

Tangible Territory

**Inviting the Body into the Experience
of Moving Image**

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of the degree of the Doctor of
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I. Abstract

Summary

This thesis identifies approaches to film-making which stimulate a relationship of active involvement between the cinematic image and the viewer through the evocation of tactility and embodied memory, thus inviting the viewer's whole body into the experiencing of the moving image. I do this specifically by defining and exploring, in theory and practice, the concept of *tangible territory* which, I propose, emerges from the encounter between the viewer's embodied self and the moving image work.

Key words: touch, tactility, embodied memory, haptic visuality, moving image, tangible territory

After working with Softimage 3D animation software in the late 1990s, as a maker I found the absence of physical contact with the computer-generated object frustrating. The inaccessibility of computer-generated imagery (CGI) to touch also leads to an absence of embodied memory in a CG object. Touch (human or otherwise) helps to imprint time both metaphorically and literally (i.e. through marks and scratches), while also charging objects with “strenuous human emotion”, an idea explored by the Czech film-maker Jan Švankmajer in his work. I further believe that the absence of embodied memory and emotion is also passed on to the viewer.

While computer-generated imagery (CGI) functions as a particularly clear example of this problem, because it involves digital, or “untouched reality”¹, moving image itself, as an audio-visual medium, faces some of the same challenges, because it lacks the capacity to employ touch directly, both in the filming process and in the subsequent experiencing of it. At the same time certain film-makers, among them Švankmajer and Andrei Tarkovsky, do succeed in evoking some of these touch-induced qualities (a sense of embodied memory, the emotional charge of particular locations) purely through the medium of the moving image.

¹ Jan Švankmajer, interview with author, 2011, see Appendix I.

By investigating specific films, using some of the existing theories of haptic cinema and haptic visuality as a critical framework, and through the verification/exploration of these propositions in my practice, I identify the approaches required for tactile, embodied, emotive expression in the medium of the moving image. I do this by defining and utilising what I call “tangible territory”, a cinematic space that evokes tactility, through which the body of the viewer is engaged in the experience of the moving image (if only in a mediated way). Rather than perceiving this as a prioritization of haptic visuality over optical visuality, I see this as a way of restoring balance in our understanding of the two, while also drawing attention to the need for the multi-sensory involvement of the audience in the experience of the cinematic art form.

Core research questions:

- 1. What are the unique qualities of the sense of touch, and how can these be communicated through the expressive vocabulary of the medium of the moving image?**
- 2. How can touch, and more precisely haptic visuality, be consciously employed by a film-maker as the bridging device between the fully embodied, living experience stored in the viewer’s subjective, sensual memory and the experience of watching a film, which by definition cannot offer a direct immersion of the body?**
- 3. What is the role, and what are the defining features, of *tangible territory*, a concept I devised to hold the various elements of my research in a unified form, in inviting the body into the experience of the moving image?**

My research generates original insights, in both theory and practice, into the evocation of tactile impressions by visual (and also audio) means. Through creating the concept of what I call *tangible territory* and the subsequent practical utilization of this concept in my film-making practice I attempt to ‘ground’ the viewer, deepening her experience and understanding of the perceived moving image, inviting her entire body to participate in the cinematic encounter.

Methodology

1. Cinematographic Theory by the pioneering academics Laura U Marks (*Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*) and Jennifer M Barker (*The Tactile Eye*), as well as

Giuliana Bruno (*Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film*), and close analysis of films (e.g. Švankmajer's *Conspirators of Pleasure*) informs my understanding of the tactile in cinema. I establish a framework for 'tangible territory', my own concept being derived from both cinematography (particularly from theories of haptic visuality and mimesis, as well as the haptic space of cinema) as well as the Surrealist term "morphologie mentale". This approach focuses on the effects of particular uses of the camera as a tool (e.g. zooms, pans, tracking, pulling, pushing, focus, depth of field, point of view, choice of lenses etc.), as well the effect of editing, mise en scène and sound (mentioned only briefly, for reasons explained in my introduction). My study of Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* stands as the basis of another valuable line of enquiry concerned with evoking embodied memory in film through the choice of specific locations and objects as well as emphasising the role of surface. This is particularly relevant to CGI artists, because of the lack of embodied memory in their medium.

2. Interdisciplinary Workshops and Collaborative Projects

I have developed practical approaches to the exploration of the tactile and its relationship to visual imagery, sound, and memory through tactile drawing workshops, encouraging participants to explore connections between memory, scale and visual/tactile modes of perception. My workshops are also based on visits to controlled environments (e.g. the Hamburg exhibition *Dialogue in the Dark*²). Outcomes include drawings, texts and photographs. Through the tactile arts peer group *Art in Touch*³, which I set up in 2009, I encourage dialogues across disciplines in the form of screenings, group exhibitions and seminars which involve close collaborations with other artists, as well as with writers, philosophers and scientists.

3. Film-making - My own practice is a form of research, self-reflectively exploring tactile aspects of the audio-visual, not only in my studio work which results in short films, but also in making these available to the public for constructive response through gallery installations and screenings.

Research Outcomes

These consist of a series of short films testing my findings concerned with haptic visuality, embodied memory and the nature of tangible territory. I was further interested in the way the films are presented: what happens when a film becomes part of a gallery installation, allowing for an immersive experience. The written thesis provides a critical context and its own rigorous conceptual vocabulary, which, by engaging with the tactile possibilities of the moving image, could be helpful to film-makers who are concerned to

² A permanent exhibition in total darkness, discussed in more detail in Chapter II.

³ More information can be found on the website www.artintouch.co.uk

heighten this quality in their work, with a particular relevance to animators working in CGI, whose tactile involvement with their subject is severely limited.

Dissemination

As an ongoing commitment to the dissemination of my work I participate in a range of conferences. To date these have included the NSU Winter Symposium *Strategies for Embodiment*, in Aarhus, Denmark, in February 2011; the *Conference on Practice-Based Research in Art and Design*, at Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Germany, in December 2011 (I have also been asked by the Bauhaus-Universität conference committee to contribute an article on my research to their publication *It's a Method! – Practice-based Research* (March 2012)); and *New Perspectives on Animation*, at Kings College, London, March 2012. I also participated in a collaborative installation of my work at the conference *SENSORY WORLDS: Environment, Value and the Multi-Sensory*, held at Edinburgh University in December 2011. I organized and curated one of the *Light & Shadow Salons*⁴, to explore my research subject in a new context while inviting various artists and speakers to explore the language of matter, touch and memory. I am a member of the CREAM research group at the University of Westminster, as well as the Animation Postgraduate Research Group, set up by the animation writer Paul Ward. During the four years of my PhD study I participated in eight group shows and held two solo shows, all of which were directly connected to my research.

⁴ Monthly events organised by Chiara Ambrosio to discuss the moving image in its various forms, taking place at the Horse Hospital, London.

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**For the benefit of film-makers, artists and others interested
in the relationship between touch and vision**

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 1. *Tactile Workshop*, 2009
 2. *Stamp Exercise*, 2009
 3. *Wallis Eats*, 2009
 4. *Melusine*, 2010
 5. *Nameless Wood*, 2011
 6. *Red Riding Hood*, 2012

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Author's declaration:

1. During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification.
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I. Introduction

1. Timeliness and context of my research

“If you are trying to decide what is more important - the experience of the eye or the experience of the body, always trust the body, because touch is an older sense than sight and its experience is more fundamental. Apart from that, in our contemporary audio-visual civilization, the eye is rather tired and 'spoilt'. The experience of the body is more authentic, uninhabited by aesthetisation.”⁵

Due to our society’s overt reliance on sight, and its elevation above all other senses, sight has been criticized as domineering mode of perception which has at its core a sense of imposition rather than exchange. As Gabriel Josipovici notes: “Sight is free and sight is irresponsible...To look costs me nothing but to go involves both a choice and a cost.”⁶

Looking appeals to the modern consumer and the world of advertising exactly because of its ability to offer instant gratification for what at first appears to be no cost. For the very same reason sight has been overtly abused by the media, so that the modern consumer is saturated with images. Ironically, it is this overloading with visual imagery that, as Jan Švankmajer (the Czech Surrealist film-maker, whose body of work provides one of the most valuable sources of information for my own research) believes, that leads to a decreased quality of seeing. Švankmajer holds the conviction that we (the citizens of the West) have forgotten how to look, and it is through this appeal for deeper engagement with our surroundings that Švankmajer draws our attention to touch. His view is that touch has preserved a certain primitive bond with the world, partly due to its harnessing in everyday utilitarian tasks. Yet as Rosalyn Driscoll, a sculptor who has spent many decades exploring the particular qualities of touch, argues in her book *By the Light of the Body*: “The problem lies not in sight itself but in the way we see. We have neglected the body as a source of knowledge. The *disembodied observer* has become the ideal paradigm, upheld by science, academia, medicine and law.”⁷ It is, indeed, this sense of disembodiment that leads to a sense of disconnection from our environment, while our over-reliance on vision, rather than being a cause of this problem in itself, is only a symptom.

⁵ Jan Švankmajer, 1998, quoted in Peter Hames, *Dark Alchemy: The Cinema of Jan Švankmajer* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), p.141

⁶ Gabriel Josipovici, *Touch*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996, p. 24

⁷ Rosalyn Driscoll, *By the Light of the Body* (forthcoming).

With the sharp rise in the powerful presence of technology at all levels of human activity, this aforementioned sense of disembodiment grows more prominent, bringing with it an inevitable counter-tendency which manifests itself in the physical, emotional and psychological need for touch. While in the past the idea of not needing to press a button to activate a process seemed appealing, today the longing for the involvement of the body in everyday experience once again returns. This tendency is visible, for instance, in the popularity of projects by the Institute of Making, founded by Mark Miodownik and Zoe Laughlin, which now collaborates with Tate Modern, the Wellcome Institute and other institutions, enabling visitors to feel and understand the materials from which most works of art are made, and which they would not normally be allowed to touch in a gallery context.

Being a film-maker and previously also an animator (with experience of working with 16mm film and also CGI) I am aware of both the necessity for my own tangible engagement with the medium during the process of making and the duty to communicate this experience to the viewer in order to involve her body in the encounter with the moving image work, even if this is only through evocation. Moreover, having based my research in the academic context of an animation department I understand my practice as located on the threshold between animation and live action film-making, and am therefore interested in exploring how animation informs live action film-making, especially with regard to tactility. Animators, particularly those specializing in stop-motion animation, have an intense relationship with the subject matter of their films: they have touched every element thousands of times, as they bring inanimate objects to life. While I remain largely distant from stop-motion animation techniques in my own practice, I am aware of the direct impact that animation and animators have had on both my film-making and my understanding of tactility and its relationship to moving image work. Perceiving moving image material through the “animator’s lens”, as well as the chance to reflect and discuss my ideas with animators, has allowed me to pay more close attention to the objects and settings of my own films, which now bear the mark of this knowledge. In practical terms the result is a heightened attention to detail in my work, as well as the awareness of the importance of familiarizing myself with the subject matter of my films through touch, the way an

animator has to because of the nature of their work. This effect is also carried over to the post-production phase, leading to a subtly manipulated image,⁸ with the help of effects.

Another aspect which should not be overlooked, of course, is the growing trend for the use of CGI, noted earlier. Together with the general rise in digital technology, this tendency leads to a further distancing of the maker from their subject matter through the lack of tactile interaction with their work. At the basis of this process lies a certain frustration, which I was able to confirm and verify both through my own experience of working with CGI and through discussion with other film-makers involved with it. Jan Švankmajer goes as far as to say: “Virtual reality has no tactile dimension...It is therefore not charged by strenuous human emotions. It is a stillborn child.”⁹ Švankmajer is one of the few film-makers consciously focused on bringing the sense of touch into his work: his book *Touch and Imagination* was the very starting point for my adventure into the realm of tangible territory, and because of this his work plays a crucial role in my research.

Having begun my journey into the tactile within the field of moving image, I realized relatively early on that my work in fact belongs to a particular current within cinematographic studies, which approaches cinema as a multi-sensory medium capable of addressing a range of senses. While the popularity of 3D software is undeniable, a counter-movement exploring the physical and material aspects of celluloid acetate acetate, in particular, is also gaining in popularity, albeit in a relatively marginal way in comparison to mainstream film production. Canadian film studies writer Tess Takahashi has explored this in detail.¹⁰ The 2011/2012 Tate Modern Turbine Hall installation by Tacita Dean, *FILM*, also celebrates celluloid acetate film as the last embodied medium of the film-maker, while mourning its imminent demise at the virtual hands of the digital.

Although my research has led me through the area of the physicality of the medium of celluloid acetate film, I have ultimately decided to concentrate on the digital medium. This is in part due to the fact that my own artistic practice employs the digital, and in part because I understand the discrepancy between it and tactility as well as embodied memory as a more interesting challenge due to its inherent contradiction. At the same time it is precisely technology’s predominance that triggers the concerns of the seemingly neglected body, and it therefore makes sense to confront the challenge of the embodied

⁸ Another definition of animation is “manipulated image” as proposed by the late Dick Arnall, founder of Animate Projects.

⁹ Jan Švankmajer, interview with author, 2011, see Appendix I.

¹⁰ Tess Takahashi, ‘After the Death of Film: Writing the Natural World in the Digital Age’, *Visible Language*, 42,1 (2008), pp.44-69

viewer within the field of the seemingly disembodied. This tension around technology's softening or weakening of our body's involvement with the surrounding world, the most obvious example being 3D animation software such as Maya, reveals in my view a vast and fertile area of investigation, in which touch must play a key role. While the medium of my work plays an important role in my understanding of tactility and the moving image, its primary focus lies in the uncovering of the ways in which tactility can be communicated by visual means, through evocation rather than by literal embodiment.

Finally I would like to mention briefly here the issue of gender which inevitably comes to mind, especially with regard to the differences between theories of haptic and optical visuality as discussed by Laura U Marks in *The Skin of the Film*. As Marks tells us, many critics have pointed out "the specifically Western character of visuality as one that objectifies others, isolates self from others, and attempts to master external and internal worlds."¹¹ It is this masculine approach, or, as Laura Mulvey calls it in her seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'¹² "a dominant patriarchal order", which in fact dominates mainstream cinema. Since haptic visuality is a form of visuality that "yields to the thing seen" and thus "escapes the attribution of mastery"¹³ it lends itself to the feminist argument. While the gender issue does inevitably arise in my writing, not least because of the tension between my own work and the work of Jan Švankmajer (whose work is very strongly masculine), it does not provide the main framework of my analysis of haptic visuality, because for me the matter of the body's involvement in the cinematic experience transcends gender in significant ways.

To conclude, I would like to clarify my own position, which is primarily that of a maker rather than an academic. This, while having the potential to be both a weakness and a strength, is nonetheless not a question of choice, as "making" is for me the most natural way of "making sense" of the world.

Throughout this journey I have realised that my practical investigation (workshops and film-making) helped me significantly in grasping the core elements of my research, focusing on what was relevant, particular, more tangible, while leaving out that which was too vague and speculative. It was precisely through identifying in practice the more specific, rather than general, issues within the theoretical field of my interest that the possibility for a more focused argument emerged. This for me lies at the basis of artistic

¹¹ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 5

¹² Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16.3 (1975), pp. 6-18, p.7

¹³ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p.132

research, which not only allows for the application of theoretical knowledge to practical work but in turn, through a directed creative process, feeds back into the theoretical work, making it grounded, or, embodied.

