view paintings in a way which she feels is superior. But there is also the implication or undertone in her discussion, that there is something unreasonable in this standard.

More clearly, Linda's extract suggests that she aspires to a particular art-viewing approach. She tells us "*look at it and what is your reaction to that*?" The idea of interacting with the image uninfluenced by outside knowledge is privileged over first pursuing extraneous information. There is again the sense of some kind of intrinsic value related to coming to one's own personal conclusions about an artwork and doing so unaided. And this is comparably better than gathering information about the painting first.

In a more positive iteration of this theme, William suggests a freedom associated with naïve viewing:

> *It's really interesting looking at a painting without any er exhibition you know the little sort of card things (8,7)*

Looking at a painting without additional information can be genuinely interesting and enjoyable rather than work or a test of ability.

A number of commonalities are identifiable regarding the favoured or 'right' ways to approach a painting. According to the participants' perceived standards, the viewing encounter should be independent and uninfluenced. It should involve intellectual or imaginative labour. Meaning should be made by the viewer rather extracted from external sources. Some quite particular information is considered useful, but an individually generated independent interaction is held in highest esteem.

It is as if viewers approach art as some kind of introspective evaluation. Can I view this well? In the right way? Am I good enough not to need the 'little card'?

As Kitty describes when she assesses her understanding of the image:

> *I sort of feel smug for knowing that [Laughs] But its only*
> *cos I've probably read it (1,30)*

Kitty's remark encapsulates a contradiction which participants seem to struggle with throughout the theme. Her feelings of reward for a 'correct' interpretation of the image, are laced with self-deprecating humour. You can feel "smug" because you understand something about the painting, but this understanding is undermined if it was sourced externally. Apparently going about understanding in the wrong way can undermine any sense of reward.

Existing knowledge and external understandings appear to be both impediment to but also the goal of a successful viewing. This opposition plays an additional role which had implications for the viewers' experiences:

Although viewers tended to value 'subjective' independent engagement with art over accessing existing knowledge, they also expressed the notion of a correct way to understand a given painting - a right answer. Importance is placed on being able to respond to an image, uninfluenced by external material, and yet the accuracy of such personal judgements may well be considered in light of these same presumed orthodoxies.

Indeed, much discussion involved the viewer's ability to make sense of the painting. This 'sense' was located in the prevailing meanings commonly ascribed to it. As Floyd explains:

For example the position of an apple or a stack of cards would be purposeful and it would have kind of been a deliberate or conscious decision so it kind of has a right answer.

I mean obviously art can mean whatever you want it to but… you can you can kind of say 'oh well a red apple in this context means infidelity everyone knows that if you've read poetry' something like that - that's just hypothetical then! (Floyd)

For Floyd, there are prescribed meanings which viewers may glean from artworks. These meanings are properties of the images. They are embedded in cultural knowledge and context and are 'real' insofar as they concern deliberately attached content that viewers can know. The example he gives here is a meaning intended by the painter and the understanding of the symbolism used to convey this meaning.

This the type of responding, one based on shared understandings, depends on a knowledge of wider contextual structure. Floyd's hypothetical example offers *if you've read poetry.* Rather than being confined to the boundaries of the image, meaning is understood through wider culture and society. Floyd introduces another tension common to the participants' accounts: Paintings can mean whatever you want but… they also don't.

For Floyd paintings have meanings a viewer can extract which are sewn into a greater social tapestry. In the existence of such meanings a right or wrong answer becomes possible, as William remarks:

And so I would say yeah I'd say someone had commissioned this piece specifically to capture er a sense of importance of of the of this family I think I might be completely wrong [laughs] (8,5)

William too describes ideas of correct and incorrect meanings associated with the painting. Here they are related not only to the artist's intention but also to that of the person commissioning the image. Right and wrong are by no means simplistic. With a foreign, historical painting, answers to these questions may still be contestable. There is inevitably some room for ambiguity regarding any art-work so unlikely that William could be "*completely wrong*". However, there is an idea of an accepted understanding

of the image and the available knowledge surrounding it. This does not simply depend on the intention of the artist, but also on a wider social understanding of the painting, its context and generally agreed meanings.

At the beginning of the theme, viewers described wanting to generate their own individual, independent responses to the image. They suggested that this was a valuable activity. A second co-concern also emerged. This regarded locating and understanding the 'correct' meaning of the painting (and paintings). These two desires are apparently somewhat antithetical; 'Understanding' the image seems to involve discerning meanings which agree with 'objective' or external information. However, the correct way to do this is to reject outside information over forming a personal response.

Cumulatively this suggests, that where and how meaning exists (with regard to experiencing art) is dynamically conceived of. Meaning is developed through my own responses and so can be fluid or actively constructed. What a painting means is also something which exists externally, I may find it or work it out but I can't create it myself.

Viewers' consciousness of the character of their own viewing was also present in an alternative form which will now be discussed.

Getting it real: the authenticity of my response

Remember Linda told us "*I think this is a painting that calls out for you to just encounter it.*"? She alluded to the common belief, that becoming too aware of received wisdom regarding an image, might intrude upon one's experience of it.

Conceptions did not only exist regarding the value of 'just' encountering art. The nature of this 'just' encountering was also of considerable concern.

The desire to just encounter art came with expectations of what this might feel like. This presented an ongoing conundrum for viewers. To what extent did their desire to just experience at, itself intrude upon their experiences? They wondered, did I actually feel that or was it just what I wanted to feel? Such wants were pervaded by concerns with authenticity and legitimacy. The importance of a response being 'real' apparently just as significant and weighty upon expectations as the importance of it being 'right'.

Here Owen describes the way expectation might cast doubt on experience:

> *I know it, I've seen it in reproduction I've read about it so*
> *I'm kind of half expecting …… I'm half expecting to…. Feel*

> *like that anyway um um so you bring all that expectation to bear*
>
> *Um it's very easy in a sense to go and be awestruck by something like this because you kind of know you're supposed to but you think you're supposed to but I genuinely was (10,14)*

In this extract, Owen reflects upon a particular type of response to art, that of being "awe struck". Rather than describing the experiencing of this response per se, he is interested in how it comes about - the potential for ambiguity in its derivation.

The term "Awestruck" is not without notable connotations. "*Struck*" suggests an action which happens *to* the viewer rather than one which the viewer creates or induces. It suggests force and momentum, more something that happens in the moment, than something premeditated. In contrast, Owen suggests that a viewer's awestruck reaction to an image may be based upon more than just what is seen in the moment. He describes how the expectation of certain experiences and ideas of an artwork's prestige, may potentially contribute to such a response. One might induce feelings of awe or "*go and be awestruck*" in response to an image.

These awe experiences have a different value and desirability not, it seems, because of how enjoyable they are, but because of something related to their perceived authenticity. Strong feelings of awe may be induced by the known reputation of a painting or by the feelings it is supposed to evoke. Although not an overt or deliberate process, such feelings are apparently not considered commensurate to an authentic reaction like when *I genuinely was* for Owen.

Owen suggests reacting to an image as influenced by its reputation is a perfunctory response. Feeling the way you are supposed to; "*it's very easy*". This comment could be understood in two ways. First, such responding is passive. The viewer reacts in accordance with the status quo and does not have to actively form their own understanding. Second Owen talks about the weight of expectation one brings to an image and there is a sense of it being easy to get caught up in this. He uses the *bear* as in bear down or overwhelm. The type of responding Owen deems less desirable give an indication to that which is more desirable, that involving active work and difficulty, notions we are more than familiar with.

Nora expresses similar sentiments concerning the legitimacy of her responses:

> *This thing that they talk about the magic of sort of a kind of*
> *transcendent moment when you're kind of looking at a piece*
> *of art, and because you're kind of a little bit cynical as well*
> *you wonder if you're convincing yourself you're having it*
> *or you're really having it or it's the art that's doing it or is*
> *it just that you kind of want to pass this on um this kind of*
> *religious feeling about art this kind of reverence Nora*
> *(11,1)*

She similarly describes the desire for certain types of experiences with art. Again there is contention between "*convincing yourself you're having it or you're really having it*". For Nora, like Owen it seems to be the origin of the experience that is important. "*or it's the art that's doing it or is it just that you kind of want to pass this on um this kind of religious feeling about art this kind of reverence*".

Nora differentiates between her desire and the nature of the painting, as the primary provocation for her reactions. It is not the content or actual experience of her response which is doubted but rather where it is derived from. Apparently, the origin (or why) of one's reaction, the will of the viewer or the power of the painting, defines its worth. It would be hard to consider the idea of having an experience in order to pass it on like an heirloom, frivolous or vacuous, yet Nora suggests that this desire de-authenticates any feelings of reverie.