2. General Overview of Chapters

Within the scope of this research I have decided to focus primarily on the relationship between the tactile and visual aspects of film-making, while being fully aware of the importance of sound in enhancing the tactile impact of moving image works. Having studied Švankmajer's films in particular I was confronted with the power of the soundtrack in bringing a great intensity to the tactile appreciation of his films. To mention an example, in Švankmajer's *Conspirators of Pleasure* (discussed in Chapter II) sound plays a very prominent role, and is heightened artificially and to great effect. In my own experiments, such as the filmic exercise *Wallis Eats*, also discussed below, I do in fact explore sound effects and use them to exaggerate the sense of disgust during the consumption of a five-course meal.¹⁴ Throughout the process of my research I came to realize that the relationship between sound and tactility is in fact such a large area of investigation in itself that it should not form just a subsection of my thesis, and in fact demands its own in-depth research. The connection between sound and tactility is therefore something I only mention in passing on a couple of occasions in this thesis, while planning to devote the next project to its exploration. Finally, in order to clarify the issue of sound in my own film-making practice, particularly in the context of my PhD research, I want to point out that I worked closely with composers and sound designers, who, while briefed thoroughly, were primarily in control of the sound designing process.

My investigation is conceived of as a journey into what I call 'tangible territory', an original concept which I define and then utilise in order to bring all the manifold strands of my exploration into a coherent whole. The thesis itself is structured into four main areas of investigation, which in turn are subdivided into more detailed areas of concern.

In the first chapter, entitled **Gathering Tools**, I explore the sense of touch as a unique way of experiencing the world. Based on various practical experiments, as well as

¹⁴ There is for example the parchment skin illusion, "which demonstrates that sounds that are exactly synchronous with hand-rubbing may strongly modify the resulting tactile sensations", V. Jousmäki and R. Hari, 'Parchment-skin illusion: sound-biased touch', *Current Biology*, 12;8(6) (1998)

theoretical research, I identify particular modes of perception that are specific to touch but also relevant to vision, and define methods of translating these into an audio-visual language of moving image. In terms of theory I focus on the concept of haptic visuality as explored by Laura U Marks and Jennifer M Barker, while for the practical application I analyse the tactile methods for cinema devised by the Czech film-maker Jan Švankmajer, such as specific uses of the camera as a tool of touch (e.g. zooms, pans, tracking, focus, etc.) as well the effect of editing, mise en scène and sound. In terms of the expedition as a whole I see this stage as that of gathering skills and tools in order to embark on the journey.

The second chapter, entitled **Mapping the Terrain of Lived Space**, maps out the so-called “terrain of lived space”, a phrase coined by Giuliana Bruno in her book *Atlas of Emotion*¹⁵. I consider this to be an emotional, embodied space of the viewer’s imagination that is both external (i.e. originating in the exterior world: landscape, a building, etc.) and internal (a subjective world based on embodied memory and associations). This is also addressed with reference to Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*¹⁶, a book of collected essays, *Material Memories: Design and Evocation*,¹⁷ and the work of Jan Švankmajer. While speaking of surface I briefly mention the medium of film (as opposed to digital techniques), and its particular way of absorbing and embodying memory through decay and so on, with reference to Tess Takahashi’s essay.¹⁸ I use my own short film *Melusine* as a case study, to help me to map my own terrain of lived space while also allowing me to reflect on the successes and failures of some of the tactile methods identified and tested up to this point.

The third chapter, **Entering the Tangible Territory**, explores the dynamic relationship between the cinematic image and the viewer’s embodied self. The term “motion of emotions”¹⁹, discussed by Giuliana Bruno in *Atlas of Emotion*, is analysed in connection with her proposed idea of cinema (or the moving image) continuing the picturesque tradition, while the idea of shifting viewpoints is applied practically as one of the modes of exploration by the maker, identifying the camera’s body with the body of the viewer as it moves through the tangible territory. The concept of the projection field, understood as an extension of the tangible territory which encompasses both a surface and a three-dimensional space, such as an architectural structure, is studied in depth. I

¹⁵ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (New York: Verso, 2011)

¹⁶ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994)

¹⁷ Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, Jeremy Aynsley, *Material Memories: Design and Evocation (Materializing Culture)*, (Oxford: Berg, 1999)

¹⁸ After the Death of Film: ‘Writing the Natural World in the Digital Age’, *Visible Language*, 42.1 (2008), pp.

¹⁹ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*

see this chapter as an embarkation into the tangible territory itself, so that the map is transformed into a terrain of lived space.

The Tactile Lexicon for Filmmakers is a compilation of key terms, tactile tools and playful initiation methods (for the film-maker as well as the rest of the crew), which distils what I consider the most vital aspects of my investigation into a form that is quick, accessible and also playful, in the Surrealist tradition. It allows other film-makers, or those interested in tactility and the moving image, to identify the most important elements of my research.

II. Gathering Tools

On Tactile Perception and Haptic Visuality

This chapter explores the sense of touch as a unique way of experiencing the world, and its relationship to sight in particular. It identifies modes of perception specific to touch, and looks for methods of translating these into an audio-visual language of film. My primary dialogue is with the Czech filmmaker Jan Švankmajer, whose book *Touch and Imagination* became the original source of inspiration for my research.

Because touch, more than any other sense, is based on the mutual reciprocity which is the key feature of dialogue, my methodology by definition reflects this dialogical approach to investigation. Since this particular chapter is concerned with modes of exploration of the tactile sense, my methodology is especially prominent here. It includes practical experiments consisting of visits to controlled environments, as well as tactile workshops, which have enabled me to focus on tactile perception in isolation from sight. I developed further exercises that helped me to translate these into visual imagery. These included drawing, modelling in clay and finally also short filmic exercises, which became the first initial steps along the way to exploring what the academic Laura U Marks calls “haptic visuality²⁰”.

1. Tactile Dialogue

'The only pure, virginal sense that remains is touch. It's also the only one that hasn't been catered for by the arts. It hasn't been aestheticised. I see it as an unexplored plain; I believe there is a buried treasure there.'²¹

In *De Anima*, Aristotle categorises touch as the most basic of the five senses, in that it is found in all animals. As Stewart tells us in her essay ‘Prologue: From the Museum of Touch’, for Aristotle “touch was the sense needed for being, whereas other senses were necessary for well being.”²²

Touch constitutes the very foundation of our experience, because we exist as embodied beings. To touch something is often synonymous with confirming its reality. This

²⁰ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*

²¹ Jan Švankmajer, *Hmat a Imaginace*, Prague: Kozoroh, 1994, p.6

²² Susan Stewart, ‘Prologue: From the Museum of Touch’, in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation (Materializing Culture)* p.21

experience stems perhaps from the experience of our early childhood, when the tactile sense constituted an elemental way of discovering the world, before it became dominated by visual experience. As small children we tested our surroundings through touch, and were guided by the feedback we received. Through touch we defined the boundaries of what was safe and pleasant, and what was not.

Touch itself is a broad term, also encompassing other categories such as kinaesthesia (now more or less synonymous with the term proprioception), which controls movement of the body as well as posture. But even simple contact between our skin and another surface contains a number of different types of encounter: We experience temperature, pressure, consistency, weight, texture, volume, shape etc. But beyond this categorisation we also distinguish between active touch (when we explore an object) and passive touch (the feel of clothes on our skin etc.)

Since touch relies on direct contact between surfaces, to touch an historical object means to certain extent “to bridge space and time”, as touch “annihilates distance and physically unites the toucher and the touched.”²³

It is through the uniting of the subject and object and indeed the reversibility of these roles (because whoever touches is at the same time also being touched) that the tactile sense “represents a confirmation of our boundaries and separateness while permitting a union or connection with others that transcends physical limits.”²⁴ This makes touch at once more powerful, as well as more threatening, than other senses, resulting inevitably in a certain level of caution in its use and subsequent stigmatisation. Touch can be caressing or abusive, it can be sexualised or mothering, it can heal or it can cause damage. We, as embodied beings, are in constant tension between our need to touch and be touched, and society’s as well as our own fear of the negative implications and potential abuse of touch. The fluid relationship between subject and object of tactile perception is based on “touch [traversing] the boundary between interiority and externality and reciprocally [returning] to the agent of touching, [so that] touch, like dizziness, is a threshold activity...”²⁵ To experience through touch is to participate in a form of dialogue with the world. Such a tactile dialogue takes place all the time as we perform our daily tasks: while brushing our teeth, typing on a computer, buying fruit, choosing clothes, cycling...We have become so automatic in these tasks that we do them

²³ Constance Classen, ‘Touch in the Museum’, in *The Book of Touch*, ed. Constance Classen (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp.275 – 286, p.277

²⁴ S. Thayer, cited by Ruth Finnegan in ‘Tactile Communication’ in *The Book of Touch*, pp.18-25, p.18

²⁵ Susan Stewart, ‘Prologue: From the Museum of Touch’, *Material Memories*, p.35

almost unconsciously, and are rarely aware of any tactile feedback, the reply we receive from materials and objects to the questions we ask with our bodies, unless it is of course in the form of pain, or pleasure. Yet to understand touch in its utilitarian role is perhaps to miss the most vital aspect of what touch, or “body sense”, has to offer. As Laura U Marks points out to us in her book *The Skin of the Film*, “theories of embodiment begin with the premise that our bodies are not passive objects “inscribed” with meaning, but are sources of meaning themselves.”²⁶ In an text cited by neurologist S, Weir Mitchell, a survivor of a World War II describes the experience of having lost his limbs: “if utter loss of relation to the outer world were capable of destroying a man’s consciousness of himself, the destruction of half of his sensitive surface might well occasion, in a less degree, a like result, and so diminish his sense of individual existence.”²⁷

The idea that consciousness may indeed be generated in our bodies, rather than confined only to the mind, has some resonances with Stewart’s speculations about the general openness of the senses to the environment, an openness which allows external impressions and experience to become internalised while “consciousness [becomes] part of the ego’s work of modulating and resisting this openness.” In Stewart’s view it is this “opening and modulation of the senses [that] takes part in a dynamic that is at the core of subjectivity.”²⁸

The subjective meaning that is generated by these exchanges, while taken by us for granted, is not always accessible to the conscious mind. As the founder of the Futurist movement Filippo Marinetti explains, some interactions or dialogues between us and our surroundings happen on a purely unconscious level: “When we feel a piece of iron, we say: this is iron; we satisfy ourselves with a word and nothing more. Between iron and hand a conflict of preconscious force-thought-sentiment takes place. Perhaps there is more thought in the fingertips and the iron than in the brain that prides itself on observing the phenomenon.”²⁹

It is this unconscious material, the emotional, imaginative responses, associations and memories that an external tactile stimulus can trigger in us, that the artist and filmmaker Jan Švankmajer identifies as an invaluable source of artistic inspiration and expression, while setting out on a mission to excavate and utilize it in his work. This

²⁶ Thomas Csordas, cited by Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p.145

²⁷ S Weir Mitchell, ‘Phantom Touch in “The Case of George Dedlow”’, in *The Book of Touch*, pp.311-316, p.316

²⁸ Susan Stewart, ‘Prologue: From the Museum of Touch’, *Material Memories*, p. 19

²⁹ Filippo Marinetti, *Tacilism* (1921) See Appendix II for Marinetti’s Scale of Tactile Values

interplay is also something that I explored in practice during a series of tactile workshops which I conducted at the Royal College of Art, as well as during my visits to controlled environments, such as *Dans Le Noir*, which will be discussed later.

2. In Dialogue with Jan Švankmajer

The work of Jan Švankmajer, whose cinematic practice is directly influenced by his tactile investigations, acted as both trigger and companion along my journey into tangible territory, inspiring playful experimentation as well as feeding directly into my film-making practice, by offering a direct example of how tactility can be employed by a film-maker.

As a native Czech speaker I had the relatively unique opportunity to access material that has not yet been translated into English, or indeed any other language, such as *Hmat a Imaginace (Touch and Imagination)*³⁰ - Švankmajer's book of his collected investigations, which has become the first source of ideas for playful experimentations in touch), and a chance to enter into a conversation with the artist directly, a conversation which I have been able to develop over the past four years.

My initial research has revealed that the visceral impact of Jan Švankmajer's films comes as a result of his direct experimentation with touch on his physical body, as well as workshops and playful exercises that he initiated and participated in as a member of the Czech Surrealist group. His keen interest in the tactile developed during the seven-year ban from film-making which the Communist regime of his native Czechoslovakia imposed on him. The connection between the muting of Švankmajer's 'cinematic voice' and his focusing on tactile modes of expression was not just incidental but revealed the availability of touch to become a universal mode of communication, beyond the reach of censorship. At the same time, touch became a kind of "weapon" of imaginative subversion, since it allowed the artist to tap into a hidden reservoir of rich, raw, untamed imaginative content, and to express this material in ways that were unburdened by aesthetic concerns. To put this even more directly and simply, Švankmajer realised that tactile experimentation and creativity is an invaluable tool in aiding the liberation of the imagination of both the maker and the audience.

³⁰ Jan Švankmajer, *Hmat a Imaginace (Touch and Imagination)*, Prague: Kozoroh, 1994

While Jan Švankmajer's body of work is widely recognized internationally, his strong interest in combining the tactile sense and cinema does not appear to have been picked up, or at least has not been explored so far, by the particular group of academics whose area of expertise is in the field of tactility and film. The implications of Švankmajer's experience are particularly interesting because, as he himself admits, they have influenced his approach to film-making per se and have therefore affected his work in a permanent way: "even in the latest films, where the tactile experience isn't notably visible, it is present in a latent form. I am convinced that these films would look very different were it not for the previous tactile experiences."³¹

This is a crucial point which, I believe, makes my investigation into tangible territory more relevant to other film-makers, because it shows that the awareness and utilisation of tactility in film is not just a fad that will be explored and abandoned again when a new one arises, but is in fact a powerful method that can be employed by a film-maker to "enrich the emotive arsenal of the available means of expression used in film-making."³²

Jan Švankmajer's own interest in the tactile emerged from his Surrealist heritage. One of the core driving forces behind the Surrealist movement, which originated in France in the early years of the twentieth century, and whose godfather was the poet André Breton, was an attempt to bring to the surface the experiences hidden within the realm of the unconscious, and find a way of merging this experience with that of the conscious mind. The Surrealists believed that the real and unreal would be united, creating thus the sur-real, or the reality beyond the real. Various methods were devised in order to access unconscious content. One of the "modes of attack" aimed at disrupting the habituality of being in the world was the Surrealist attempt at the "derangement of all the senses", whose importance they elevated beyond any aesthetic concern. These included procedures such as automatic writing, frottage and dream analysis, as well as various tactile experiments.

But it was Marinetti who, to a certain extent, formalized concerns around the creative harnessing of the tactile senses, in his *Manifesto of Tactilism*, which he wrote in 1921. Marinetti was interested in the concept of Tactilism not because of its aesthetic value but because of his belief in its potential to become a powerful instrument with which artists and others could gain new insights about the world: "The Tactilism created by me is

³¹ See Appendix I

³² Jan Švankmajer, *Touch and Imagination*, p.6

clearly distinct from the plastic arts. It has nothing to do with, nothing to gain from, and everything to lose by association with painting or sculpture.”³³

In his *Manifesto of Tactilism* Marinetti was ambitious enough to claim that he “created a first educational scale of touch, which is, at the same time, a scale of tactile values³⁴ for Tactilism, or the Art of Touch.” He did this by categorizing tactile impressions according to their emotional content, and matched these to the textures of materials. One can argue that Marinetti’s tactile scale was an attempt at creating the first objective, if rather simple, language of touch.

The close study of Jan Švankmajer’s work yielded a great depth of information, and to a large extent informed my methodology in its rigorous, passionate and playful engagement with the subject. His achievements in this area provide a useful benchmark for my own aspirations, but also offer a kind of mirror. While being Czech and therefore of shared heritage, his work carries notable masculine traits: it’s forceful, direct, fully involved, often explicitly sexualised³⁵, virile in its tone and expression. His edits are precise, abrupt. There is a sense of control and domination over the image, nothing appears to be left to chance.