On the surface, Jay's discussion seems a little different from the previous two. However, he too describes the influence of a specific and desired response upon his eventual reaction:

> *So for him to have been as it were, um lording and um erm*
> *favourably representing the people who were committing*
> *that and in charge of it is pretty horrible so that that's the*
> *reason um, which is why maybe I want to uh fabricate some*
> *er alternative narrative in his court paintings to ensure that*
> *I still like him [laughs] But I think it's there! I think its there*
> *(11,30)*

Jay's feelings about Velazquez and his ideas about the artist's political leanings cause him to reflect upon the authenticity of his response. Rather than second-guessing a sense of awe or transcendence (as Nora and Owen did), he appears to question a

different legitimacy. Jay is concerned about the authenticity of what he feels is in the painting. He describes an internal friction between desires. Is what he sees as genuine as he wishes? Or, is it prejudicially embellished by his additional desire, to regard the artist in a positive light?

As with Nora and Owen, there is a struggle or blurring between what in the response is being primarily generated by the image and what is the result of being willed into existence by the viewer. Do I really see and feel it or do I just want to? How do I tell the difference?

We begin to get into a sort of perverted Magritte "ceci n'est pas une pipe" territory here. What is the difference between convincing oneself that one is having an experience and "*really having it*"? More pertinent perhaps may be the question, why is this distinction important to viewers? Is there a performative nature to art viewing, even in a viewer's own private headspace?

What is clearer, is that viewers apparently do not uni-linearly respond to art, they respond to their responses. They desire particular responses and this desire causes self-doubt and questioning of reactions. Experiencing a reaction when engaging with an image sometimes isn't enough to convince a viewer their response is 'real'. There is a collision of the sensuous and the would-be censorious. Potentially this relates to the level of expectation that viewers place upon themselves to encounter art in particular ways (as has pervaded the whole Master Theme)?

Summary

In this Master Theme, concepts of the correct way to view paintings appeared to have multiple implications on viewing experiences: Viewers discussed how they felt a painting should be viewed. Of particular concern was the role of extant knowledge and information. The how and when one should access such material was laced with ambiguity. There were ideas about the 'work' one ought to do when viewing a painting and the effort that should be involved. There were also notions of regret or self-admonishment if viewing was undertaken differently.

Viewers also discussed the notion of 'the right answer' to a painting. Although internal, independent generation of understanding was previously valued, getting it wrong in relation to perceived orthodoxies was also possible and something viewers aspired to avoid. Arriving at these correct understandings was felt to be an achievement and considered a measure of successful viewing. Authentic and real responses were also

complicated by additional expectations. Again a pull between subjective 'I think it's there' or I want to feel this way, strained against the desire for 'objective' 'it is there', I really felt it, experiences.

These concepts (the right way to view, correct understandings, and authentic responses) do not exist absolutely independently. Rather they run through viewings interactively. Nora's sentiments in the following extract demonstrate their combined expression. Here she alludes to ideas which arose in both the previously discussed subthemes:

> *Coming in here and thinking maybe I'll say the wrong*
> *thing, to which you're inclined to say there isn't a wrong*
> *thing but that's not going to convince me. I know that there*
> *are ways to look at paintings which er which you know kind*
> *of, having the knowledge is gonna.*

> *Although there's no wrong thing to say, you can say you*
> *don't like a painting or you do like a painting but um but*
> *knowing about it is going to make that count more, mean*
> *more, to you. And that's the important thing, I think it's*
> *what art like this can give you personally, and I think it can*
> *give you more if you know more. (15,26)*

Nora's comments are packed with the interplay of competing demands and ideas. She describes the contrasting notions of '*maybe I'll say the wrong thing*' and '*there isn't a wrong thing*', and fluctuates between one view and the other explaining '*that's not going to convince me*' and '*there's no wrong thing to* say'.

The rightness of responses is measured according to several standards. The right thing relates to knowledge and knowing how to look at paintings, but there is also the consideration of a painting meaning something and what it '*can give you personally*'.

For Nora, experiences with art can count more or less. This depends on whether certain conditions are met. The experience may be more personally meaningful when it is an informed one. To like or dislike a painting may be part of a subjective response and yet is similarly dependent on external 'objective' ideas and '*knowing about it*'. These interactions, between how meaningful an experience might be and what knowledge, expectations or actions inform it, pertain to previous ideas of both authentic and correct responding. There appears to be an inter-tangling between personal significance and intellectual understanding which brings us round to where we began.

Ultimately this Master Theme is characterised by a constant interplay between different forms and locations of 'meaning' (in relation to art). Meaning is simultaneously considered as pre-existing, associated with the painting and its context, real, and something that can be found and understood. But it is also thought to be something that can and should be created by the viewer, from themselves and by themselves. Meaning is located both externally and internally and these existences present a need for constant negotiation.

Desires to understand the image and the wish to extract meaning from it are coupled with the ambition to do this independently and uninfluenced by external information. Yet correct understanding is judged against this same existing information and knowledge. There is an idea that paintings have knowable meanings, but also that knowing should be achieved through effort, work, and individual meaning-making endeavours. And viewers acknowledge the demands of these preferred ways to look at images, but also suggest that one should not be prescriptive or restrictive. The desire to freely just encounter a painting actually a confinement itself.

In the places between these competing conceptions and desires, viewers appear to be searching for something very difficult and ephemeral in order to truly value their experiences (or make them count). Getting it right is important but also fragile, as concepts such as meaning and understanding appear to be dynamic, multiform and sometimes incongruous. Experiences are therefore constantly being questioned and retroactively re-configured. Conflicting desires and aspirations leading to the grasping for modes of participation which are just beyond possibility. The question 'how should a painting mean?' equally as pertinent as any concerns of what.

To summarise the three Master Themes in their totality, the backbone running through the viewers' encounterings with the image was one of dynamic relationships and contrasts between positions. These comparisons involved both ideological stances and were reflective of a physical dynamic too. Ongoing intimations of negotiation, pull and counter pull, characterised the encounters as a whole. The viewing experiences seemed somehow interwoven through relational space. A betweenness enlivened by momentums linking contrasting (and sometimes oppositional) points.

The image portrayed that which conformed alongside that which deviated. The Gaze was inviting and connecting but could implicate the viewer and identify them as a voyeur. In the image, meaning was seen in absence, time in stasis. The unreal brought the real into being as fictional characters became sentient through their own conscious

looking acts. Formal rules, of art, of beauty, of societies past and present, were interpreted hand in hand with the challenging and breaking of those rules. The viewers desired particular responses and interactions with the image, educated and naive, learned and raw, individual and also canonically correct. The imaged exposed these juxtapositions, those of everyday and exceptional humanness and then required them to be looked at face to face to face.

Chapter Nine - Study Two: Discussion

The gaze

The first Superordinate Theme 'The Gaze', outlined experiences of viewers as being looked at or gazed upon by characters in the painting.

Eye contact has been described as one of the "most intimate modes of interpersonal encounter" (Heron, 1970, p. 243) however, in research regarding paintings (which is sparse), perception of gaze has historically been treated as the purview of psychophysics. The "common observation that the eyes of portrayed people follow you around the room from their position within the frame" (Koenderink et al., 2004) for example, is usually explored via manipulation of spatial awareness and pictorial features. Similarly, gaze is often treated as a prompt, orienting the direction of viewers' looking, (Dukewich et al., 2008).

Gaze is well known to be a social phenomenon. Frischen, Baylis and Tipper (2007) describe a 'language of the eyes' through which information about the direction of attention, emotion and meaning can be conveyed. Gaze has been demonstrated to play an important role in social cognition (De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007; Itier & Batty, 2009; Varela et al., 1991) and direct gaze in particular is suggested to be a significant communicative signal (Conty et al., 2007). However, studies using paintings are in the minority. The nature of the depicted gaze is less well accounted for and even described as a "vexing problem" (Kesner et al., 2018, p. 97)

Experience of The Gaze in the accounts reported here was characterised by impressions of inter-subjectivity and implication. Gaze established a dialogical connection between the viewer and the mind of the gazing character. It appeared far more meaning-laden than merely a 'cue' to direct attention. Linda, for instance, described the gaze as "*confessional*" (1,24) Paul described a sense of being questioned *sort of 'what do you make of this?' Or maybe something more complicated than that but, veiled"* (9,26). As surmised by Oliver *"it's a very human connection"* (2,13)

The gaze which viewers sensed had a particularly implicating character. It reminded them of their physical presence as they stood before the image. It generated an awareness of their mental, intentional selves as they were gazed upon, witnessed in the act of their looking. Sasha experienced the characters *"observing you as you are observing them"* (11,35) and Linda described the painting as being "*all about the gaze and who's looking at who, how that configures how we see ourselves."*

The implications of becoming self-aware through another's gaze have been the concern of various philosophers. A central question for Jean-Paul Sartre in his discussion of looking and being looked at was, "What does *being seen* mean for me?" (Sartre, 1992, p. 347). The 'look' (*le regard)* describes the epistemological nature of being located in the gaze of another. According to Sartre, the self gains knowledge of its own consciousness or comes to be aware of itself through *le regard.*

Sartre presents a series of ontological categories to describe the world and our consciousness within it. Being-in-itself (*être en soi*) refers to the word of objects, unchanging, passive, things which simply are. Human consciousness for-itself (*être pour soi*) is dynamic and creative and also recognises what it is not, i.e. *en-soi*, an object in the world. However, it is incomplete (as Sartre puts it, plunged into a world of objects but aware that there is no place for me at this level).