These were the qualities that attracted me at first as they stand in opposition to my own approach, which is in its essence based on feminine qualities, bringing with it its own weaknesses: it is often hesitant, detached, observing rather than interfering. Instead of sharp edits I am drawn to long cross-dissolves, layering of imagery. Rather than controlling the image, I often prefer to work in a less constrained way, gathering material intuitively, coercing meaning through the process of editing, retrospectively. The close study of Švankmajer’s work (especially in relation to his masculine approach to cinema and touch) thus allowed for a necessary confrontation with the limitations of my own creative methods, while also clarifying its opposite: the strengths of these.

As shown in subsequent chapters of this thesis, over time it became apparent that the evocation of touch in cinema can be achieved by a variety of methods, some of which are in direct opposition to each other. While the feminine approach to tactility remains the more natural one for me, an awareness and understanding of the masculine approach has been an invaluable contribution to my skills as a film-maker.

³³ Filippo Marinetti, *Tactilism* (1921)

³⁴ See Appendix II for Marinetti’s *Scale of Tactile Values*.

³⁵ See Appendix VIII for analysis of *Game with Stones*, 1965

However, I must also note that it was not just the masculine traits of Švankmajer's filmmaking and his Czech heritage that drew me to his work. It was also his use of animation, the close involvement of his hands with the objects he touches and brings to life, frame by frame, listening to their inner life.

My dialogue with Jan Švankmajer is a thread that weaves through my writing, and a measure against which I lay my own attempts and achievements, and I will therefore be returning to his work on many occasions, most notably when studying closely his film *Conspirators of Pleasure*³⁶, which served as the main case study, and also in my own subchapter entitled *Memory of Objects*, which deals with embodied memory and a fetishist object.

3. Tactile Experiments

Tactile Workshops³⁷

2005 – 2012

Tactile workshops have been a vital part of my personally tailored methodology. They functioned as a testing ground for various practical propositions, as well as an imaginative way of gaining new insights. The original trigger for these was Jan Švankmajer's book *Touch and Imagination*, which catalogued various playful explorations as well as questionnaires and other experiments, some of which were based on original Surrealist games, while others were invented by the Prague Surrealist group of which Švankmajer is a member.

Having taken some of these as a starting point I developed a series of my own tactile exercises, which explored:

- *The unique qualities of tactile perception*
- *The rich associations and embodied memories that touch can trigger*
- *The relationship between tactile and visual memory*
- *The role of attention and its relationship to scale*
- *The role of tactile imagination*
- *Tactile communication and gestic impressions (based on Jan Švankmajer's theories and experiments)*

³⁶ *Conspirators of Pleasure*, dir. by Jan Švankmajer (Kino Video 1999)

³⁷ See Appendix III and the accompanying DVD for more detailed documentation.

- *The translation of textures and tactile properties into emotional qualities (with reference to Marinetti's Scale of Tactile Values³⁸)*
- *The practical application of tactile language to creating artwork*

The workshops were normally divided into two main parts. The first was designed to allow the participants to be immersed in an experience by becoming sensitized to touch, and through isolating touch from sight with the help of a blindfold, which was worn throughout and only taken off for specific tasks, which will be pointed out.

The second part consisted of defining a palette of tactile values and translating these to emotional values, and then using this palette to communicate narratives based on dreams or memories.



Fig 1. Tactile Workshop, Royal College of Art Drawing Studio, 2009

Part I: Experiencing³⁹

- *Exercise 1- Experiencing Materials. The participants are firstly given various textures and materials to explore with their hands, while their attention was drawn to the different tactile qualities. I ensured that there were a great variety of contrasting impressions, also referencing Marinetti's Scale of Tactile Values*, in terms of my choice of textures and objects.*

³⁸ See Appendix II.

³⁹ See Appendix IV for transcriptions of some of the participants' feedback.

- *Exercise 2- Peeling a Fruit. In the next exercise the participants are normally asked to peel a fruit (a satsuma, lychee etc.) while a series of questions was asked, to guide them away from the usual associations connected with a piece of fruit and towards more imaginative interpretations, as well as introduce a narrative. The participants are later asked to note down some of these imaginative journeys and associations.*
- *Exercise 3- Tactile impression translated into drawing An unknown object is explored by touch without referencing it through sight. The objects are chosen in such a way that it is hard to identify them through the tactile sense alone, thus ensuring that the participants have to rely on their tactile sensibilities and imagination alone. Once the subjects have a chance to study the object through touch the object is removed from them and they are asked to draw it from their tactile memory, on a large sheet of A1 paper, while their blindfold is temporarily removed. The objects are often shared between different participants, leading to interesting comparisons between the results. Once the drawings are concluded the objects are revealed and the participants are asked to identify the one they drew, which sometimes proved difficult because of the discrepancy between the immediate visual impressions and tactile memory.*

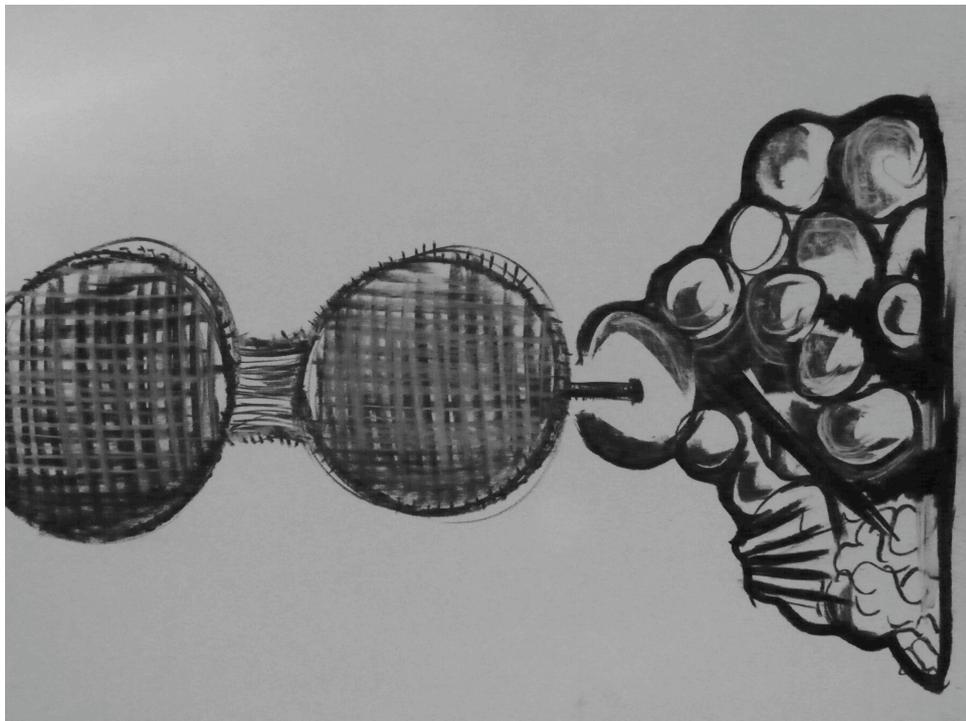


Fig. 2 Tactile Workshop, Royal College of Art Drawing Studio, 2009

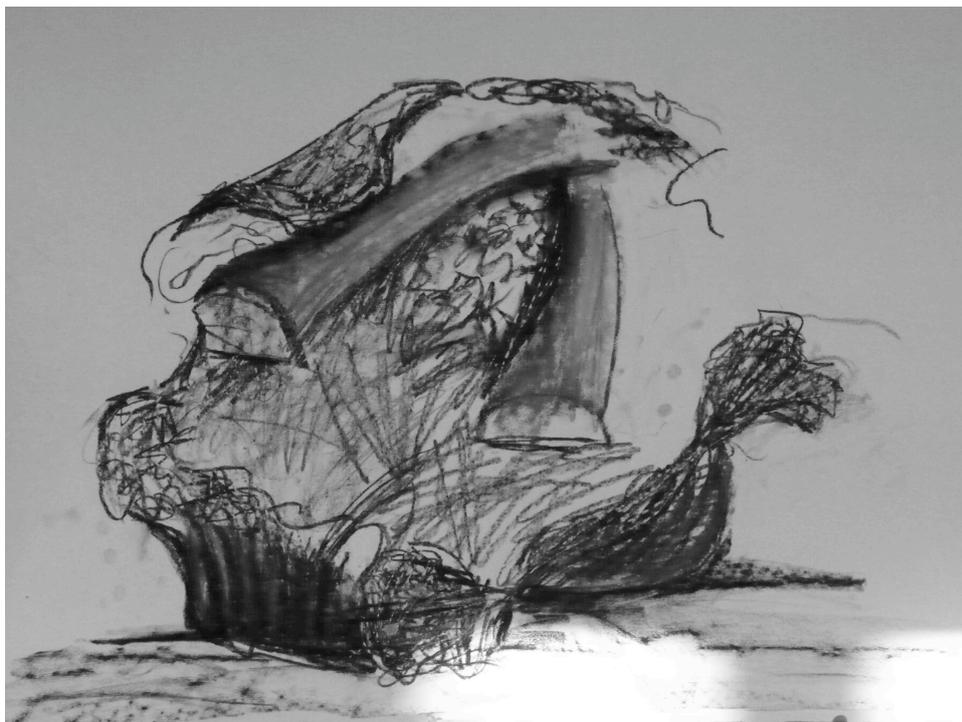


Fig. 3 Tactile Workshop, Royal College of Art Drawing Studio, 2009

Results: The results of this particular exercise are especially interesting. Having examined the large drawings, some of which depicted the same object, it was apparent that tactile perception prioritises very different properties in comparison to sight, which has a tendency to focus on form and ignore detail. The drawings based on tactile perception and tactile memory alone displayed elements of enlargement of scale, where small detail gained great prominence through attention and was subsequently vastly enlarged in the drawings. The drawings had a rawness as well as a freshness, which supports Švankmajer's claim of the tactile sense not having been tamed through aestheticisation. It was this particular exercise that triggered an exploration of scale in my journey into the tangible territory.

- *Exercise 4 – Tactile Conversation. This task is designed with reference to Jan Švankmajer's gestic sculpture, as well as Marinetti's "pre-conscious" conversation that can take place between a hand and an object and bypass the conscious mind. According to Švankmajer, materials have the ability to capture and preserve emotional states that are impressed on them. Švankmajer's own investigation of gestic sculpture (gestic from "gesture", which can be impressed into the material in a raw and spontaneous manner, preserving thus its emotional immediacy) is an ongoing process, and it has affected the aesthetics of his films to a great degree. In this case the participants are blindfolded, and each given a piece of plasticine. They are then asked to mould the lump and then exchange it with their colleague. They have to respond to the shape felt and pass it on, continuing the dialogue. Finally the participants are asked to combine their two pieces*

and given a third lump of plasticine, which they have to incorporate jointly into the shared piece. The tactile conversation plays itself out on a tactile level alone and the results are only revealed at the end.



Fig. 4 Tactile Workshop, Royal College of Art drawing studio, 2009

- *Exercise 5 Frottage. The participants are asked to leave the space and create a tactile portrait of the building, by using the technique of frottage (i.e. rubbing of charcoal over a sheet of paper placed on various textures).*

Part II: Communicating using a tactile palette of emotional values

- *Exercise 6 – Communicating. In this second part of the exercise the participants are asked to define a palette of tactile values by linking tactile impression to emotional qualities, associations or memories. They are then asked to communicate a narrative or create a tactile portrait, utilizing the palette available. This part is designed to test the skills and new-found tactile sensibility actively, through creating tactile artwork.*

Tactile workshops provided a very useful platform for practical group exploration of touch and its relationship to vision and memory in particular. I believe there is a great potential for utilising tactile workshops in my future research. For instance, the targeting of particular groups, such as animators working in CGI, with tailor-made tactile exercises, could provide valuable insights into new ways of bringing tactility into the

digital world, even if indirectly. Specifically targeted tactile workshops could also function as modes of initiation for various members of the film crew (such as cameramen, sound designers and editors) into the subject of tactility, an idea discussed in more depth in my conclusion.

In the Dark

The next couple of experiments consisted of visits to controlled, completely blacked-out environments, one of which was *Dans Le Noir*, a restaurant in Farringdon, London. Originally conceived as an attempt to heighten customers' appreciation of taste through the absence of sight, the restaurant is set in complete darkness and visitors looked after by blind waiters. The second location was *Dialogue in the Dark*, a large-scale international project which consists of exhibitions set in complete darkness.

The effects of my experience have been gathered in a form of reports. The results of *Dans Le Noir* are included here, while the *Dialogue in the Dark* report can be found in Appendix VI, in note form.

Dans Le Noir experiment⁴⁰

Restaurant, Farringdon

Date: 5th December 2008

Time: 9.00pm – 12pm

Informed participants: Deborah Levy, Tereza Stehliková

Design

The design is set by the dining procedure of the restaurant Dans Le Noir. It is a restaurant with a maximum capacity of 60 diners, and there are two evening sittings, at 7.15pm and 9.15pm. All guests for each sitting must enter the restaurant at the same time. The participants must leave all their belongings, including mobile phones, in a locker outside the dining area. The controlled environment is the main dining area, which is completely darkened, so that there is not the smallest source of light. The diners are served by blind waiters who are familiar with the space.

Because this experiment deals with qualitative experience, comparison based on dependent and independent variables is not the method I will use. Instead, a subjective imaginative experience is

⁴⁰ See Appendix V for more detailed report of the experiment.

the main focus of my investigation. The main points I am focusing on are:

Change in immediate perceptions / change in emotions / perception of space / tactile perception / other perceptions, and the role of imagination / attention / memory and movement

Outcome:

- *In the absence of vision the sense of touch became an essential tool of perception. So for example a finger had to be used to measure the amount of liquid in a glass when wine or water were poured, and hands were utilised directly to feel food on a plate before it was brought to the mouth (cutlery was dispensed with). Touch became an important method of communication, of attracting attention and of locating one's body (and also that of others) within the space. It helped to find objects in space and identify special relationships between them. For these reasons the tactile sense became heightened, or perhaps it is more precise to say it became more focused because the subjects were not able to rely on vision. This led to a more acute and richer tactile perception being reported by the subjects.*
- *The awareness of space was created by body experience, such as the number of steps taken to arrive at the table. A certain sense of direction was preserved. Special dimensions were assessed through sound and how it travelled through space. Scale and distance took on a different meaning, certain objects on the table felt close together while other seemed impossibly far, and the differences in size (of glasses etc) seemed more dramatic than when perceived by sight. Tactile perception, deprived of its dialogue with sight, focused more precisely on material properties: texture, temperature, consistency, etc., thus making detail grow literally in prominence.*
- *The sound in the dining area, contrary to expectation, was very loud. The other subjects in the restaurant spoke very loudly, forcing the subjects also to speak quite loudly in order to hear each other. Voices appeared disembodied because there were no bodies to attach the voices to. The line of a conversation became a sort of lifeline, because in complete darkness it was the only thread that bound one person to another (when touch was not being employed).*
- *The food's taste appeared heightened, as did its smell. However, this heightening had a double effect: it made certain food very appetising, while other food became threatening and confusing. The smells in the dining room felt potent and their interaction made subject B feel slightly nauseous.*
- *Attention became more focused due to the fact that vision was disabled. A struggle to clarify perception led to a heightened attention. The subjects became more aware of attention dividing,*

so it could flow in two opposing directions – inward to observe the internal movement of thoughts (which now felt strongly disembodied), and outward, towards confirming the reality of one’s surroundings through touch – feeling the wall, chair, table and the food on the plate (a literal grip on reality). Sound played an important role in this focusing of attention, because, as a sense, it felt closer in nature to the missing vision than touch with its primacy and directness (one could participate in a flow of a conversation without breaking any social taboos). The need to lean closer during a conversation assisted in focusing kinaesthetic awareness of one’s own body and brought extra awareness of the proximity of one’s dining companion.