Sartre suggests that self-awareness must be different phenomenologically from awareness of objects; the object of consciousness must necessarily be differently positioned to that which is directed upon it. "My objectivity cannot itself derive for me from the objectivity of the world since I am precisely the one for whom there is a world" (p. 281) According to this view self-reflective consciousness then can only be fully realised from the point of view of the other. Here Sartre describes a third category. Being-for-others; the intersubjective nature of human experience through which we become reflectively self-consciousness or via which our consciousness is directed towards itself.

Sartre discusses the way in which consciousness apprehends itself as the result of recognising it exists in the consciousness of others "I see *myself* because *somebody* sees me" (p .349.). Such consequence of being looked at is echoed in the accounts presented here. Lookers are located by the stares coming from the painting; the gaze is experienced as directed specifically towards the viewer *looking at you rather than a window or something… (9,8)* William

Eye contact as experienced in the viewings of the painting here indeed appears to share qualities of *le regard*. In Sartre's conceptualisation "the eye is not first apprehended as a sensible organ of vision but as the support for the look" (p.282). There was apparently, far more present in the painted-gaze than could directly be attributed to the occularity depicted. The gaze flowed both ways for the viewers. It was not experienced solely as a discharge of information from the image but also acted as a conduit equally as able to communicate information from the viewer back to the character as from the character to

the viewer "*how they were looking at me and maybe what they were telling me and what I could tell them back* (11,36) Owen.

In addition to this correlation or parallel, the viewers' accounts raise a question which extends beyond what happens when one is 'seen' by a figure in an image. This seeing somebody is also some*thing*, not an actual person but a depiction. What does this mean in terms of being seen and the nature of our subsequent self-reflection?

The answer to this is, one could suggest, two-fold: For Sartre, the look has both phenomenological (being seen by someone else) and metaphorical (the metaphor of being able to 'see' oneself) forms, it is not necessarily bound to another person or body. Sartre describes the experience even the in the absence of an actual looker "the sound of a footstep followed by silence, or the slight opening of a shutter, a light movement of a curtain" (p. 281). The fundamental presence of the other remains, his 'facticity' more important than his actual presence. In this sense an imagined or implied look may function as a 'real' look might.

However, the gaze as experienced here also evinced an additional distinguishing aspect. Conceptually in this particular work, the gaze extended through an extra irreal layer. It was imagined as coming from the *painting* and yet seemingly experienced as one might a 'real' onlooker.

The other in this instance then, is more than just an implied or imagined presence; we see him depicted and looking. He is the painter, or Maria Balboa or the Infanta Margaret Theresa, or the *Meninas,* with particular expressions and presences. And yet he is less than an embodied, living being in front of us. He does not possess all the qualities suggested as characteristic of gazing which occurs between sentient human subjects. Although an imagined or implied other can 'look' upon us and take the form of a 'probable' being, Sartre also asserts the importance of the embodied sentient aspect of the encounter. The other is apprehended as a "presence in person" (p. 278) and "I am vulnerable, I have a body which can be hurt" (p. 282)

In the case of viewing a painting, seemingly there is an experience of intersubjectivity without this intercorporeality. We engage with the world through our bodies thus bodies determine how we experience the world and also suggest our selves to others (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). The contribution of another embodied, independent, antonymous individual with their own personhood is not directly present in the viewing but rather is translated through the artwork. There is a depicted physicality but the reciprocity

experienced through interactions with characters is constructed, imagined and formed by and of the viewer. A corporeal, sensing, responding being with its own physically established presence extending back, is missing.

This imagining or constructing of the other gazer does not, apparently, make the interaction less real. In the presence of a probable other it is seemingly experienced as differently real. The impression of intersubjectivity with an irreal other gives the experience a unique, ephemeral maybe insecure quality. Fuchs & De Jaeger (2009) further describe enactive intersubjectivity as the "coordination of two embodied agents", "a process in which the lived bodies of both participants extend and form a common intercorporeality" (p. 465). Where, as in the case of art-viewing, the second embodied presence is lacking, apparently something else fills this void.

Viewers impregnate the space through othering aspects of themselves. Senses of the interaction, therefore, may understandably become "*more confrontational"* (8,22) Paul and *"almost accusative"* (11,17) Owen. Such comments allude to a disruption or imbalance within the usual way meaning is formed and developed through social interaction. The facticity of the other is altered. The relation between the self and epistemological space is shifted and may be called into question.

Sartre's discussion of being-for-others begins with a consideration of shame. Being looked upon bestows awareness of one's vulgarity "I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the other" (p. 246). There is an ever-present sense of being caught in the act, caught looking through the keyhole, caught in some kind of awkwardness "But now suddenly I raise my head. Somebody was there and has seen me" (p. 245)

This particular character of implication echoes through the participants' accounts of being 'seen'; as viewers, voyeurs, or somehow basely inappropriate. Oliver suggested a sense of being caught in possible disinterest: "*I can see the painter who is looking at me, trying to say are you interested in what I'm trying to tell you"* (1,9) slightly scolding, as if catching the reluctant child at school. The character Maria, as she looks at Owen, similarly asks him "w*hy are you staring at me so much?" (11,17).* There is not only a recognition of the self but also a sense of challenge in the encounter. And for Sartre, the encounter with the other is inherently one of conflict. We struggle to maintain our sense of subjectivity in the other's objectifying gaze. The look is not neutral, it is an appraisal, judgemental.

Other philosophers such as Merleu-Ponty have suggested that this sense of alienation or discomfort generated by the objectifying look may be one among many ways that intersubjectivity can occur. He writes it is "only if both of us withdraw into the core of our thinking nature, if we both make ourselves into an inhuman gaze, if each of us feels his actions to be not taken up and understood, but observed as if they were an insect's" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 420).

Indeed, Andrews (2014) reconceptualises *le regard* through the lens of a 'self-showing', an idea which does not seem incompatible with what is apparently in occurrence here. She discusses the conditions under which seeing and being seen become, in their experiencing, analogous to being judged. The experiences here were indeed laced with judgement and Sartrean shame. This may be because we are accustomed, in this culture at this time, to view art in a certain way as Andrews suggests. In addition, potentially the irreal element experienced in the depicted look contributes the 'inhuman' aspect to the gaze, giving it it's differently real nature. With this backdrop it is understandable then, that experiences of questioning, doubt and self-contemplation should feature during these engagements. Such reflections indeed emerged from the analysis and will be returned to in later discussion of The Third Master Theme (The Self-Conscious Viewer).

Meaning-making: Interpretative Content

The position from which we undertake and understand viewing was apparent but in a different form in the second Master Theme 'Interpretative Content'. Here an inextricably culturally-informed component of art viewing was evidenced. Viewers' discussions explored and were shaped by the influence of historical knowledge and social context.

Viewers' sense of historical locatedness, both their own and that of the painting, pervaded their meaning-making activities. This acquiesces with the call from Bullot and Reber (2013) to take a historical approach to art-viewing and develop "accounts that appeal to appreciators' sensitivity to particular historical contexts and the evolution of such contexts". The influence of historicity was demonstrated in viewers' interpretations where references to contexts originating from different [historical] positions were regularly made. William qualified during his interpretation, "*these are people from a certain point in history*" and viewers generally agreed that the image make*s "reference to historic relations"* (Oliver) which they are viewing from a *"modern perspective"*(Jay)

Bullot and Reber (2013) further suggest that the ability of psychological approaches to fully explain art-appreciation is questioned by a body of theorists with particular concerns regarding historicity (e.g. Currie, 2004; Gombrich, 2000). Such researchers criticise the lack of attention directed at viewers' sensitivity to historical context and the contextual nature of artworks.

Notions of the historically-contextualised artwork and viewer are far more evident in the non-empirical literature. Krukowski (1990) attests to the plethora of existing theories concerning the relationship between the way we think about art and both our own point in history and our understandings of the circumstances of its creation. Some of these emphasise discontinuity, in that artworks are 'coherent only within specific contexts of theory' whilst others emphasise intrinsic qualities of art which unify our experiences of them.