- *The visual imagination became heightened. Touch produced strong visual images and specific colour associations, which were very vivid although not necessarily right. Imagination acted to fill in missing details, seeking to keep the world as close to normal / complete as possible. It kept the subjects calmer by generating visual imagery of the space, thus holding the sense of panic at bay. Visual imagination also produced images through associations and daydreams, triggered by the conversation or internal thoughts.*
- *Memories of the actual experiment, although non-visual, are now located within a 3D space, and in fact have a visual aspect, similar in quality to a certain dream image: i.e. it is very particular but lacks detail. Rather it appears to be built from emotional content, which is not perceived by the senses. It feels whole but lacks general detail. There is no direct colour in the memory. The memory relies heavily on movement, and moves in the same explorative way as attention did during the experience.*
- *There was an interplay between attention, imagination and memory. Attention helped to deepen the perceptual experience, while imagination filled in gaps in perception. Memory relied for its recall on both attention and imagination.*

Discussion

- *It was concluded that changes in perception occur when sensory deprivation (of sight) is introduced. This is due to the need to concentrate on the remaining senses, employing the power of attention, which in turn leads to the heightening of tactile, audio, olfactory and gustatory impressions. While the visual sense is eliminated, it does not cease, but is in fact replaced by a vivid visual imagination, which helps to fill in missing information.*

- *Because the main focus of the study is the examination of the interplay of the tactile sense with the audio-visual senses, the discussion will primarily concentrate on this, using the identified key concepts of attention, imagination, memory and movement as the framework.*
- *It has been found that the key to increased sensitivity of perception lay in the focusing of attention, which had to compensate for the missing senses. Therefore it can be suggested that the heightening of perception caused by sensory deprivation may not necessarily be a physiological heightening, but a heightening of conscious perception (versus unconscious input). This is interesting from an artistic point of view, for it lends itself to direct exploration and utilisation in order to communicate to audiences more precisely and with greater depth.*
- *For practical reasons, other senses had to be relied on (which normally are not). So, not only did attention become more focused but the participants also felt the need to perform extra activities (such as touching the food with one's hands and smelling it in order to identify it), which led to a more playful exploration of the surroundings, which normally does not happen. The heightening of sound was due both to the actual focusing of attention as well as the general raised level of conversation in the room, due to a lack of visual communication between dining companions. The heightened awareness of smell and taste resulted in both greater appreciation of new tastes and smells, but also fear and disgust.*
- *Imagination acted as a unifier, allowing an experience of the surrounding world to be perceived as a whole, or as close to a whole as possible. When employed in this way, imagination acted as a perfect tool towards bridging fissures in the experience of reality, filling in visual details such as colour, arrangement of space etc. When less controlled, imagination caused fear and paranoia, which manifested itself in the fear of eating unknown food on the plate, the fear of the solid darkness itself etc. In such a situation imagination, rather than substituting for reality, began to bring associations, memories and visual imagery much closer to daydreams and fantasy.*
- *Memory, examined two weeks after the event, appeared on first consideration to be non-visual. The strongest memory seemed a proprioceptive memory, i.e. the position of one's body during a conversation, as well as tactile (the feel of textures in hands and mouth). The statement on the absence of visuals is slightly misleading though, for, after a more thorough investigation, the awareness of something like a visual memory was detected. However, this memory resembled a certain type of dream image, which is recognised emotionally but lacks precise detail. The details of visual clarity can be identified as the moments when attention was at its most acute – touching the padded wall or exploring a particular piece of food.*

- *The importance of movement was even more apparent in the absence of visual imagery. Movement is directly connected to attention – it is necessary as a way of progressing through a space which lacks visual markers. Therefore the movement of a conversation became important, as did the movement of thought, imagination and one’s own body. In the first instance of entering the dark space, movement also calmed and protected against the rising panic which was triggered by the stillness (this stillness symbolised, and even embodied, by the surrounding ‘solid’ darkness).*
- *The experience of Dans Le Noir now exists as a heightened memory, where details which would normally be forgotten are deeply imprinted in the mind. Its representation in the memory now exists as a dreamlike image which contains vivid details, some of which are visualised through imagination, while other areas remain in darkness and are defined purely by non-visual perceptual memories. Despite the obvious lack of visual memory of the event, the richness of the experience is clearly apparent and it holds strong potential for utilisation (and enrichment) in the creative expression of an artist.*

4. Touch in Dialogue with Sight

While it was vital for me to get familiarised both practically and theoretically with the unique qualities of touch in isolation from sight, it is this complex relationship between tactility and visuality which lies at the basis of my research.

The reliance on “the conjunction of ‘touch-vision’ senses, learned from the practical tasks of everyday life” leads Jan Švankmajer to assert that “sight is capable, to a greater or smaller extent, depending on individuals, to transfer tactile sensations in a mediated way.”⁴¹

Since we are dealing here with the aesthetic utilisation of this bond between touch and sight, I want to look briefly at some of the theories concerned with experiencing art, in particular the distinction between “haptical and optical properties of art, a distinction referring to knowledge of artistic space through the senses of touch and vision” proposed by Alois Riegl, and analysed in relation to cinema by Antonia Lant, in her essay ‘A Haptical Cinema’.⁴²

⁴¹ Jan Švankmajer, interview with author, 2011, See Appendix I

⁴² Antonia Lant, ‘A Haptical Cinema’, *October*, 74 (1995), pp. 45-73

Riegl worked as a curator of textiles at the Museum of Art and Industry in Vienna and, as Giuliana Bruno points out, “Work on the haptic was thus, significantly, produced by an art historian whose curatorial considerations put him in touch with matters of texture and tactile practices.”⁴³

Basing much of this argument on the evolution of art from the ancient Egyptian relief form, Riegl argued that the Egyptian art was in fact “emblematic of the haptic, the seed of an evolving spatial language”.⁴⁴ For Riegl, Egyptian reliefs signified both haptical objectivism, since the relief could be explored even in complete darkness, through touch, as well as the suppression of realistic spatial relationships, the whole scene needing to be “squashed” within the narrow band of its width. Because the relief marked the emergence of a three-dimensional space from a flat surface, this form of Egyptian art thus became the forerunner of the change that was to enter all forms of artistic expression, as haptical expression gave way to optical representation of space.

In the same essay Lant also presents the theories of Adolf von Hildebrand, a sculptor and the author of *Das Problem der Form in der Bildenden Kunst* (“The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture”), who first realised that:

“the eye perceives space in two modes, visually and kinesthetically, corresponding to distant and near encounters. In distant perception we grasp the image as a whole, as a spatial unity that tends toward flatness, or at least has clear, comprehensible spatial relations between parts...By contrast, the nearer an object is in our field of view, the more eye movement is required to perceive it as coherent and spatially unified, but through this motion we can piece together disparate views, using a combination of the visual and kinetic modes.”⁴⁵

Since Lant’s essay is focused on the cinematic form, she applies the categories devised by Riegl to cinema, stating that in Riegl’s categorisation cinema would inevitably fall under the category of optical art, since it cannot be known by touch. In contrast to this Lant posits the theories of Walter Benjamin (a German cultural critic, who responded to Riegl’s propositions) and Noël Burch (a contemporary film theorist) who both believe that “mature cinema is a haptical form”⁴⁶

⁴³ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p.247

⁴⁴ Antonia Lant, p.64

⁴⁵ Antonia Lant, p.53

⁴⁶ Antonia Lant, p.67

For Benjamin, “Cinema is haptic both because of the cameraman's profilmic penetration of the world, like the surgeon's internal handling of the body” which eliminates distance between the cameraman and the subject, “and because of film's physical impact on the viewer, especially through its startling juxtapositions of scale, time, and space created in rapid editing.”⁴⁷ Benjamin was convinced that it is through the brutal impact of the film on the viewer that cinema involves the body in the experience of film, while Burch's view is that the “camera movement may be “the main guarantor of [this] 'hapticity'” since “the haptic is clearly tied to conviction of spatial illusion, such that a viewer believes he or she could touch the photographed objects and actors, as if they existed in real space”.⁴⁸

Incidentally, this brings to mind the constantly evolving use of stereoscopy, a method of creating an illusion of three-dimensionality within a two-dimensional plane, which was first invented in relation to still photography in the nineteenth century and was used in film as early as 1915. Its potential is currently explored with the help of the latest technology in mainstream cinema. The 3D effect, created through the juxtaposition of two almost identical shots, filmed from two slightly different perspectives, can create an illusion of objects emerging from the cinema screen, at times leaving the audience ducking and moving or, on the other hand, trying to grasp imaginary objects coming towards them.

To come back to Lant's article, while it offers a particular approach to understanding the relationship between space, touch and cinema, other scholars have taken up the subject of tactility, visuality and film in relation to aspects unrelated to space. Laura U. Marks, in her book *The Skin of the Film*, defines the concept of haptic visuality. She understands haptic visuality as a mutual engagement between the viewer and the image, rather than an attempt to represent or dominate the image by the perceiver. It is the sense of mutual exchange, as well as the active involvement of the viewer in the process of watching, that makes haptic visuality stand apart from optical visuality. “Haptic visuality requires the viewer to work to constitute the image, to bring it forth from latency.”⁴⁹

To make a literal comparison, just as touching cannot by definition be detached, in haptic visuality the viewer is drawn into the image, she cannot but identify herself with it,

⁴⁷ Antonia Lant, p.69

⁴⁸ Antonia Lant, p.71

⁴⁹ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of Film*, p.183

participate in it, she is unable to remain emotionally neutral: “the viewer relinquishes her own sense of separateness from the image – not to know it, but to give herself up to her desire for it.”⁵⁰

Marks’s understanding of the particular qualities of haptic visuality mirrors to some extent Hildebrand’s explanation of the experiential animation of a plane (say an Egyptian relief), which is achieved by “both increased modulation in the plane, and increased activity by the viewer, who would move, or imagine he moved, to perceive the object.”⁵¹

Švankmajer’s belief in “the conjunction of ‘touch-vision’ senses, learned from the practical tasks of everyday life”⁵² is affirmed by Hildebrand, who he tells us that “all our knowledge concerning the plastic nature of objects is derived originally from movements which we make either with eyes or with hands. And it is through a complex of such movements, or by so-called kinesthetic ideas of them, that we are able to imagine three-dimensional or solid form.”⁵³

Jennifer M Barker, another writer who is concerned with the relationship between cinema and touch, develops some of her views on the subject in her book *The Tactile Eye*⁵⁴. The book is structured into three main sections, entitled *Skin*, *Musculature* and *Viscera* respectively. As these sub-titles suggest, Barker’s tactile analysis of the film’s body moves from the surface towards depth, and uses touch both as a direct tool and object of study, but also as a metaphor for grasping meaning. One of the definitions of the haptic image Barker offers to us is “a horizontal look along a flat surface”⁵⁵ and it is this definition that Barker focuses on primarily.

Mirroring the earlier comment by Classen about the power of the tactile sense to bridge space and time, Barker believes that “while optical images put literal time and space between us and those events, temporal and physical distance that translates into emotional distance”⁵⁶, the haptic image brings us closer to it, while revealing “the profound connection between past and present.”⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p.183

⁵¹ Antonia Lant, p.55

⁵² Jan Švankmajer, interview with author, 2011, see Appendix I

⁵³ Antonia Lant, p.55

⁵⁴ Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009)

⁵⁵ Jennifer M. Barker, p.37

⁵⁶ Jennifer M. Barker, p.59

⁵⁷ Jennifer M. Barker, p.61

Exploring this direct comparison further, Barker reminds us of the mutual bond between subject and object of a tactile encounter, and the reversibility of this relationship: “A lived-body is always in the act of perceiving expression and expressing perception.”⁵⁸ It is this constant state of interchangeability which creates a tension between the viewer and the film and helps to involve the viewer’s body in the experience. For this reason Barker considers “meaning and emotion not as residing in films or viewers, but as emerging in the intimate, tactile encounter between them.”⁵⁹

While Jan Švankmajer confirms this idea of reversibility when he states that touch plays “an important role in overcoming the antagonism between Object – Subject...”⁶⁰, his style of film-making contradicts the primary definition of haptic visuality offered by Marks and Barker, who tend to focus more on haptic images that “discourage the viewer from distinguishing objects and encourage a relationship to the screen as whole.”⁶¹ Having said this, both Marks and Barker are also well aware that the haptic image can come into being through qualities that are the very opposite of what has been described so far: “it can also be high resolution of film that gives it a tactile quality” because films that “contain more visual texture than the eye can apprehend, have the effect of overwhelming vision and spilling into other sense perceptions.”⁶²

Using some of these descriptions of haptic visuality as a starting point, I expand its definition further by bringing other theories into my argument, as well as through testing their validity in practical film experiments.

5. *Conspirators of Pleasure*

Jan Švankmajer’s feature length film *Conspirators of Pleasure*⁶³ has become the key case study of my investigation. I have chosen it because here tactilism is both the subject matter and the mode of artistic exploration of the film. Born of the legacy of Švankmajer’s tactile experiments conducted during the seven-year ban on film-making, “*Conspirators of Pleasure* [is] basically about an application of experimentation (New Eroticism) with tactile props...”⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Jennifer M. Barker, p.8

⁵⁹ Jennifer M. Barker, p.15

⁶⁰ Jan Švankmajer, *Touch and Imagination*, p.6

⁶¹ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of Film*, p.172

⁶² Laura U Marks, *The Skin of Film*, p.175

⁶³ *Conspirators of Pleasure*, dir. by Jan Švankmajer (Kino Video 1999)

⁶⁴ Jan Švankmajer, interview with author, 2011, see Appendix I

The film follows the stories of six protagonists whose main motivation in life is the pursuit of tactile pleasures. Although these characters do not all know each other, their shared passion, or indeed obsession, with achieving sensual, erotic stimulation and satisfaction from the use of fetishist (and often unusual) objects of desire creates a sense of conspiratorial knowledge or recognition of each other.

Every protagonist has their own particularly unique way of pursuing their tactile urges. A husband is spurred on by the need to gather fur, and goes as far as sneaking up on strangers and cutting off items of their clothing to supplement his collection of tactile tools, which will later aid him in reaching a crescendo of the tactile pleasures he has been striving for. Meanwhile his frustrated wife, a TV presenter, satisfies her own longings by keeping two carps under her bed, which she enjoys stroking. She is unaware that the newsagent salesman harbours a secret desire for her, which he indulges by constructing a primitive robotic device attached to the TV screen where the TV presenter appears every night to read the news. The two main protagonists, a middle-aged man who works as a newsagent and his ageing female neighbour, are locked in a strange ritualistic entanglement, which finally ends in a human sacrifice akin to a voodoo magic ceremony.