In addition to this complexity, the experiences here bore relevance to the conception of contextual situatedness beyond the relationship between art-viewing and understanding of historical practice. A special thickness was found in the interpretations provided by the viewers. Rather than experiencing the painting and what it depicted as positioned at a point in a linear historical timeline, an interactive multiple-layering of contextual-understandings emerged. The painting itself was interpreted as expressing the passage of time both chronologically and also as a lived structure typified by significant occurrences and meanings. Gwen interpreted a father figure in the image "*looking wistfully back*" both physically and through time into memories of previous familial life. Oliver described a "*generation or evolution of their family*". Time was appreciated as structured according to meaning and human relationships as well as chronology or sequence.

Similarly, social significance was understood as located historically and also within a moving, fluid connection between epochs. Jay alluded to a form of cultural dialogue "*You know, from a modern perspective it almost does feel like a satirical comment.*" where modern and historically situated interpretations became united in the meaning they suggested to him.

Rather than being something which existed purely as a property of the artwork or attached to a specific time in history, context was created and moulded through the viewer's engagement. Historical context was retro-actively constructed and experienced as part of a fluid, malleable continuum. Oliver described the ugly daughter "*looking at me possibly saying 'it could have been me'…*" her narrative in a previous time un-

disturbed by his perception of being looked at by her in the now. His position in the present similarly un-disturbed by an interaction with someone from the past. Lived-time when viewing art was unburdened by the laws of physics and was experienced in an undulating fashion. Time could be experienced as folding back upon itself and flowing backwards and forwards without any discordance being perceived.

Unlike these experiences, context is often treated in the literature as something fixed and which influences viewing from the outside. In Bullot and Reber's (2013) account, the historically embedded nature of an art-work is something viewers have varying degrees of sensitivity to. It is something that can be increased by learning and knowledge. The transmission of context through time is something one can develop an understanding of, rather than something one creates.

In the accounts reported here, the historical context of the artwork was not experienced as something concretely located or structured. It was not something to only be found, understood or known about. Instead, it was something alive, fluid and ever in a state of being brought into being by the viewer. The past, not something either separable from the present or uninfluenced by it.

Discussion of artworks as socially, culturally or historically embedded often implies an object set in a bed of multiple influences. The embedded nature of the artwork here was experienced as continually re-constituting. Historicity was not something external to be looked back at, understood or accessed, it was part of a dynamic self-informing honeycomb where viewer, image and meanings were continually under revision.

This was particularly evident in the theme Juxtapositions and Tensions. In this theme, viewers explored the relationship between the central females Maria Balboa the 'court dwarf' and Margaret Theresa the Infanta of Spain. They discussed the wider social and political ideas implicated by the depiction of these characters and their interpretations of the perspectival nature of understandings often surfaced.

Beth suggested that interpreting the painting from a modern perspective can divulge multiple conceptions of its past-significance or meaning. In one sense the contrast between "*this quote perfect quote which is how she's being portrayed, um next to an imperfect in their view person*" is something distinct from her own position and "in their view", and yet this version of the juxtaposition takes a second form. "*Um if you see it in a broader context they're both being commodified*" which is equally as historically situated.

The plasticity of historical-context in the viewers' interpretations further emerged as a tension between a sense of the morality of the depiction, which viewers associated with their 'modern perspective' and an understanding stemming from the knowledge that the painting was associated with a different time. Beth suggested that different contexts indeed provided different lenses but still found the pairing "*horrible really*", whilst Linda felt *"actually I don't think in this painting is diminished whoever this person might be".* The character's and viewer's existence in the present flexibly influencing how their existence in the past was understood.

Context again was not experienced as something fixed and set like a dial to a particular point in time. It wasn't something understood to be present or absent, past contexts did not disappear in modern viewings, the influence of modern ideas was present even in historical perspectives. Social and historical situatedness appeared as overlapping and bearing influence bi-directionally, from the past to present but also backward, present changing the context of the past. *"I think they are both in their own ways, those two faces are both very beautiful faces and they are position so they are juxtaposed and I think that's deliberate". (12,26)* Linda sees a similarity between the two females in one sense and their juxtaposition equally persistent and deliberate.

The 'disability' of Maria as counterposed with the Infanta Margaret Theresa in the image was not dominantly focussed on in any physical aspect. Instead, there was a particular attunement to the characters' mental liberty and freedom of individuality, their personhood and what might challenge, restrict or negate it. Beth saw a '*picture of chains, a very pretty prison'*, whilst Linda took comfort in the self-possession and stature she perceived in Maria, though she was owned by the court.

The social worlds of the figures were continually relevant, informing the development of narratives and potentiating interpretations of social commentary and moral provocation. *"By putting these in direct juxtaposition he's asking us 'which do you prefer?' And why? And what does that say about you?"* (10,20) Jay

The folding and merging of historical and contemporary contexts were again evident in the interpretations of deviance and transgression which formed the third theme. Describing artistic mechanisms of the past did not relieve them of their modern meanings resulting in discomfort: "*I feel kind of horrible expressing that*" (7,11 Jay) Conversely for Floyd the radical nature of the image 'for the time' was still experienced as exciting in the present: "*That would I guess for the time have been er er a pretty wild pretty adventurous pretty inventive. (8,9 Floyd)*

Juxtaposition and transgression were not only experienced through a suspension of historical separateness. The discordance and discomfort viewers experienced which was aroused by the self-awareness the painting generated, resurfaced here. Experiencing facets of oneself, in the guise of aspects of the image, became especially challenging and acute (unlike the more diffuse experiencing in the Gaze) "*I always found that figure troubling and then I've been troubled by the fact I'm troubled by it*" (12,1 Kitty)

The contusion is particularly well captured by Linda who explains *"So there's an emotional threat, there's something threatening about this picture as well. You're not quite sure where the threat is coming from. Is it coming from me, is it coming from these people,"* (8,28 Linda)

Cause and effect became hard to distinguish in contrast to what is presented in sequential accounts of art-viewing (e.g. Belke et al., 2010; Leder & Nadal, 2014). Moreover image content and viewer input become indistinguishable, presenting a difficulty in terms of experiments which aim to vary one and control another (such as studies of image saliency e.g. Itti & Koch, 2000; Koide et al., 2015).

Transgression and deviance were socially and personally located but this locatedness existed in a continuous, fluid form. The image was seen as radical, challenging and defiant of conventions of its time and in turn produced challenges to self, accepted conceptions of correctness and notions of proper viewing behaviour in the present.

The Self-Conscious Viewer

In this master theme (as previously alluded to), issues involving self-awareness were more explicit and related to the activity of viewing itself. Concerns such as the 'realness' of reactions, how one should view art and the possibility of a correct meaning or interpretation of artworks were all suggested.

A desire for experience without 'discursive preparation', was born out in the theme 'Getting it right'. Here the idea of a preferable or an ideal responding was considered in terms of the 'how' art should be viewed. Seemingly viewers expressed a value judgement regarding where ones understanding of a painting was generated from. They described the desire to "*do the work to interpret it and look at it and imagine it" (*Gwen) rather than avail themselves of information provided. It was preferable not to *"read the little thing at the side"* (Owen) and doing so was regarded often in a disparaging manner. The acquisition of information was felt to in some way present a barrier to

legitimate viewing activities; *"reading the information rather than looking at the bloody thing"* Linda

As discussed in the literature review, the effects of access to sources of contextual information such as knowledge of titles (Leder et al., 2014), information about the artist, or value of the image (Cleeremans et al., 2016; Hernando & Campo, 2017), have been subjected to experimental investigation. However, such manipulations do not address viewers' motivations or judgements regarding the (de)merits of using such provision. Viewers here expressed ambivalence and acknowledged their contradictory desires and stances "*I want I don't want I want my … judgement to be prejudiced but at the same time it can give me grounding" (5,10)* Owen. *"I think it is useful to know who this is painted by, when it is painted, the context, but I think actually come to it first and then the information*" (13,15) Linda

Contrasting desires and perceived expectations about preferable approaches and responses to art generated a series of tensions. The belief that the preferred (or correct) way to approach art involved interpreting and reacting to it from an individual, personal, unaided position became problematic when intertwined with ideas about 'correct' understandings of paintings and where and how these existed.

Arriving at a particular understanding of an image has been the purview of much of the experimental literature. Here viewing is treated as goal-oriented, involving cognitive mastery (Leder & Nadal, 2014; Redies, 2015) and requiring processing fluency (Belke et al., 2010). All are concepts which contribute to the notion that a correct endpoint to the aesthetic experience exists. The predominance of concerns with art-experts and expertise (Bauer & Schwan, 2018; Foreman-Wernet & Dervin, 2016; Pihko et al., 2011), similarly reflects this supposition. Experimental investigations, however, leave little room for the simultaneous holdings of contradictory beliefs, or doubts, re-interpretations, hindsight.