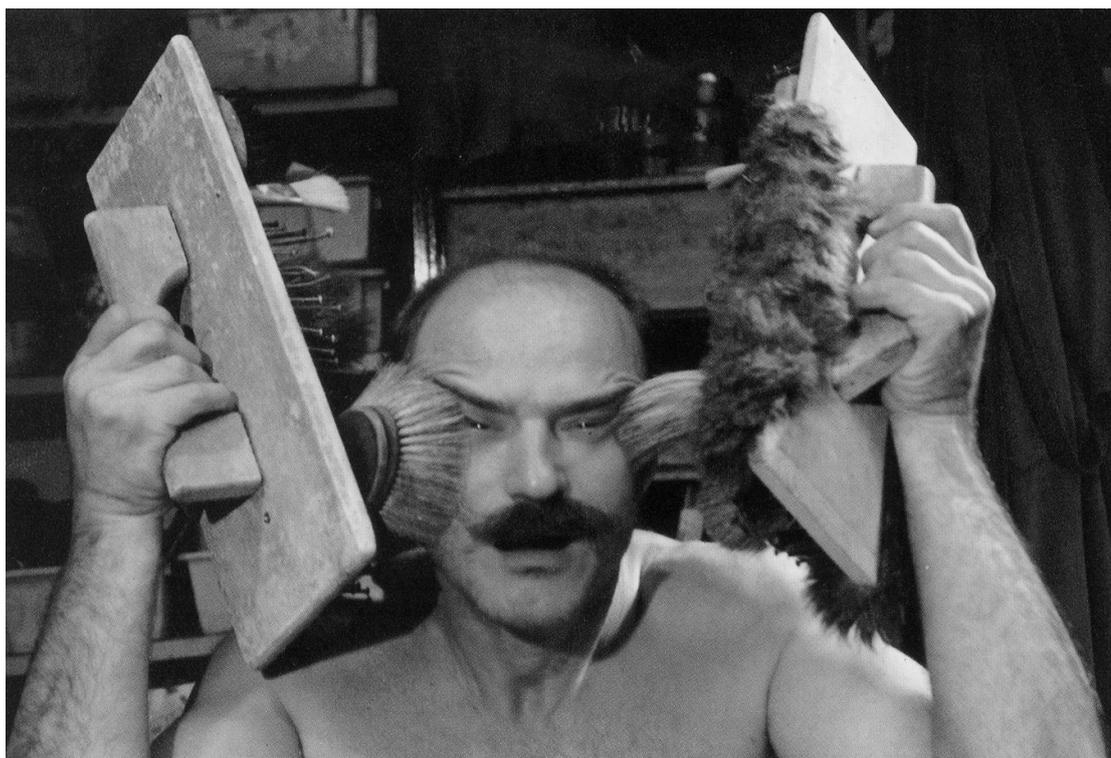


Fig. 5 *Conspirators of Pleasure*, 1996, dir. by Jan Švankmajer

While the film's subject matter promotes tactilism, particularly in its more directly erotic incarnation, it is also the mode of filming which manages to embody tactile values, achieving thus an integration of form and content that creates a powerful effect on the viewer's body.

In order to study the film I watched it both on my own on a number of occasions, paying attention to the use of camera, mis-en-scène and editing, as well as sound, while taking notes, and also organised a screening at the Royal College of Art, which was open to students from all departments and enabled the participants to see the film on a large screen and to discuss impressions with others.

The close study of *Conspirators of Pleasure* was indeed transformative with regard to my understanding of the possibility of introducing touch into an audio-visual medium. I became aware of a strong amplification of tactile awareness (this was also noted by another colleague who watched it separately, on a small screen). The effect was visceral and lasted for about an hour after the film finished. From the feedback I gathered from the group of students who participated in the viewing (I gave out forms and asked the participants to send these to me by email after the event) I realised this was indeed a more generally shared experience, rather than just a subjective one. The effect in visual terms could be compared to walking around with a magnifying glass. The viewers became extremely sensitised to touch, so that subsequently even an ordinary, everyday act like grasping a rail in a bus became imbued with great detail, through the focusing of my mental faculties on the tactile perception: "I'd have to say the most striking was my experience afterwards, when every touch became amplified. Though I could identify with the postwoman's rolling of bread; when I was little, I rubbed my fingers over creases in fabric." (Subject A)⁶⁵

Although the film could by definition only directly utilise an audio-visual language by which it is constrained, the overall impact of the experience indeed transcended these two senses, just as Švankmajer intended. It confirmed on a practical level some of the theories put forward by Marks and Barker, and facts that were pointed out by Hildebrand and finally Švankmajer himself: that there is indeed a powerful bond between the visual and tactile perceptions. The eye's knowledge is based on the tactile knowledge, and it is by utilising this knowledge that the eye is able to understand volume and distance, and therefore to construct space, while also judging other qualities such as textures, consistency and so forth. Vision and touch work in tandem, a fact that ensures

⁶⁵ See Appendix VII

the applicability of vision to triggering embodied memory, particularly if this is done with the intention of doing so.

Based on a close reading of the film, I have initially compiled a list of techniques that were used to heighten awareness of the material and the physical in the film, as a first step towards creating my lexicon of tactile language for film.

**Some of the basic tactile methods employed by Jan Švankmajer in
Conspirators of Pleasure:**

- *Heightened attention to great detail through close-ups.*
This includes the depiction of imperfection in objects, materials and human bodies which occurred through contact with various elements, other objects or bodies, and are therefore reminders of their physicality (peeling, scratches, indentations, sweat, split hair, flaking skin, fat, badly applied make-up, wrinkles on skin).
- *Lighting – employed in a way that enhances contrasts, picking up relief and texture.*
Exaggerated, harsh contrasts between dark and light surfaces.
- *Dramatic edits between different materials and textures (a method which heightens the sense of contrast between textures, relying on a mode of discrimination that lies at the basis of tactile distinction.*
- *Actors captured in an act of exploring materials in fascination or deep concentration, while the materials show their resistance to contact – speaking back (shaking, bouncing back, etc.), human bodies responding by a visible display of physical effort.*
- *Juxtaposition of materials that is unusual and disconcerting (glue on feathers or fur) matter and objects in unusual places (i.e. drawer full of clay, hen in a kitchen cupboard, bread inside nostrils and ears etc), or association of substances or objects with other bodily substances or forms (tomato sauce/blood, glue/sperm etc.)*
- *Camera moves – camera, rather than behaving like an eye, imitates the function of a hand or even the whole body (Zoom used as a pull and push, panning resembling a turn of the head)*
- *Editing - pace and rhythm of edits resembling the act of touching*
- *Heightened sound*

6. Summary: *Wallis Eats*⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Refer to the accompanying DVD to view *Wallis Eats*

The first part of my journey, that of preparation for entering the tangible territory, is best summarised by analysing my filmic exercise entitled *Wallis Eats*, which was created as response to my encounter in the dark, my study of Jan Švankmajer's work, and finally the theoretical research of haptic visuality, as outlined by Laura U Marks and Jennifer M Barker. Bringing these different approaches to the same subject together I began to see, even at this early stage, how indeed there cannot exist a single interpretation of what constitutes a tactile language of film.

While Laura U Marks suggests that the haptic image “discourages the viewer from distinguishing objects and encourages a relationship to the screen as whole”⁶⁷, by for instance drawing attention to the grain of the film, or by making the image illegible by playing with focus or obscuring the view, Jan Švankmajer shows us that tactility can also be promoted by the very opposite approach: through heightened clarity and sharpness of the image, which renders the object vividly real, virtually tangible.

Even from a purely practical point of view it became apparent that there are multiple approaches to the involvement of the body in the cinematic experience. One route leads through what could be called an overindulgence of the tactile sense, immersing the eye in an abundance of tactile detail and information, as in the case in *Conspirators of Pleasure*, so that the viewer experiences a kind of heightened awareness of physical reality akin to certain dream states, or as depicted by some of the Surrealist painters. But the body's sense of the tactile can also be activated by the very opposite: by evoking a state of frustration of sight, through interfering with the view by obscuring it in some way, or through viewing an object from such proximity that one is no longer able to discern the context.

Yet what unites both of these is an attempt to get away from representation, by entering a relationship to the image that is involved rather than passive. In case of Jan Švankmajer we may be talking of a “mimetic relationship between perceiver and object”, a relationship which “does not require an initial separation between perceiver and object that is mediated by representation.”⁶⁸ The word mimesis comes from the Greek *mimēsthai*, to imitate. In Western heritage of aesthetic thought, which dates all the way back to Plato, the term mimesis relates to the relationship between art and nature. Mimesis thus functions as useful concept towards theorizing the basis of artistic expression, while attempting to pinpoint the particular qualities that distinguish works of

⁶⁷ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p.172

⁶⁸ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p.164

art from nature or other phenomena, as well as our own response to these works of art. Mimesis is most commonly understood to carry two essential meanings – imitation (most often of nature) and artistic representation.

However, it is a very specific aspect of mimesis, which bears a strong connection to tactile epistemology and which has been elaborated by Laura Marks in *The Skin of Film*, that I am interested in in reference to Švankmajer's work.

Marks argues that mimesis can also “suggest that one represents a thing by acting like it.”⁶⁹ I want to propose that the powerful effect of Švankmajer's film comes primarily from the mimetic bond between the audience and the characters in the film, and through the powerful identification, brought on by the techniques listed above, we are enabled to temporarily adopt the actors' bodies as our own. As was proven by the group presentation of *Conspirators of Pleasure* and the subsequent discussion, such intimacy and visceral impact can prove too uncomfortable. Some students reported a sense of disgust and repulsion evoked by the film. They resented the sense of direct bodily involvement, which they felt was more or less imposed on them by the film-maker.

In order to test some of these assumptions I decided to produce a filmic exercise entitled *Wallis Eats*⁷⁰: I wrote a script involving the consumption of a meal of four courses, based on a gradual progression from an ordinary supper to a decadent feast where utensils are no longer required to consume food. This narrative was constructed in such way as to test both Švankmajer's techniques of tactile stimulation used in *Conspirators of Pleasure*, as well as my own experience of being submerged in the darkness of *Dans Le Noir* (and to a certain extent *Dialogue in the Dark*), experiencing qualities of food through touch, taste and smell alone, and of course also the tactile workshops. I worked closely with a composer who incorporated tactile sounds into the soundtrack in order to enhance the visceral experience of consuming a meal.



⁶⁹ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p.138

⁷⁰ See Appendix VIII for a detailed script.

Fig. 6 Stills from *Wallis Eats*, 2009, Tereza Stehlíková

While aware of the fact that the film itself did not break any new ground (I was consciously influenced both by Jan Švankmajer, as well as Věra Chytilová's *Daisies*⁷¹), it did fulfill a function in the context of my research, by allowing me to gain feedback from audiences (it was shown at the RCA Work in Progress show, 2009) as well as reflect personally on the making of it and the outcome achieved.

What became apparent was that the visceral impact of the film was indeed based on the viewer's identification with the actress, and this in turn led to a sense of disgust, through tapping into what I would argue is embodied memory. It was this access to the knowledge of the body, triggered through sight and hearing, that created a strong bodily response in the viewer.

On the other hand, the limitations of this methods were also revealed: the modes of stimulation of body memory were too obvious, they had a tendency at times to become illustrative, rather than embodying the principle. In some of the feedback it was suggested that concentrating on ways of evoking touch through using the camera in particular ways could work more successfully than illustrating touch literally.

⁷¹ *Daisies*, dir. by Věra Chytilová (Second Run DVD, 2009)

III. Mapping the Terrain of Lived Space

Outlining the House of Memory

1. Introduction

“Mnemonic life abides in space and can, indeed, be mapped. One’s past resides not in mere presence of time but in the spaces where time was lived: in the schools frequented, in the landscape of the chambers occupied and visited...”⁷²

The aim of this chapter is to utilize some of the theories and concepts I have been exploring so far, while applying them in practice by mapping out the intimate terrain of my own lived space. I will be revisiting the locations of my own childhood and constructing a filmic narrative based on these locations and the embodied memory they hold within their tangible physical presence. In order to do this I will also be introducing other theories and propositions which will help me develop my argument further.

The concept of the mapping of intimate space is examined in depth in Giuliana Bruno’s *Atlas of Emotion*. In the introduction to the book she gives a brief overview of her understanding of the relationship between geography, mapping and internal emotional space: “The exterior world conveys an interior landscape. Emotion materializes as a moving topography. To traverse the land is to visit the ebb and flow of a personal and yet social psychogeography.”⁷³

In his introduction to *Material Memories* Kwint, too, examines the importance of the physical environment in moulding our psyche, and vice versa: “Not only does the material environment influence the structure and contents of the mind, but the

⁷² Giuliana Bruno, p.259

⁷³ Giuliana Bruno, p.2

environment must also have been shaped along the lines of what persists in the mind's eye...human memory has undergone a mutual evolution with objects that inform it".⁷⁴

Because of Jan Švankmajer's involvement with the Czech Surrealist tradition I also want to examine briefly the Czech Surrealists' interpretation of a term originally coined by the painter Roberto Matta, "morphologie mentale", which offers a poetic reflection on the very same idea. While not wishing to use this term as Matta has used it (Matta's definition appears rather obscure and far-fetched now), its transposed meaning makes this a helpful concept. In the Czech Surrealist tradition, "morphologie mentale" is applied to the meshing of subjective experience with an external topography, so that particular external landmarks (such as houses, staircases, or trees) are integrated into one's psyche, and affect its formation in the same way that certain vital experiences can.

"...human consciousness is not so much determined by various childhood deprivations and traumas, but rather by the landscape in which a person has lived and the objects that they might have touched. Many years ago, the Surrealists even tried, with the help of questionnaires, to prove that the way a landscape is formed, the number of corners a house has and how crookedly a tree grows outside the window, have as much effect on the psyche as the upbringing. The Surrealists called this imprint of the external (a collection of measurable quantity, dimensions, tone and colour) onto the spiritual microcosm of a person mental morphology."⁷⁵

The intertwining of the interior and exterior world in the poetic imagination is also the theme of Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics Of Space*. In this phenomenological approach to understanding the poetic significance of dwellings Bachelard explores the role of imagination in the shaping of our experience of various intimate and familiar environments. He shows us that the interweaving of early childhood experience (marked by daydreams) and the space in which these products of imagination come to life is so intimate it often erases the division between interior and exterior, between objectivity and subjectivity, creating thus a seamless landscape inhabited by the imagination, a unique poetic, yet also concrete, form that connects the various elements of an individual's life in a network of associations, memories and dreams.

This concept is evocatively described by the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke: "I never saw this strange dwelling again. Indeed, as I see it now, the way it appeared to my child's

⁷⁴ Marius Kwint, 'Introduction: The Physical Past', in *Material Memories*, pp.1-16, p.4

⁷⁵ Václav Cílek, 'On Morphology of the Non-Human', *Artesian*, 2 (2009), p.41

eye, it is not a building, but is quite dissolved and distributed inside me: here one room, there another, and here a bit of a corridor which, however, does not connect the two rooms, but is conserved in me in fragmentary form. Thus the whole thing is scattered about inside me, the rooms, the stairs that descend with such ceremonious slowness, others, narrow cages that mounted in a spiral movement...”⁷⁶

Childhood houses, with their rooms and staircases, thus gain a significance that reaches far beyond any utilitarian function or sentimental value. According to Bachelard they do not represent aspects of one’s childhood, they are its building blocks and in our psyche they are not assembled in a way that is faithful to an external reality, but their structure corresponds to the imaginative projection, that draws its own spatial narrative: “Home itself is made up of layers of passages that are voyages of habitation. It is not a static notion but a site of *transito*. More than simply a point of departure and return, it is a site of continual transformation.”⁷⁷

The terrain of lived space, which I understand to exist on this threshold between interior and exterior realities, is rooted firmly in physical concreteness of the locations of one’s childhood, as well as adult life, while infused with equally real but internalized states, such as emotions, daydreams, imagination. While impossible to fully grasp without understanding the imaginative dimension into which it extends, it is through tactile experience and physical proximity that we come close to understanding also its more intangible features. And the sense of touch plays an important role here, not only because it can bring us into direct contact with this physical concreteness of specific locations, but also because as a sense it stands “somewhere in between the objective and subjective perceptions” so that “when we are touching something, we project the perception out, beyond ourselves, but at the same time we perceive it on ourselves, our skin.”⁷⁸ It is this reciprocal nature of touch that makes the tactile sense the most valuable tool in orientating oneself upon the plane defined as the meeting place between the physical house (or home) as it exists in objective space, and its imaginative counterpart.

And it is the medium of moving image, as Lant argues in her essay ‘Haptical Cinema’, that has the ability to travel “behind the haptic, around it, to its reverse side, or inside – the side that, according to Riegl, cannot be known from the outer surface”.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Rainer Maria Rilke, cited in Gaston Bachelard, p.57

⁷⁷ Giuliana Bruno, p.103

⁷⁸ Jan Švankmajer, *Touch and Imagination*, p.6

⁷⁹ Antonia Lant, p.67

The cinema's ability to "move between outside and inside" as it writes "the history of private lives"⁸⁰ makes it a unique medium for recording the terrain of lived space, which straddles both the inner and outer realms.

In order to embody in practice ideas and concepts that can by definition only be fully grasped in the context of the terrain of lived space, I have decided to revisit some of the external landmarks of my own *morphologie mentale* and gather and connect these through a filmic narrative. The map of the terrain of lived space will be a map created from relationships between specific physical locations and emotional states. It will need to be constantly redrawn, layered, readjusted, as new impressions overlay the previous ones, offering new interpretations.

As Bachelard argues, the landmarks of our childhood have long been internalized, and now live in a form of embodied memory, so that we instinctively feel the height and number of steps, the mezzanines and turnings, the height and shape of the door handle we used to grasp to enter. These memories are housed in us on a pre-conscious level, they reside in our bodies, just as Marinetti's observation about the hand and a piece of iron, cited earlier, tells us. At the same time objects and surfaces constantly accumulate and hold their own memories, imprinted and accessed through touch. "This interaction evokes the very reversibility of the flesh, where touching also means being touched; the idea thus approaches the tactile self, mapped in psychoanalysis as an inside out."⁸¹ And it is perhaps for this very reason that Jan Švankmajer, who uses film and animation, amongst other techniques, to enable objects to share these accumulated stories, speaks of his unique type of creativity as a form of "self-therapy".

Before revisiting the house of my childhood and studying it through the framework of Bachelard's understanding of the "oneiric house of dream-memory", I first want to look at the concept of embodied memory with reference to film in particular because, as Marks argues, "cinema itself appeals to contact – to embodied knowledge, and to the sense of touch in particular – in order to recreate memories."⁸²

2. Memory of Objects / Embodied Memory

⁸⁰ Giuliana Bruno, p.26

⁸¹ Giuliana Bruno, p.255

⁸² Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p.129

[The past is] somewhere beyond the reach of intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object (or in the sensation which such an object arouses in us), though we have no idea which one it is. As for the object, it depends entirely on chance whether we come upon it before we die, or whether we never encounter it.”⁸³

Just as the terrain of lived space straddles the threshold between interior and exterior realities, so the senses have “been often considered as a philosophical problem appearing on a boundary between what we refer to, perhaps for lack of better terms, as internal and external phenomena.”⁸⁴ Haptic perception can thus be understood as flowing in two opposing directions in the process of mutual exchange described above: outwards, by our bodies reaching towards the physical reality of the external world, and inwards, by these encounters stimulating existing memories and triggering associations in our embodied selves. Through the outwardly-directed experience we can access the memory and emotional charge of objects that surround us, while the inward-bound flow activates memory that is already present in us. This memory can be connected to our utilitarian knowing of an object, so that the eye becomes simply an extension of an organ of touch (seeing a piece of velvet will bring out the sensation of softness, particular texture and temperature etc., based on previous knowledge of the material) but it can also trigger a more specific, subjective memory. It is this personal association, which is at once much harder to control, that is also potentially more intriguing, and contains a greater poetic charge. It would also include Marcel Proust’s term “involuntary memory”.

Firstly, I want to examine the significance of objects as containers of memories. Marius Kwent, in his introduction to *The Physical Past*, notes that: “In western traditions, objects serve memory in three main ways. Firstly, they...constitute our picture of the past...secondly objects stimulate remembering” through what Proust called involuntary memory, and finally they “form records...storing information beyond individual experience...Entering us through the senses, they become history...”⁸⁵

The second and third of these ways are the ones that Jan Švankmajer is most interested in utilizing and exploring in his films. The artist works with the notion of places and objects as being charged with the emotions of those who come into contact with them, so that as we touch these we are at once depositing some of our own effects, while gaining others: “The emotional content of a tactile object changes constantly through physical

⁸³ Marcel Proust, cited in Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p.77

⁸⁴ Susan Stewart, ‘Prologue: From the Museum of Touch’, in *Material Memories*, p.18

⁸⁵ Marius Kwent, ‘Introduction: The Physical Past’, in *Material Memories*, p.2

contact. We are always touching the same, yet at the same time completely different object.”⁸⁶



Fig. 7 *Objects Series*, 2008, Tereza Stehlíková

As Švankmajer demonstrates to us in his work, embodied memory is not just an abstract concept, a meaning transposed onto a physical object metaphorically. The objects he works with have their own histories, they have been used and are marked by their utilization, they are soaked in emotions, bursting with life: “objects have consequences and therefore history of their own.”⁸⁷ And Marks confirms this when she states that “objects are not inert and mute but they tell stories and describe trajectories.”⁸⁸ In his ‘Decalogue’⁸⁹ on film-making Švankmajer tells us that when employing objects artistically, we must never impose external stories onto them, but instead find ways of coaxing their own narratives out, otherwise it is a kind of violation of these objects.

As part of his tactile experimentation focused on the direct exploration of the capacity of materials to receive and hold emotions, Švankmajer has devised what he calls “gestic sculptures”. These are sculptural objects created by imprinting emotional states (such as anger etc.) into a piece of clay in a spontaneous manner, so that original impulse is passed into the material without being filtered by aesthetic concerns. He uses this method to create ‘tactile poems’, a practice he continues to the present day. Some of these experiments formed the basis of films such as *Dimensions of Dialogue*⁹⁰ (*Passionate Dialogue*) or *The Fall of the House of Usher*⁹¹. As is apparent from watching the films, the rawness of these emotional gestures is indeed preserved, and even communicable visually, through the medium of the moving image.

⁸⁶ Jan Švankmajer, *Touch and Imagination*, p.34

⁸⁷ Marius Kwint, ‘Introduction: The Physical Past’, in *Material Memories*, p.4

⁸⁸ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p.80

⁸⁹ Jan Švankmajer, ‘Decalogue’, in *The Cinema of Jan Švankmajer: Dark Alchemy* by Peter Hames (London: Wallflower Press, 2008) pp.140-142

⁹⁰ *Dimensions of Dialogue*, dir. by Jan Švankmajer (BFI, 2007)

⁹¹ *The Fall of House of Usher*, dir. by Jan Švankmajer (BFI, 2007)

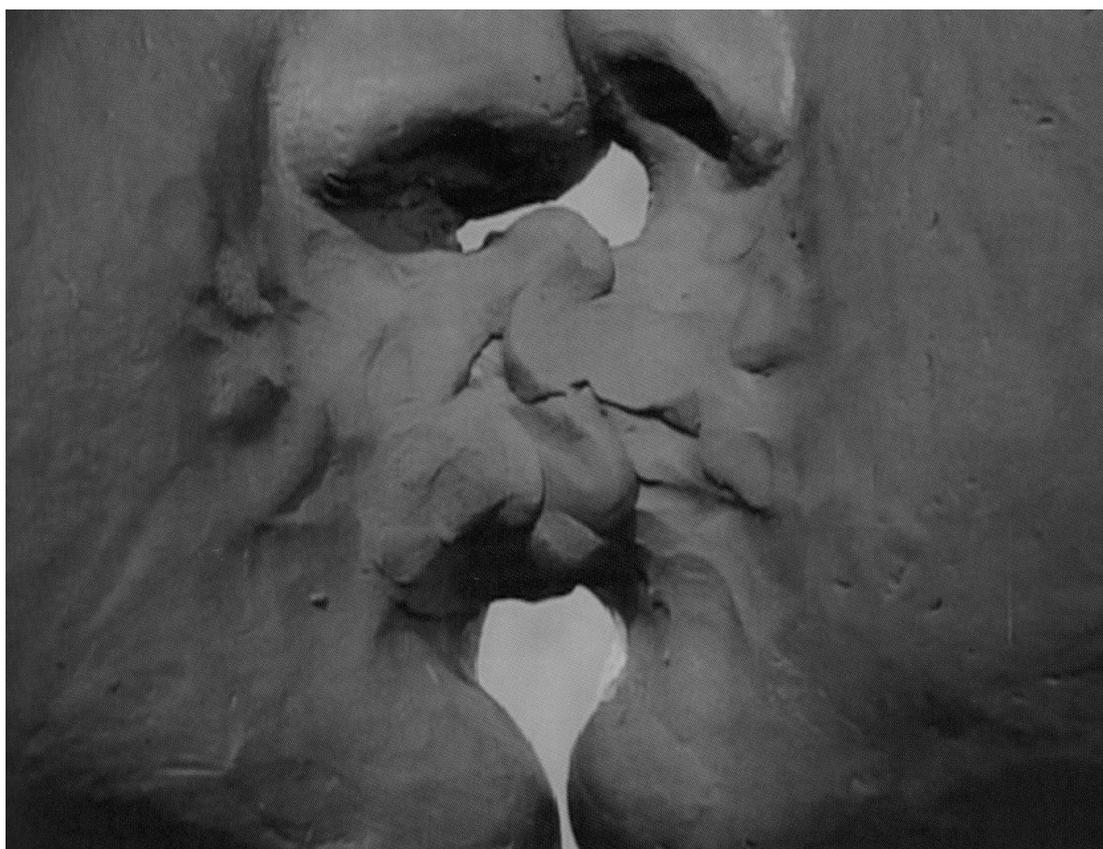


Fig. 8 *Dimensions of Dialogue*, 1982, dir. by Jan Švankmajer

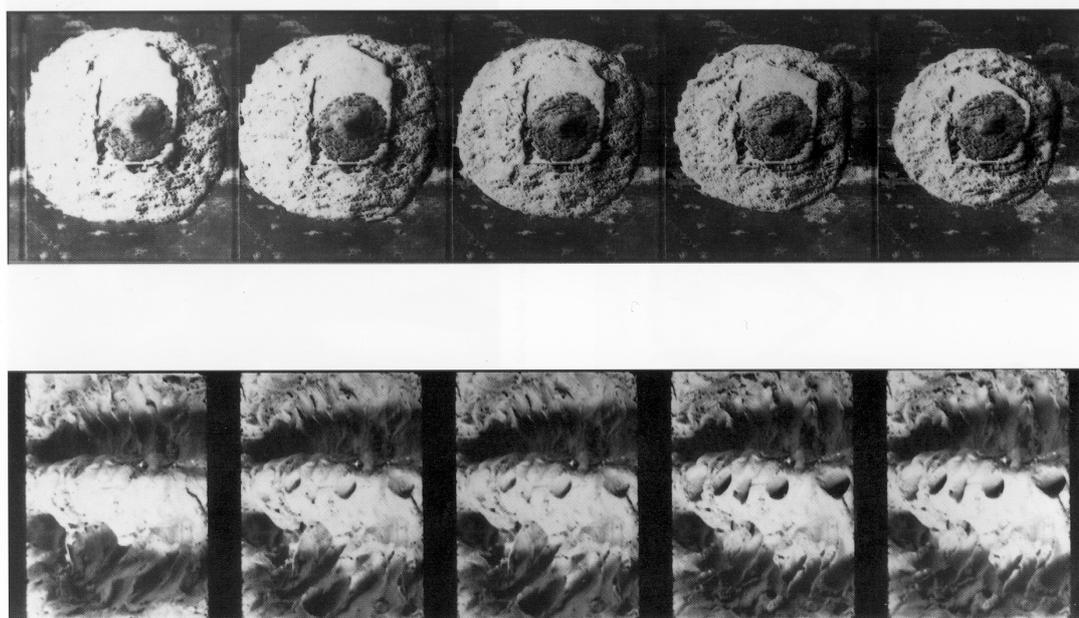


Fig. 9 *Fall of the House of Usher*, 1980, *J.S. Bach: Fantasia in G Minor*, 1965, dir. by Jan Švankmajer

From walls and stones (as is the case in *J S Bach: Fantasy in G Minor*⁹² or *The Flat*⁹³) to everyday objects like toys (*Jabberwocky*⁹⁴) Švankmajer's films have the quality of childhood daydreams, where the power of imagination wakes the inanimate to life, creating a space for the objects to be free, to express their pent-up frustrations. Far from a romanticised vision, Švankmajer's objects go into battle with each other, they mutilate one another, they tease or even attack the protagonist (as is the case of the potatoes and a large chest in *Down to the Cellar*⁹⁵). At times the whole environment conspires against the human, which happens in *The Flat*.

The objects with which Švankmajer surrounds himself have a strong element of fetishism: "fetishes get their power not by representing that which is powerful but through contact with it, a contact whose materiality has been repressed"⁹⁶. It is at once the dependence on physical contact and their power to accumulate and transmit emotions directly that makes them so, because: "all fetishes are translations into a material object of some sort of affect."⁹⁷

Švankmajer's fascination and passion for collecting objects does indeed extend to various fetishes that he collects in his very own Cabinet of Curiosities in the Šumava mountains, and which I had a chance to visit in the summer of 2007. The Cabinet is a mark of Švankmajer's passion and obsession, while at the same time a homage to the Kunstkammer of Emperor Rudolf II, whose collection was housed in Hradčany Castle in Prague at the turn of the sixteenth century and renowned across all of Europe. Švankmajer's own collection contains a great number of objects, both original fetishes collected during his travels through Africa and Papua New Guinea, as well purchased online, and his own artwork, artificially created fetishist objects, some of which have featured in his films. While Švankmajer's fascination with objects (whose value he perceives according to the object's ability to hold and communicate their own history, rather than on its monetary value) stems from his childhood obsession, as he himself openly admits, this tendency can also be seen as a reaction against Western society's current drive towards the commodification of objects. It is precisely the well-worn, tired and often unappealing object, as perceived from a consumer's point of view, that are most desirable to the artist, whose motivations are so diametrically in opposition to their utilitarian purpose.

⁹² *J S Bach - Fantasy in G Minor*, dir. by Jan Švankmajer (BFI, 2007)

⁹³ *The Flat*, dir. by Jan Švankmajer (BFI, 2007)

⁹⁴ *Jabberwocky*, dir. by Jan Švankmajer (BFI, 2007)

⁹⁵ *Down To the Cellar*, dir. by Jan Švankmajer (BFI, 2007)

⁹⁶ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p.85

⁹⁷ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p.80

As Stewart argues, “it is not just that the fetishist, obsessed with the magical power of objects, wants to keep things to himself, but that the involuntary dimension of intuition and the carrying over of impressions into memory is something private to us all...”⁹⁸ It may be that it is the poet in Švankmajer that hoards and searches in order to finally find the single object that holds all the longing, as described by Proust.

Proust’s idea of an external object holding the mystery of one’s own past leads me quite naturally to the second aspect of embodied memory, i.e. the memory that is housed in our bodies, and that may or may not be consciously accessible, and that can, often involuntarily, be triggered by tactile stimuli.

As I found through my own tactile experiments, as well as through watching Švankmajer’s *Conspirators of Pleasure*, the memory triggered by touching certain objects (or through perceiving a haptic imagery) both enhances the depth of our experience of a given object, through reactivating on some level all the previous versions of the object that we have encountered (it is here that the superimposition of layers of experience can be seen directly), but often also activates a subjective association unique to each person. To what extent this association can be predicted or generalized is hard to assess, since at this particular level it carries its own personal flavour, based on a unique set of memories.

Used objects, with their own embodied memory, play an important role in many artists’ work: from the surrealist tradition of readymades, through Joseph Cornell’s memory boxes, to contemporary artists such as Susan Hiller who recently exhibited an artwork consisting of a collection of personal objects, entitled *From the Freud Museum*, which was exhibited at Tate Britain, in 2011. Hiller states that these objects often hold a personal significance, they are talismans, mementoes, private relics. One could say she chose them because of their fetishistic function.