In these accounts, viewers presented truths that were experienced as both contrary but also not directly oppositional. 'Correct' understanding was often aided and constructed by the very contextual information viewers treated as forbidden. It is not surprising then that ambiguity and unsureity towards the concept of 'correct' responses exists. Nora expressed feeling anxiety before her interview "*thinking maybe I'll say the wrong thing, to which you're inclined to say there isn't a wrong thing*" and further explains "*Although there's no wrong thing to say, you can say you don't like a painting or you*

do like a painting but um but knowing about it is going to make that count more, mean more, to you".

'Getting it right' is simultaneously valued and devalued, rightness an elusive concept which fluctuates between being a measure of arriving at commonly accepted or prevailing interpretations and responding to art in a pure way which is devoid of all of these contrition's. "*I mean obviously art can mean whatever you want it to but…*" Floyd. There was again an element of self-judgement (or fear of shame?) present as viewers felt they ought to already be in possession of the art-historical knowledge or know-how necessary to understand a painting.

The theme 'Getting it Real' collected viewer's concerns and doubts regarding the veracity of their responses provoking the question: How do I know what I am feeling is genuine or did I bring it into being? Much of the discussion of the authenticity of experience concerned occurrences of perceived awe, transcendence or the sublime. Owen spoke of the influence of expectation and existing interpretations, upon his own response "*Um it's very easy in a sense to go and be awestruck by something like this because you kind of know you're supposed to*" (10,14). Jay reflected upon his reverence for the painter and how this might influence his interpretation of the image "*to ensure that I still like him".* Nora referred to the desire for a *"kind of religious feeling"* or *"kind of reverence"* and wondered *"if you're convincing yourself you're having it or you're really having it"(11.1)*

This anxiety or ambiguity reflects a distinction upheld in viewers' minds between 'real' experiences which are evoked by the image, unmediated by existing knowledge and expectation, and a more 'cynical' as Nora describes it, self-induced response. Viewers are susceptible to societal standards and demands even in the privacy of their own thoughts and feelings. They are aware of social and cultural expectations and the potential for these to influence their reactions. Such influence is perceived as detrimental to the preferred 'authentic' responding.

It is unsurprising that a particular form of aesthetic responding, especially with regard to awe and the sublime, is considered optimum or desirable given the prevailing consensus. For example, "Aesthetic awe is regarded as the ultimate humanistic moment, the prototypical aesthetic response to a sublime stimulus" (Konecni, 2005, p. 27) and "A "successful" contact with an art object may produce a strong experience, which can be described as a momentary feeling of authenticity" (Linko, 2003, p. 73).

In philosophical and theoretical treatments, the experience of the sublime or ideal experiences with art are often antiquated with the encountering of something completely external and other. Such a conception is remarked upon by Haen (2017) as expressed in John Logan's play Red about the painter Mark Rothko where it is asked: "do these paintings still pulse when they are alone?" (p.13)

Ideal experience seemingly involves accessing this externally existing form and consequently, the literature often presents experiences of disconnection or dislocation from self during preferred viewing experiences with art. One apprehends art as if it has its own separate being – its own 'pulse'. Through engagement with this external thing or immersion in it, one may be relieved, temporarily, of experience of self; "the typical conception of the arts as affording detached moments of contemplation" (Pelowski & Akiba, 2011).

"selfless 'Flow' type states" (Pelowski et al., 2017, p. 84) are often suggested as possible responses to art. Csikzentmihaly & Robinson's (1990), concept of a 'flow state' is regularly applied to models of art-viewing and (what was discussed in the literature review as) the 'output' of aesthetic engagement. The purported loss of self is evident here, Csikzentmihaly suggests during the experience of flow "The ego falls away." (Geirland, 1996, p. 2) and "The world seems to be cut off from me. I am less aware of myself and my problems". (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, p. 195).

Loss of or separation from self to an external object/other has similarly been suggested in more specific discussions of awe. Awe is variously described as an experience of "the inner subjection to the unprecedented and absolutely unique and therefore divine" (Weber, 1978, p. 1117 in Keltner & Haidt, 2003), it is associated with shock (Jabri, 2006) and in order to experience awe Shiota, Keltner, & Mossman (2007) suggest that ideally "the thoughts and feelings accompanying prototypical awe experiences should be stimulus-focused and self-diminishing, emphasising the perception of greatness outside the self, rather than self-focused and self-enhancing." (p. 946). As Heidegger writes, one is "imbued with the awareness of being excluded from what exists in the awesome" (Heidegger, 1994, p. 143).

And yet this preferred or ideal form of interaction appears to present a paradox for viewers. A tension which formed the backbone of the theme discussed here. Viewers described anxiety and unsureity associated with a form of conflicting experiencing and desire. There appeared to be an experience of engaging with the painting and bringing

art into being from their own understandings and connections. Yet, simultaneously a desire, in the thick of expectation, to experience something fully other. This conflict persisted even in the face of genuine reactions and the belief in the authenticity of their responses "*But I think it's there! I think it's there*" (11,30) Jay "*but I genuinely was*" Owen

Viewers seem inevitably to inject something of themselves into artworks. They touch them with their consciousness, revivifying them and so relieving them of their neutrality. Any pure 'other', however much they might desire to encounter it, is effused with facets of the self.

It may be worth returning again here to Sartre's account of shame in the eyes of the other. He writes "Shame is an immediate shudder which runs through me from head to foot without any discursive preparation" (p. 246). Is it purely coincidental that this description sounds so much like the desired experiences of awe suggested by participants? Do impassioned responses to paintings exist in some inevitable circle revolving through the experience of some kind of other, in its immediate, shuddering, shameful sublimity, and then the ensuing self-awareness which casts doubt upon the original experience?

Part Four

Final Remarks

Chapter Ten - Conclusions, evaluations and reflexive statement

Conclusions

This thesis has come to be about what happens to you as you happen upon a painting. Whilst each study has been considered in-depth in its individuality, to conclude, a discussion of the collective nature of the findings is presented.

To begin, Table 12 collects the Master Themes for Studies One and Two as a reminder of the original results.

Table 12 Summary of Master Themes and Subthemes from Studies One and Two

Study One			Study Two		
Elements of Engagement	**Deeper Exploration**	**Vulnerability and Intimacy: emotional resonances of viewing**	**The Gaze**	**Meaning-making: Interpretative Content**	**The Self Conscious Viewer: Concerns with the 'right' way to view art**
Groping Out	Emerging Prominences	Within painting encounters	Intersubjectivity	Families and Social Structures	Getting it right
Attracting Attention	Awareness of Tensions and Contradictions	Self-reflections	Implication	Juxtapositions and Tensions	Getting it real: the authenticity of my response
Drawing In					

Asking 'what is it like to look at a painting?' in this study, became suggestive of something beyond what was anticipated in the original question. It exposed a commonality situated in, but perhaps not limited to, art-viewing. The studies collectively captured aspects of movement and force, actioned through space and between place. Senses of motion, of layerings and dynamic (re)positioning, emerged in both psychical and physical forms.

These final conclusions consider this gestalt: the push and pull, jolting and wrenching or more subtly shifting involvements suggested by the totality of the thesis. Such actions or happenings were not restricted to indicating chasmic or chiasmic relation between one thing and another but also a transmissive and transformative momentum. Forward and

back, in and out, from and to. The flux from one position to a different one which thus changes the landscape of both. These inhalations and exhalations were tonally evident in the Master Themes in each of the studies:

In Study One, the Master Theme 'Elements of Engagement' suggested an inceptive colliding between viewer and painting. Aspects emerged from the image towards the viewer, nudging, shoving, gently probing. The viewers own attention was oriented to the image, energy from the onlooker progressed towards it. And, something articulated from the painting also drew the viewer back toward it. Curling them in like a beckoning finger.

In the Second Master Theme Deeper Exploration, viewers descended *in* to the paintings. Interactions moved through the images as multidimensional landscapes. In doing so viewers drew elements *out* of the flatness. Complex, layered structures equally psychic and physical. The layers of fabric in a dress, the oozing of molten lava from a fissure in the crust of a sun. This was a traversing innervation, a braille like enmeshing of sensuous exposition.

In the Master Theme Vulnerability and Intimacy, experiences of the paintings acting upon the viewers in an evocative manner were coupled with those of the viewers locating emotion within the image. Emotions resonated through the within and the without of the frame, and through the conjoined actuality of viewer and painting.

In the discussion of Study One, these findings were described in relation to Merleu-Ponty's concept of enfleshment. Here in the viewing, viewer and image became part of the same world. Onlooker and looked-upon, made of the same stuff and established in the same domain. This communal medium appeared as the holder and proving ground for experiences of connection and movement, a fluid expanse where room existed for multiple positions and layerings. Space, location and motion were realised through enfleshment as things hit out, pulled in, impacted and reacted, attacked and decayed.

The Master Theme The Gaze in Study Two also described a bidirectionality, in this case, consciousness as realised through looking. Viewers' gazes were directed towards the characters in the painting and in turn, they were gazed at. Through this movement viewers and characters were both found and forged. This experience could be agitating and unsettling. It was variously felt as an intrusion or a reaching out and a meeting or union.

Motion between two points was also captured in the second Master Theme Interpretative Content. Here positions and counter positions were posed and re-posed as viewers explored meanings in and of the image. The honest beauty of Maria Balboa the character with dwarfism was felt to be set side by side with the ugly nature of Margaret Theresa the spoilt princess. The perspectival shiftings from pretty to prison, from individual characters with personal feelings to social circumstances and societal commentary. The man in the doorway looking back from one historical era to another.

Finally, in the Third Master Theme 'The self-conscious viewer', flux emerged between different viewpoints participants adopted towards themselves and the paintings. At some points, they regarded themselves as detached observers, somehow distanced or away from themselves and from the painting. At others, they were consumed and absorbed, caught up inside the properties of the artwork. This echoed sentiments expressed in the first study concerning features the paintings. Were previously depicted elements were seen as part of and apart from the painting, viewers now regarded themselves as being both part of and apart from the encounter.

In the discussion of Study Two, Sartre's (1992) treatment of intersubjectivity was drawn upon in relation to gaze and realisation of consciousness. In this account, shiftings and sublimations emerged as interactions were experienced between entities located in physical and personal relation to one another. Experiences of reciprocity and connection disclosed subjective and intersubjective movements and exchanges. These, in turn, elicited other relocations as viewer's negotiated paradoxical perspectives towards themselves, their ideas about how art should be viewed and how paintings could or should be experienced.

The indication of these movements and positionings in space is not presented to suggest a separation of subject and object. These are not intended to be indicative of a divide between image-world and viewer-world or reality and fiction. Rather they are considered as the gasping movements of breath within one body. The delving into and forming out of. The contraction and release of impressions by the muscle of consciousness. The specificity of 'viewer' and 'painting', seer and seen dissolved into a fluid, textured, loam within which, as meaning is apprehended and made, course and momentum are changed.

Considering the overall outcomes or indications of the thesis in this way, Heidegger's treatment of art 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (in Basic Writings: Heidegger, 1993) is an analysis so steeped in movement and kinetic forces that it would seem wanting not to now make reference to it. Heidegger's evaluation considers the way worlds are not just

disclosed to us through art, they are brought about, in and by, artworks. In doing so, a litany of possible positions and relations within a dynamic landscape are implicated. To elaborate upon this conception, Heidegger famously describes the creation of great Greek temple, made of stone and rocks which have been chiselled, hauled and 'set up' into this art, this temple form.

Through its creation, or setting up, the temple allows aspects of the world to come into view and be experienced 'This resting of the work draws up out of the rock the obscurity of that rock's bulky yet spontaneous support' (p.167-68). In this way through such an artwork, elements are revealed more richly and articulately to us. According to Heidegger to be a work is to set up a world. Paintings are simultaneously worlds in frames in front of us and part of the same world as us. They, therefore, draw to our attention and put on display, the way we relate to the world. For Heidegger, this is, in its very nature, a relationship of jolting and wrenching, of jutting out and of enveloping. Of movement and setting in position.

Heidegger suggests that in this way, art manifests and exposes what he calls the essential strife between earth and world. Earth here is what is outside and beyond human engagements. It is the stuff of nature and matter. World is what encompasses all human happenings. Consciousness, activity and meaning-making. This Earth and World are related through a counterplay. The world is placed upon the earth and the earth bursts up through the world, setting it back. The temple as a work of art is representative of world, which is set upon the earth concealing it. And yet this art lets its material earthly aspects be what they are – as we admire the temple we notice the rock jagged and hard its minerals shining. Thus the earth bursts through the world as the character of the stone overwhelms our perception the structure sculpted from it.

In Heidegger's description art instigates and amplifies this countenancing, the putting forth and setting back. Art has a thingly character, it is made physically from objects, we can see thickness, oil paint and the wood of frames. Yet is more than this. It establishes meanings and understandings. It allows us to see things as they are, opens them up to us, and sets backs them down again. Heidegger tells us "metals come to glitter and shimmer, colours to glow, tones to sing, the world to say" (Heidegger, 1993 p. 171). Unlike other objects we create (such as those he refers to as equipment) where the matter they are made from disappears, in art it comes forth, beyond utility. Thus the back and forth between different but never separated positions of earth and world is enacted before us through art.

This treatment of art involves many explications of momentum and repositioning and is saturated by the language of movement. Similarly, the accounts here imply positions in space, locations in place, a physical direction and movement of forces, and also ins and outs of our understandings and interpretations. Agitation and displacement. This strife-like continual pushing and pulling, bursting out and receding back in, rupture and relocation.

It is perhaps unsurprising then that a more straightforward sense of friction and paradox permeated the studies. The paintings in this study did not give themselves to viewers in totality. Rather as some aspects came into view, others retracted or twisted away.

The counter-positions and dynamics experienced as physical forces and cerebral discords seemed ultimately to have a single root foundation. They appeared to be actualised from tensions between the primordial and elemental, and the cultivated and understandable. The encounters reflected the experience of something primal, physical, pulsating that was also apprehended by the viewers manifest through meanings. Understandings and unintelligible base nature pulling and tugging taking shape between and through one another.

Viewers indicated a struggle between desiring both raw and knowledgeable response to paintings (Getting it Right & Getting it Real). The basic nature of eye contact and a collision of looks in turn realising sentience and knowing (The Gaze). Natural laws of space and time present and affecting but also refracted and somehow elastic. Aspects bursting forth grabbing and pulling back (Groping Out, Drawing In). Paintings could be descended into and structures drawn out from them (the Theme Emerging Prominences most directly demonstrative of this), viewers' positions challenged and shifted. These forces both primal and established through understanding. The tamed and untamed, tethered to one another.

The encounters with paintings described indeed did not just involve experiences of modes of appearing. Through their evincing of space and motion, they conveyed experiences of appearings *in*. The earthly Being-in-itself (être en soi) and the worldly for-itself (être pour soi) different and yet always in relation, always part of or in something, Enfleshed.

When we view art we are not separate entities from a 'reality' which we are presented with and into which we can become more, or less, immersed. The painting and viewer do not represent distinct independent worlds, the meeting of which is mediated by

external contextual factors. Rather art-viewing is an enactment of a world, complete with a background of pre-givens and alive with interpretative activity and meaning-making. It could be argued, therefore, that trying to understand art-appreciation by attempting to establish a meaningful differentiation between image content, perception of that content and viewer characteristics, may be misguided. Art-viewing by its very nature is the combined and indistinguishable creation of all those aspects. Instead of the viewing representing an interaction between separable subject and object, the painting is brought to life and lived by the viewers, the painting is the viewers' experience, art becomes synonymous with Being.

Evaluations

There are questions raised by the studies and questions which may be asked of them. For instance, are the bulk of the findings particular to the Velazquez painting, an image which is celebrated across art-historical discussion. What are the real-world applications of the findings? How can their validity and reliability be demonstrated? These issues will be attended to in the following section.

Is the Velazquez painting special? There are many paintings that are associated with a special nature or quality. The artworks of Francisco Goya are replete with expressive eyes and telling gazes. Édouard Manet's A Bar at the Folies-Bergère, as referenced by one of the participants, presents a perspectival conundrum. Picasso's Guernica described by another participant, communicates a significant historical occurrence in a modern form. There are many artworks considered special to some and devoid of worth or scandalous and notorious to others. There is often a fine line between ground-breaking and broken in art-history. Las Meninas certainly was special to many of the viewers, but less so to others. And any reification was not at the expense of other paintings which could also be regarded as unique, important or amazing. The Velazquez painting is special, yes, but so are many paintings. In addition, the gestalt across studies suggests that the findings are not merely an anomalous product of a painting unlike any other.

What of art from other genres and origins? The study here aimed to resist initial classification of paintings into types and forms. This was to avoid ascribing categorisations to images in a way that may have been more telling of the assumptions and preconceptions of the researcher than the art itself. 'What is art' is still a mainstay of art-historical discussion and the folly of imposing distinctions as 'real' during

research, was explicated in the literature review. The paintings involved provided quite a cross-cultural representation of art, Japanese, Spanish, Russian and Australian for example. More of the paintings were representational than those which might classically be considered abstract but the questionable nature of this distinction was noted in the review of the literature. Abstract and representational aspects were often reflected upon as part of the same painting.

What Future Directions are indicated? Hopefully, one future direction indicated by this work is to continue to pursue this area of research. Some initial groups or influential factors, having seen a painting before or not, were suggested and in doing so other factors indicated. Notions of levels of knowledge and the implications of class and social background, whilst not directly emergent in the analysis, brewed in the background and would be of interest in subsequent investigation.