In one of the exercises during my tactile experiments, the participants were given various textures and materials to experience while blindfolded. They were subsequently asked to write up their responses to these tactile encounters. Some of the responses are selected here⁹⁹:

⁹⁸ Susan Stewart, ‘Prologue: From the Museum of Touch’, in *Material Memories*, p.27

⁹⁹ See Appendix IV for a more detailed list.

- *“I felt childhood memories return of playing with different textures, the hedgehog, conjuring up images” (Subject A)*
- *“The rice biscuits led me instantly to vanilla ice cream.” (Subject H)*
- *“At the start when I was squeezing it I was imagining a lola ball. My sister had one when we were kids. With lola balls you stand on it and bounce up and down. The ball was yellow on my sister’s one. The disk that you stand on was blue.” (Subject I)*

Yet indexical memories were not the only responses produced. A simple act of peeling and feeling a lychee fruit triggered associations in some participants, which, while also based on memory, took the imagery into the realm of imaginative projection, involving, for instance, colours or shifts in scale.

- *“I visualised a prickly dark fish but inside were opaque beautiful colours. He was fed by streams of light from the sea entering a small telescopic hole.” (Subject B)*
- *“I’m in a jungle, touching my little reptile friend.” (Subject H)*
- *“I imagined the inner colour was a dark red/blue like oxidised flesh.” (Subject I)*
- *“When he wakes up from very long sleep, he goes to climb a tree and stay steady for about 12 hours till the brown shell weaves itself. He eats only juice from tree (do you call it amber?) to find female to mate for 2 weeks and die.” (Subject J)*
- *“The shape became a planet that nobody would like because of its painful asperity but inside was very weak and fragile. Nobody would realise that. Energy planet auto-generated by its inside seed. A seed which wasn’t a grain but a tooth. Tooth of a creature to be born from this planet.” (Subject K)*

This was very much in accord with my experience of my In the Dark experiments.

- *“The visual imagination became heightened. Touch produced strong visual images and specific colour associations, which were very vivid, although not necessarily right.” (Subject A)*

A similar reaction was also recorded after the experience of watching *Conspirators of Pleasure*.

- *“I could identify with the postwoman’s rolling of bread; when I was little, I rubbed my fingers over creases in fabric.” (subject B)*
- *“I had a strong involuntary memory when seeing one of the characters changing the gear when driving. It was the feel of the rubber surrounding the gear stick, that transported me back to childhood, and the involuntary recollection even contained an olfactory sensation, while being*

impossible to categorise.” (Subject T)

The fact that Jan Švankmajer succeeds in embodying these concerns in his work, by demonstrating to us that imagination, memories or daydreams are rooted in physical objects that we held and locations we inhabited and can therefore be captured and communicated in film, has been crucial in my own research into moving image and tactility.

3. Significance of Surface

"Depth is hidden. Where? On the surface."¹⁰⁰

Having outlined some of the vital characteristics of embodied memory, including the process of their inscribing and speaking to us, I would now like to take out a metaphorical magnifying glass and look at the significance of surface itself, as the literal embodiment of the threshold between interior and exterior realities, which at the same time bears the marks of impressions inscribed by touch, transformed thus into a visible as well as tangible record of memory in its workings.

For me as a film-maker, surface is particularly important, because it is here that touch becomes manifested visually, while capturing surface on film is one of the methods of drawing attention to the materiality of objects. Working with surface has become one particular way of creating a haptic image. Here I must mention briefly the importance of lighting, which can greatly enhance the tactile qualities of different textures depending on the angle and focus of its source, whether natural or artificial.

To recall a “significant surface” from my own personal history I want to give a brief account here of my memory of a walk which I took with my grandfather as a small child. While strolling through a quiet street I stopped by an old building, picked up a piece of stone, and drew a picture of a rabbit on the wall. The rabbit was standing in a semi-human pose, on its back paws, and I still recall being very proud of the way I managed to draw the curve of one of its ears, while the second ear was jagged, and gave me a sense of dissatisfaction. Once the drawing was finished we walked away and the rabbit stayed. It stayed for many years. As we went past it with my grandfather on numerous

¹⁰⁰ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, cited in Italo Calvino, ‘Exactitude’, in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (London: Vintage, 1996), pp. 55-80, p.77

subsequent walks, we joked that the rabbit would still be there as I grew up and became a famous artist. At one point the wall was repainted but by a lucky chance the rabbit escaped the coating. Finally, unnoticed, perhaps, after the Velvet Revolution and the influx of tourism which led to Prague's general renovation, the rabbit disappeared under a coat of paint together with other scribbles and marks.

Even now, many years later, as I walk past this wall I see the rabbit. But far from being just a memory, he is now an intrinsic part of the wall itself, as well as one of the landmarks of my personal terrain of lived space, despite being no longer visible.

This wall of my childhood captures something that happens to all surfaces all the time, only more subtly. As Bruno argues, places are often used like wax tablets: "They bear the layers of writing that can be effaced and yet written over again, in a constant redrafting. Places are the site of a mnemonic palimpsest."¹⁰¹

In Cinema 16's 1953 *Poetry and the Film* symposium, the American avant-garde film-maker Maya Deren (1917-1961), whose work has significantly influenced my practice, expressed her concept of what she called "vertical cinema", a poetic interpretation of a particular moment, which implies a vertical rather than horizontal approach to making sense of a specific scene, or even a whole film, which in some way resembles this layering: "The distinction of poetry is its construction (what I mean by "a poetic structure"), and the poetic construct arises from the fact, if you will, that it is a "vertical" investigation of a situation, in that it probes the ramifications of the moment, and is concerned with its qualities and its depth, so that you have poetry concerned in a sense not with what is occurring, but with what it feels like or what it means."¹⁰² The American film-maker Barbara Hammer, whose work is directly influenced by Deren, refers to Deren's proposition by saying: "Many emotions would be called forth from the viewer from a particular image or a juxtaposition of images and I think I do that through layering."¹⁰³

This layering of memory, which in a way resembles the sedimentation of rock strata familiar to geologists, is something I have been exploring in my work for many years. In fact it was the superimposition of imagery which marked my first attempt at moving into the area of haptic visuality. This idea was first consciously explored in the

¹⁰¹ Giuliana Bruno, p.221

¹⁰² Maya Deren, cited in Willard Maas, 'Poetry and the Film', *Film Culture*, 29 (1963), pp. 55-63, p.57

¹⁰³ Barbara Hammer <http://www.moma.org/modernwomen>

collaborative project *Fingertips*, made as a projection for a live performance by the musician Philip Jeck in 2005. By juxtaposing close-up shots of textured surfaces and objects marked by time and decay in long cross-dissolves, I tried (at this point perhaps semi-unconsciously) to emulate an effect of layering of tactile impressions and memories. Combining different overlapping textures, while not necessarily achieving the precise intended effect, nonetheless led to some interesting results.

I continued developing the concept of layering further, mainly in a project entitled *Sensory Strata*, which resulted in a series of large-scale photographic collages, created from images captured during weeks of wandering through the forest of southern Bohemia, where I spend my summers. By transposing textures on top of each other I attempted to emulate tactile impressions stored within a surface, while at the same time producing a visual representation of multi-sensory immersion in a landscape, which combines a host of stimulations in a single image. The project culminated in two exhibitions: *Interior Constellations*, at the Kingsgate Gallery, London, and *Sensory Strata*¹⁰⁴, at Pages of Hackney, London, both in 2010. While the feedback from visitors to the galleries has been positive, and confirmed some of my speculations in relation to creating images that entice one to enter, it was precisely the limitation of the still image which made me understand with more precision the unique qualities of moving image as the most valuable tool in my exploration of terrain of lived space.

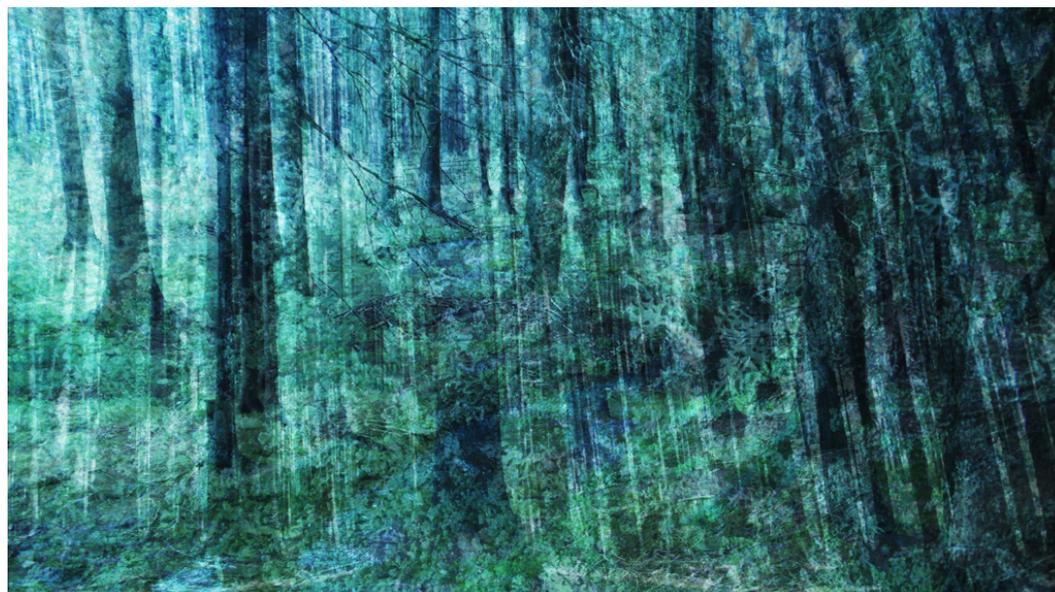


Fig.10 *Sensory Strata* series, 2010, Tereza Stehlíková

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix X and Fig. 10

While still image could by definition only capture a single moment of the overlap and merging and fix it in time, the time-based quality of the moving image allows the viewer to witness a process of becoming, thus introducing another, temporal, dimension to the experience. It was while watching the sequence of transitions I created (from the same images taken in the forest and which were used in a presentation as part of the first show), that I realized that as the first image begins to lack definition while the next one is still undefined, an interesting space opens up as the surface temporarily yields to us its own secret depth. It is in this particular instant, when the viewer loses her grasp on the original image, unable to predict the form the next one will take, that haptic visuality comes to forefront as the viewer “gradually [discovers] what is in the image rather than coming to the image already knowing what it is.”¹⁰⁵ This sense of disruption of habitual perception, which allows the viewer to perceive an image afresh, and which is also akin to the effect described by the participants of the tactile workshop (who enjoyed the tactile investigation of an unknown object only till it became identifiable), resonates with the Surrealist attempt at disorientation of the senses.

Surface can have many incarnations, of course: from skin, to wall, to map, to projection screens or even the surface of a celluloid acetate film. One must also not forget the modern touch-screen, or similar products that come under the term haptic technology, which, despite their obvious advantages and their direct responsiveness to touch, offer very little tactile pleasure to the finger.

I now want to consider two surfaces in particular that have a relevance to moving image. These are the projection field and celluloid acetate film.

4. The Projection Field

The projection field is where the intangible image, consisting of projected light, encounters a physical surface. For this reason the projection field becomes the literal and metaphorical embodiment of the meeting-place between the inner and the outer, the invisible and visible, intangible and tangible realities.

The need for experimentation with a projection field became apparent to me very early on, precisely because it offered a physical dimension to the moving image. As part of my

¹⁰⁵ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p. 178

initial investigation I collaborated with a colleague, Katie Gaudion, a textile designer with expertise in devising haptic tools and tactile surfaces. We worked together on the creation of tactile screens, distributed within a three-dimensional space, which would enable the viewer to a certain extent to enter the screen. The original idea for a tactile screen was a rather simple one – we worked with progressively more translucent fabric, which allowed the beam of light to travel through the series of surfaces, the image leaving its traces on each of the layers. The collaboration culminated in a gallery installation which was part of the group exhibition *Safe to Touch*, at the Hub National Centre for Craft and Design, Sleaford, in 2009.



Fig.11 *Fingertips* installation, 2009, Tereza Stehlíková and Katie Gaudion

Yet it was only later on, during the site-specific installation by Art in Touch entitled *Just Under the Surface*, that the concept of the projection field was clarified and deepened, by introducing and exploring the notion of embodied memory as well as depth of surface.

The exhibition took place in the Crypt Gallery of St Pancras Church, London, a space which has a rich history: it has been used as a burial place and as an air raid shelter during World War II, and only much later as a gallery. Its original character and feel had been more or less preserved: the walls are a patchwork of different periods: they bear the marks of history through subtle graffiti and drill-holes left there by past exhibitions, and contain tombstones with engraved letters marking the resting place of

the many deceased who are buried there. There are also gravestones stacked up along the sides of some of the passageways. It was here, while working in a group to devise the concept of the exhibition, aware of the powerful presence of the space, that the relationship between the projection field and the projected image gained a new significance. It was no longer about finding a suitable surface for a projection. The place itself asked for a particular form of dialogue. When caressed by light the walls began to yield stories that normally remain hidden. The exchange was reciprocal: the projected image gained an embodied presence by borrowing the tangible presence of the walls. In return the walls were able to temporarily shed some of their solidity, the weight and constraint of their particular embodiment, and dance together with light. This exchange was not just an abstract idea, but was felt and subsequently described by the visitors. In my writing this is elaborated in more detail in the next chapter, which deals with installation space as an extension of the tangible territory.

The idea of the projection field being understood not only as a surface upon which something external is superimposed but as an integral part of the installation which imbues the work with its own memories, drawn out of the material with the help of the projected light, can be seen in the works of an artist Shimon Attie. In one particular strand of his work Attie experiments with projections of historical photographs onto the exact locations where these were taken, decades previously. Attie's interventions create a powerful emotional effect, as the tangible presence of a particular building is merged with the ephemeral image of projected light, which captures a reality that is no longer present, yet nonetheless real and emotionally powerfully charged (seen here on account of the subject matter, in this case the Holocaust).



Fig.12 Plate 10 from the series "Writing on the Wall", 1993, Shimon Attie, Linienstrasse 137, Berlin

5. Celluloid Acetate Film

“The projected strip of celluloid is the modern day wax tablet.”¹⁰⁶

Celluloid acetate film, the original medium of film-makers before video and digital media began to take its place, offers another example of a physical surface that records marks of contact over time in a relationship that is indexical, and even fetishistic, since it is based on direct contact. In this section I will analyse some of the ways in which others have explored this particular quality of celluloid acetate in creative ways.

In her essay, Tess Takahashi analyses celluloid acetate film from the point of view of its materiality, studying work of film-makers who deliberately push the boundaries of the physicality of their medium to make visible the physical imprints of both their hands and the surrounding conditions, including natural elements, and finally time (in the case of decay, oxidization etc.)

“Celluloid film's flecks, blurs and scratches can be made to invoke, not only a general sense of how time and history wear upon the image, but the specific material conditions

¹⁰⁶ Giuliana Bruno, p.221

and emotions evoked by the particular context of its production, travels through the world and association with the artist.”¹⁰⁷

Takahashi’s core argument centres on contemporary North American avant-garde film-makers’ striving for a “utopian freedom” as well as a longing for authenticity (which evokes Benjamin’s concept of an aura) found in celluloid acetate film, and this is contrasted with the impersonal and deceptive character associated with digital technology.