The responses captured in this pair of studies were generally positive and interested. Haen (2017) for example, has referred to the paucity of research regarding non-evocative or 'dead' responses and states of being. Similarly, experiences with paintings that provoked dislike were not included in this study and might represent another avenue to explore.

Viewers' concerns regarding how to view art, correct understandings and authentic reactions, especially via experiences of paradox and contradiction, provide material for reflection in the sphere of art education. Many programmes have been developed to classify viewers' level of ability or expertise, and to coach viewers on how to look at paintings. E.g. The Visual Thinking Strategies curriculum (Housen, 1999, 2002). Social expectation, received interpretations and meanings, and self-awareness are apparently unavoidable.

Multiple demands generate conflicting aspects of viewing but these are not necessarily to be negated through education. Rather, recognition of the fluid and also irregular, irritant components of viewing art as credible and relevant might offer alternative direction in fostering engagement with paintings. Traditional approaches to art-viewing as goal-oriented, directed towards a particular or definable response and with preferable characteristics might also be considered in this light.

The ability of art to facilitate communication and understanding has already been the subject of health and therapeutic assessment (e.g. Gelo et al., 2015). However such work tends to focus on the use of art as a tool to direct conversations towards the

desired subject matter or content. This relegates the actual viewing of art to something almost incidental to the endeavour. Such a focus may overlook the potential usefulness of the viewing-act in and of itself. The focus might in future extend discussions of 'what do you see' to encompass the experience of seeing. Ewing (1990) writes: "individuals are continuously reconstituting themselves into new selves in response to internal and external stimuli." (p 258) and in this sense, attending to the process of viewing art and the experience of the encounter as well as the meanings and responses themselves, might reveal additional insights.

Similarly, art therapy predominantly involves the creation of art (e.g. Kramer, 1958), the addition of art-viewing to the toolbox may prove beneficial. To this end, the treatment of art-appreciation as a self-revealing engagement might be a point for further research.

The viewers' interpretations of the images were themselves full of insights. Their engagements with the images as inquirers highlighted the endeavour of looking at paintings as a phenomenological undertaking in and of itself (as per Andrews, 2014).

How is this work evaluated? Smith (2011) details seven considerations of 'what makes a good IPA paper' which will be attended to in turn.

1) The paper should have a clear focus

The focus of this thesis was on the experience of looking at a painting. Painting rather than art more broadly, and a single painting rather than a gallery or exhibition experience was specified. Orienting discussion away from definitions of what art is, what aesthetic means or what types of object lend themselves to aesthetic experience, was intended to help the work retain a clear and straightforward direction.

Philosophical accounts of art viewing were explored following completion of the analysis. However, during the early stages of the study, it was considered beneficial to identify some boundaries regarding the breadth of engagement with extant theory and investigation. For the purpose of focus and clarity, (particularly during the literature review), the work concentrated on empirical research. It was acknowledged that the project might potentially span multiple fields and therefore risked becoming vague or unwieldy. To prevent such occurrences, as this was a qualitative, phenomenological and psychological project, research within this constellation was considered most important to explore and draw upon.

2) The paper will have strong data.

The study prioritises the perspectives of the participants. Their words and points of view were the focal points from interview to write up. The interview schedule was designed, and the interview carried out, with the aim to be as open as possible and offer freedom for participant expression. The research was motivated by the suggested benefits of taking an inductive approach to the research question.

When preparing for the second study (where I chose the image rather than the participants doing so), I attempted to select a painting that would be enjoyable to discuss and give people a range of material to talk about. The aim was not to puzzle, confound or test participants or instigate any struggle to make sense of an image. For this reason, I did not choose something very abstract, difficult or deliberately provocative or challenging.

I did, as described, visit galleries to observe the ways people looked at the paintings. I also, throughout the study, was attentive to the way I myself looked at artworks and made time and effort to be so. This experience was useful as when participants, for example, described the significance of walking up to a particularly big painting, I could empathise somewhat and recognise the attractions and aims of such behaviours.

I believe these practices all contributed to the acquiring of strong data. By facilitating my engagement with the paintings and participants they helped me gather material which I believe is powerful and deeply resonant within the themes as I have presented them. I hope that readers find the material as illuminative compelling as I did when analysing it and that I have selected extracts which demonstrate the themes well. I found the participants' discussions, in all their honesty, knowledge and curiosity, to be both engaging and highly substantive.

3) The paper should be rigorous

During preparation for the study, I resisted reading about Las Meninas specifically (by co-incidence at least two popular books were published around the time of the study), and in general consciously did not seek to educate myself more about art, art styles or art history. I felt I should approach the study from my honest position of relative naivety rather than attempt to jury-rig some form of expertise. I considered that there was a wealth of information in existence about paintings and that any selection I attempted to make from these materials might bias my thinking, reflect my own biases and inadvertently direct the research.

The analysis and findings were verified through ongoing supervision of the project. This also lent a level of transparency to the work and a triangulation of perspectives. Supervision occurred at each significant stage of analysis. Initially, the creation of emergent themes was discussed and selected transcripts read and notes and themes checked. For example, a note raised in earlier supervision sessions regarded the level of specificity used to name emergent themes. I had been too frugal in doing so thus losing some of the richness of the data. I followed the advice to include more information and thus slightly longer descriptors in the development of emergent themes so as to capture their full and often layered meanings.

At the stage where summary tables of themes had been generated, these too were viewed and discussed. The original transcripts were used to verify where data had come from (via page line numbers) and provide an overview of how it had been used to construct themes. Essentially a quote from the text could be followed to its place in a thematic table at group level and individual level.

In this vein, during the cross-cases analysis, individual participant tables were viewed and then compared to the cross-case work. Tracing themes and quotes back to their origins in the text demonstrated the analysis had been conducting using a thorough and rigorous procedure. It also allowed discussion of the validity of the interpretations underlying the themes constructed. When looking through analyses in this way, paper copies of annotated transcripts, individual thematic tables (which contained quotes with page and line numbers) and cross-case thematic tables were all saved. This meant data such as themes, superordinate themes or quotes could be followed through from any place in the analysis back to their origin in the data thus establishing a paper trail.

Participants' interviews offered detailed accounts of their experiences. The themes which resulted from the analysis are believed to be sufficiently dense, supported by the interpretations upon which they are based, and it is submitted that the analysis is meaningful, of appropriate depth and represents the participants well.

Discrepant or divergent cases and themes were incorporated and indicated. As described in the analysis section, part of the analytic process involved habitual checking-in with the transcripts to try and ensure interpretations were well-grounded in participants' experiences.

    4) Sufficient space must be given to the elaboration of each theme

In the presentation of each theme, care was taken to include and discuss extracts provided by each of the participants for whom the theme was evident. In some cases, multiple quotes from the same person were used to illustrate variation or add depth. I tried to evidence each theme clearly whilst still giving detailed consideration to the particular nature of each extract. I hope that in the presentation of each theme, *overall* unifying and diversify factors and description of its general character are balanced with the intricacies of the participants' individual utterances.

5) The analysis should be interpretative not just descriptive

I believe the analysis present here extends beyond that of description. I noted duel meanings when they arose in the text and offered discussion of ambiguities. I have considered the way language was used and what it might reflect. To give a specific example, when a character was referred to as 'this' with a hand movement, it was explored as suggestive of more than just her location on the canvas. The particularity of the utterance was considered in relation to the general narrative provided by the participant. She had discussed finding certain aspects of the character disturbing which lead to my considering the interpretation of her reference as a dehumanisation. This interpretation was associated not only with the character as dehumanised but also by the lack of humanity the viewer identified in herself in her 'prejudiced' reaction.

6) The analysis should be pointing to both convergence and divergence

The participants' accounts as discussed were flooded with contrasts and paradox. These in some cases became defining features of themes. In other cases, some parts of a participant's account stood out as noticeably different from the others and this was pointed to in the results. The themes themselves were additionally considered not only in terms of the different elements they captured but also in terms of how they converged and acted together.

To give some particular examples:

In Study One the First Master Theme consists of three subthemes discussed separately. In addition, the final extract, provided by Henry, is used to demonstrate a convergence of the thematic material. The experiences which characterised the three subthemes individually are presented captured in a unified manner to illustrate a case of their flowing together.

Staying with the First Study, divergence was an inherent aspect of the theme discussing tensions and contradictions. In addition, within this theme, there was divergence between participants. The majority of the viewers recounted contradictions that were quite physically and visually based – elements which were pictorially part of but also stood out from the paintings. However, Marian, who looked at the Victorian surgical scene *The Gross Clinic* discussed social ideals. She described the different points in time which set them apart but suggested that they were simultaneously part of a single sense of modernity.

In a more explicit instance, accounts of the emotionality of viewing (theme three) were dominated by feelings of vulnerability and exposure. Nude bodies and isolated or ominous settings featured often. However, care was taken to include the interpretation of a mother and child relationship which stood out from the others in its warm and comforting nature.

In a similar vein, in The Second Study Linda's maternal protectiveness towards the characters depicted and Kitty's sense of fear were both included in the discussion. In the theme Juxtapositions and Tensions, some viewers felt that the servants occupied a relatively good position in the court given their status. Others saw overwhelming mistreatment. Some viewed the Infanta according to her privilege and the type of life she might enjoy, others saw her as commodified and reduced to the status of an ornament.

In addition to presenting these areas of convergence and divergence between viewers, attention was also paid to unity and disunity within each individuals account. Viewers often took contrary stances and this was readily acknowledged. Jay admired Velazquez for his perceived political ideals and sensitive depictions of people who would usually be invisible. And yet he noted he was the painter for the king and aristocracy who were the engines of oppression thus *"favourably representing the people who were committing that and in charge of it is pretty horrible"*

7) The paper needs to be carefully written

I have tried to present the themes in an order which is helpful to the reader and allows the experiences they describe to be related cogently. Being immersed in the data it is easy to overlook elements needed to guide and signpost the analysis for someone fresh to it. I have tried to clarify who is speaking, when and what specific parts of a painting they might be speaking about. I have selected extracts carefully not only due to their

presence in themes but also for the clarity of expression and strength of their resonances. I have tried to privilege the accounts of my participants whilst still providing what is hopefully interesting interpretative commentary.

Reflexive Statement

Instead of recounting an unbroken discussion of reflexivity I would like to present three practical examples from different points in the research where awareness of my own position and role as researcher figured in directing my work.

The first example relates to an earlier point in the research process during the interviewing stage:

Initially, I conducted some practice or pilot interviews to see how the schedule worked and try and identify any difficulties in advance. I began each interview by explaining that I wasn't an artist or art expert, emphasising that I didn't know much about art. I thought this would make the participants more comfortable to discuss a painting. I assumed, though not consciously at the time, that most people who were not 'experts' would, like me, have an attitude that they didn't know about art but enjoyed it. The 'I don't know about art but I know what I like' adage.

After a couple of practice interviews, I began to realise not only was this a huge assumption on my part, it was actually having a detrimental effect on the discussions. People regarded 'knowing about' art in all sorts of ways. It wasn't necessarily this elusive ephemeral thing only a particular few were given access to. 'Knowing' came from having strong reactions, from having seen lots of paintings, from seeing one painting that was really special, from having friends and family that were enthusiastic. And 'knowing' wasn't considered important or necessary to all the viewers in terms of the quality or form of their experiences. In fact, my protestations of ignorance undermined the viewers' space to talk passionately about paintings and become seriously involved with the looking and discussion.

I was far more careful in subsequent interviews to present a more neutral foundation. I explained I wasn't an art-historian but that I was really interested to find out about how other people viewed paintings. I did want to retain my sensitivity towards the participants' comfort however and not move too far in the other direction. I further considered that talking about art with a psychologist might imply 'testing' or 'assessment'. I was careful therefore to point out that this was not the purpose of the

interview or study. This was indicated at initial contact and during the consent and debrief discussions.

This second example relates to conducting the analysis and describes a situation where I had to revise an interpretation:

When I was writing up the first study Jean's comments about *Ship and Red Sun* captured my attention. She described "*A ship unless it's… unless there's something wrong*" (4,1) which was "*even more vulnerable. It's just floating in space alongside the sun*" (9,16)

I thought about the ship, floating along in a menacing silence. The comment screamed to me that this was The Nostromo from the film Alien (1979). Here was this 'ship' floating in space, vulnerable against the uncontrollable power represented by the sun. How could it not be Alien? I wrote what felt like an insightful commentary about different aliens and alienations in the various accounts and then caught myself in my tracks.

A recent instance comes to mind where some viewers were baffled by the 'red room' featured in the TV show 'Stranger Things' (2016) set in the 1980s. These younger (than me!) audience members had never used a film camera or had any idea that photos used to be developed in a dark room. They saw it as a mythical place where pictures were washed in special liquids. The lesson being: a cultural understanding or importance to one person is something entirely different to another.

Of course this was about Alien… to *me*. My cultural sandbox and hers may or may not have been utterly different and shaped by a whole range of diverse factors. Had the interpretation been supported by Jean consistently referencing films or describing Ridley Scott as her favourite filmmaker this interpretation might have been more justified. However, this was not the case and I suspected my own attraction to the analogy was more influential. Sufficed to say my Alien interpretation did not make it into the final analysis.

This third example relates to my overall position in relation to the research question, objectives and how I might inadvertently direct or shape what was found:

I was concerned during the work on this study about how sitting and talking, thinking and questioning, might relate to or influence capturing the real experience of art-viewing. After one of my interviews, I was excited to record in my research diary some

of the things I had learnt. Here (*italicised text*) is a diary extract following my interview with Sasha:

Sasha told me during her interview about how people used to look at paintings in Velazquez' time. In the absence of television people would stand around a painting and use it as a conversation piece, talking about what they thought was happening in the image, what they liked and disliked about it, whether they thought the artist had done a good job or not.

In a way, this brought us both closer to the painting in its original setting. We were doing a similar thing in the interview. Sitting and discussing the image in the way it would have been done historically. I was right, after all, this was a legitimate way to look at art! My study was valid, I was saved. *Where did this modern idea come about that paintings should be observed silently and internally? I should think and write more about cultural situatedness.*

I didn't realise until later that I had completely missed the point. What was notable wasn't that the way we look at art might be historically or culturally situated, what isn't? More importantly, some of my own assumptions of which I had been unaware, had been exposed. I apparently had some notion that there could be 'real' ways people looked at paintings and that these were the ones I needed to capture in my research. There were the ways that people *actually* looked at art and then there were other ways… Really?

Being eager to ensure I had 'really' captured the 'actual' experience suggested I had some quite powerful indwelling ideas of what that 'actually' was. Such ideas were dangerous left unchecked as they could become prescriptive of what in the accounts was emphasised or overlooked. This was a definite reminder to concentrate on what the participants were saying and try and focus on their experiences. To persist in being inductive rather than being distracted by notions of what ought to be found.

To finish, I hope that this work will contribute to our understanding of how some people look at some paintings. And that it will inspire more investigation in this area and provoke consideration of phenomenology, both psychological and philosophical, as illuminative of our encounters with artworks.

In conclusion, we shouldn't stop looking into paintings.

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Appendices

Appendix A Sample Participant Information Sheet

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCES BIRKBECK UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Participant Information

Title of Study: The phenomenology of aesthetic encountering

Name of researcher: Rachel Starr

Dear participant,

This research is being done as part of a PhD in the Department of Psychological Sciences, Birkbeck University of London and has received ethical approval.

It is a study of how people view and respond to art works. If you agree to participate you will take part in an interview which involves choosing a painting from a selection provided and discussing it with the researcher.

The interview will take about an hour and will be recorded. The recordings will only be listened to by the researcher who will transcribe them, following which they will be destroyed.

All names and identifying details will be changed on the transcripts to protect your anonymity. You will be free to stop the interview and withdraw at any time for any reason and all information will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

The results of the study will be written up as part of the thesis for my PhD. Parts of the transcripts may be quoted from but you will not be identifiable in the write up or any publication which might ensue.

If you have any further questions before or following the interview you can contact me at

rachelastarr@gmail.com

The study is supervised by Professor Jonathan Smith. If you wish to contact the supervisor, contact details are:

Department of Psychological Sciences
Birkbeck University of London
Malet St
London WC1E 7HX

TEL: 020 7079 0868

Appendix B Sample Consent form

Consent form

Please delete as appropriate:

I agree to take part	YES/NO
I understand and agree that my interview will be audio recorded	YES/NO
I understand that I have the right to ask for the audio recording to be turned off at any time during the interview.	YES/NO
I understand and agree that this recording will be transcribed	YES/NO
I understand and agree that this transcript may be quoted from but my details will remain anonymous	YES/NO
I understand I am free to withdraw from the study at any time	YES/NO
I have read the participant information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	YES/NO

Participant Signature: _____

Researcher Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C Sample Recruitment Flyer

<div align="center">

Are you interested in art?

</div>

I am conducting research with the University of Birkbeck into the experience of art appreciation.

I am looking for participants who are enthusiastic about art to be interviewed as part of my research.

The interview involves choosing an unfamiliar painting to look at and talking about the thoughts, feelings and ideas it might provoke. It is very informal and usually lasts from forty five minutes to an hour.

No particular knowledge of art is required, just a willingness to share ideas about paintings.

If you might be interested in taking part or would like more information please contact me at

rachelastarr@gmail.com