It is an enticing argument, and, I believe a truthful one in as much as it captures a particular feature of celluloid acetate film that is indeed unique to this medium, and untranslatable into the digital form. The correspondence between physical touch and its translation into the projected image is direct, not only in its impact but also spatially. This indexicality allows the film-maker to manipulate the film’s surface and perceive the result in the projected image at a moment in time that corresponds to the spatial placement of the mark. Or, in other words, the correspondence between space and time is direct, visible, and tangible in celluloid acetate film. It would be quite counterproductive to interfere with a digital source, as there is no obvious or accessible correspondence between time and space: i.e. it would be quite senseless to scratch a memory card as the result would be unpredictable and most likely simply lead to it just not functioning.

It is in relation to this most accessible, or “surface”, aspect that I want to discuss celluloid acetate film here: it, too, exists on a threshold between two worlds – the tangible world which it occupies as a physical object with a surface that can be interfered with, and the world of representation to which it acts as a gateway. Although a digital card onto which moving image is recorded also exists as an object in space, the gateway it offers is no longer legible to us as embodied beings. Unlike celluloid acetate, digital speaks a different language to us, and most importantly it does not understand the human touch in the same way that we do. It lives on a different scale, inaccessible to the eye, an aspect it shares with all modern technology, in comparison to older machines.

In her essay Takahashi describes the relatively recent resurgence of interest in working with celluloid acetate film because of “its capacity to record direct contact with both filmmaker and the natural world”¹⁰⁸ on its physical body. It is precisely because of this ability of celluloid acetate film to be both comprehensible and to comprehend us that attracts the contemporary artist, mirroring the general need to reconnect with one’s own

¹⁰⁷ Tess Takahashi, ‘After the Death of Film: ‘Writing the Natural World in the Digital Age’, *Visible Language* 42.1 (2008), pp.44-69, p.46

¹⁰⁸ Tess Takahashi, ‘After the Death of Film’, p.48

alienated body. “ Here the definition of the indexical mark is extended to mean other kinds of unique presence, individual vision and personal touch than that captured by light’s initial imprint on emulsion. In the digital age, attention to film’s material specificity suggests a secure relationship between the hand of the artist and the image. Such marks function like a signature, as symbols of authentication.”¹⁰⁹

Because of celluloid acetate’s physicality, which can be grasped and understood, contemporary avant-garde film-makers have used it in various ways to explore its materiality. They have dragged it through the ocean and buried it in the ground, allowing nature and the elements to make their mark in the same way that a wall or any other surfaces bears imprints as marks of weather and time.

As an example I will name the New York based filmmaker Bill Morrison, whose film *Decasia* is composed of found footage of disintegrating nitrate footage, which he skillfully assembled to produce haunting scenes that become the embodiment of memory and its gradual irretrievable loss.

In the 2011/12 Unilever series for the Turbine Hall the filmmaker Tacita Dean celebrates celluloid acetate film in an installation entitled *FILM*, while at the same time mourning its imminent demise. In an essay¹¹⁰ of the same title, Dean speaks about the “burdensome physicality” of film, which she loves, as it imposes limitations, resistance, that is not present in the digital medium. Dean’s argument is that there truly is no way of comparing the medium of film with the digital, they are two very different techniques and as such they should not threaten each other.

As I have already mentioned in my introduction, the physicality of film was something I considered at first in my quest for tactility. And indeed I explored some basic ideas in brief filmic exercises with 16mm film, scratching into unexposed strips of black leader and using the resulting print as a mask to run through the rostrum camera, exposing it again.

¹⁰⁹ Tess Takahashi, ‘After the Death of Film’, p. 50

¹¹⁰ Tacita Dean, ‘FILM’, in *Film: Tacita Dean*, ed. Nicholas Cullinan (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), pp.17-35

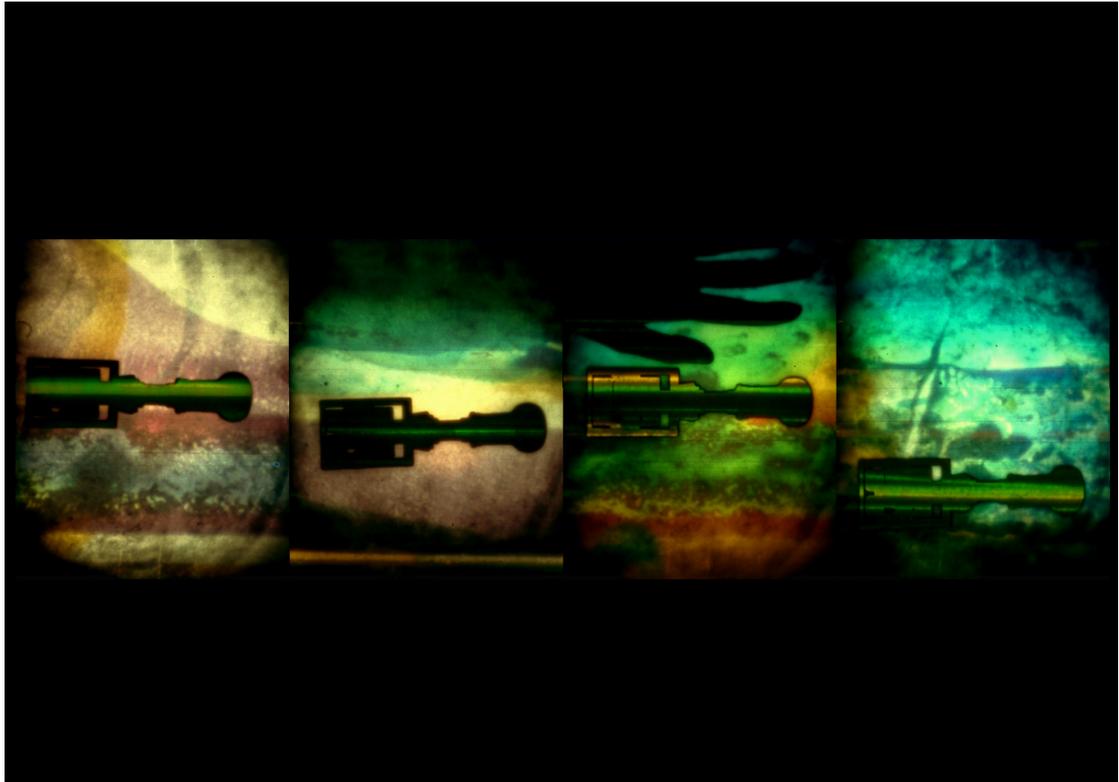


Fig. 13 Stills from 16mm film experiments, 2008, Tereza Stehliková

I was able to experience some of the joy, mentioned by Dean and many others, at witnessing a process that was at once so accessible to understanding yet still magical in its result. Despite this, I decided that the materiality of celluloid acetate film was not an aspect of film's tactility that I wanted to concentrate on in my journey into tangible territory. It became clear to me that the challenge of my exploration of the tactile lay within the terrain of lived space itself, and to this extent the nature of the medium I employ, while important, is not of primary concern.

6. House of Memory (*Melusine*)¹¹¹

“As a house of moving pictures, film is as habitable as the house we live in.”¹¹²

Having examined certain relevant ideas such as the memory of objects and places and the significance of surface, I now want to come back to the landmarks of the terrain of

¹¹¹ Please refer to accompanying DVD to view *Melusine*

¹¹² Giuliana Bruno, p.251

my own lived space, and explore filmically the relationships and connections between them, while joining them in a narrative.

During the process of research I came to realise that I was haunted by certain tenacious memories from my childhood, and in particular by the house of my growing up. Over and over again I have felt the need to return there in my work, in order to try and exorcise its power over me. By revisiting some of these familiar locations of my childhood, I was hoping to reactivate the original bond between my own early experience of these places while also drawing on their powerful tangible presence, and the embodied memory they store, because: “Memory interacts with the haptic experience of place...”¹¹³ At the same time it was the medium of moving image that offered the most suitable way of not only recording but also weaving of these elements of imagination and memory together since “it is precisely this experience of revisiting sites that the architectural journey of film sets in place, and in motion. Places live in memory and revive in the moving image.”¹¹⁴

In order to access the archetypal significance and the haunting qualities of the house of my childhood, I decided to concentrate on Bachelard’s depiction of the oneiric house, which he describes as both a physical place, a building made of bricks, stone and mortar, while at the same time being a container constructed out of daydreams and memories. Bachelard argues that it is precisely because the house is a living value that this forceful opposition can be sustained, and indeed makes sense. Moreover, it is through this very contradiction that the oneiric house gains its power over us: “the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. The binding principle in this integration is the daydream. Past, present and the future give the house different dynamism, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another.”¹¹⁵

I realized that the house of my childhood, with all the narratives it promised, had to become the central point of my exploration, since it was here, in the most familiar of places (so familiar in fact that I could no longer see it objectively because it has become deeply internalized), that the relationship between various forms of memory and the sense of touch could be tested. As Marks reminds us, “touch is only effective, that is, is only a perception, insofar as it links with memory”.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Giuliana Bruno, p.221

¹¹⁴ Giuliana Bruno, p.221

¹¹⁵ Gaston Bachelard, p.6

¹¹⁶ Laura U Marks, p. 149

The first step towards erecting the oneiric house was to compile some of the key memories from my childhood¹¹⁷ which centred on the house. Re-evaluating these memories, it soon became apparent that the pivotal line of the investigation, the core narrative, was in fact the staircase of the house itself, which is a spiral and therefore carries powerful symbolism. Coincidentally (or perhaps not) it was on this staircase that my earliest identifiable memory took place, a fact that reinforced the staircase's ability to function as both a poetic metaphor of the spine of my own being ("But what a spiral a man's being represents!"¹¹⁸ as well as time, while providing the physical set for the film.



Fig. 14 Still from *Melusine*, 2010, Tereza Stehliková

Melusine: synopsis¹¹⁹

The film is loosely structured into three sections: exterior, staircase, interior.

The exterior section and the film itself begins with the main protagonist, Karla, touching her own faint reflection in a shop window, soon followed by a long shot of her walking across a desolate railway bridge. She stops in the middle, drawn by the hypnotic shimmering surface of water deep beneath her. Just as the water proves too strong a pull to resist, a red button rolls from nowhere and topples by her feet. Her sinister intention revoked, she crouches down and picks up the button, then throws it into the river, as an offering. Having liberated herself from her prescribed path, Karla leaves the bridge, and enters the narrow streets of the city of my

¹¹⁷ See Appendix XI.

¹¹⁸ Gaston Bachelard, p.214

¹¹⁹ See Appendix XII for full script

childhood. She touches crumbling walls until finally a stream of water on the stairs leads her to a door.

Karla dives into the house filled with water, she passes through the water's permeable surface and enters the house of her childhood. Karla, now a child of seven, finds herself at the bottom of a spiral staircase. She is soaked from head to toe, holding the very same button that her older self dropped into the river earlier. The child looks up, at the spiral twisting above her, then decides to climb up the stairs. On her way she encounters two characters, firstly a grandmother (my own grandmother), who exchanges the button with her for a bunch of irises. A few flights of stairs higher a young bride takes the flowers and passes the child a large key on a ribbon, which she hangs around her neck. Finally, Karla is at the top and looks down the winding staircase. A young woman with a newborn baby is coming up the stairs, beckoning to her. At that point a faint sound of a lullaby drifts across the space.

At this point the child turns towards the door just behind her, which slowly opens, and enters.

The final section is set in an interior of an apartment. Karla is an adult once more. She walks around a large dining room, picking up objects with secret histories. They are items that have a meaning only understandable to her, musical instruments, postcards... At last she approaches a closed door, takes the key on a red ribbon from around her neck, and unlocks the door. She enters the room and finds her own double lying asleep (or dead) on a bed scattered with flowers. She is watching herself in stillness, again the forgotten lullaby drifting towards her through layers of time. Once more, she is seized by an impulse to grasp her own reflection. She reaches out, passing her hand through the streaming surface of water which envelops the sleeping figure and touches the one on the other side. The closed eyes open, her gesture is reciprocated, as if in a mirror. The red button, now one of the buttons on Karla's shirt, wiggles out of its noose until it's free, and is then carried away by a stream of the river that has taken over the image.

I have been taking inspiration primarily from the works of Maya Deren, whose concept of vertical investigation of a situation, simultaneous with poetic approach to cinema, captured most accurately my intention as a filmmaker. It was already at the stage of the script development that the vertical structure was explored, through close layering of memories that in reality took place over a distance of many years.

Reflection on pre/post/production

Having given a brief overview of the film's narrative, in its final form, I now want to analyse the process of making the film, in order to see how the practical elements relate to theory.

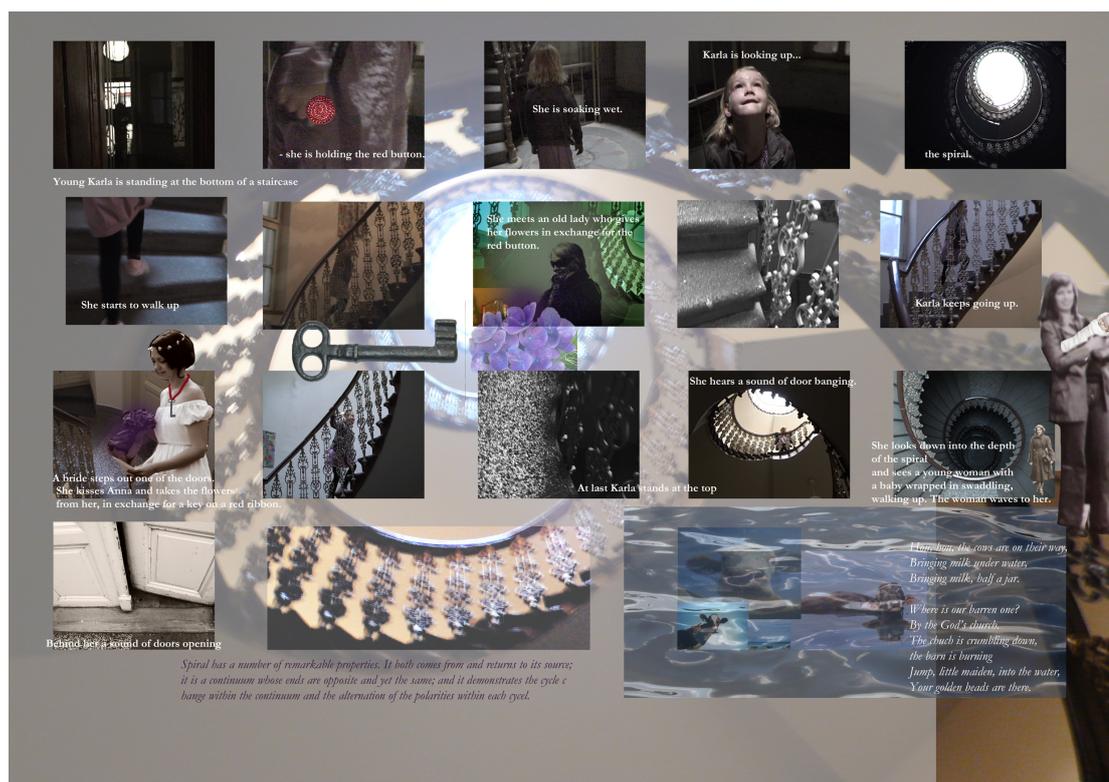


Fig. 15 An example of a *Melusine* storyboard, Tereza Stehliková

At the beginning there was a series of memory images, in the sense described by Cílek or Rilke, as quoted earlier in the chapter: a spiral staircase, a young woman with a newborn baby, a jar of colourful buttons, a large key, a woman in a white dress, a river with a weir. There was also the image of Millais' *Ophelia* drifting in her river of blossoms and the Czech lullaby, with its strange imagery, which has haunted me ever since I first consciously remember hearing it as a very small child.

I developed my script with help of the writer Deborah Levy. She encouraged me to trust these images, to string them together like beads of a necklace and to be brave in presenting them without fear of crossing into kitsch.

In order to gain the necessary distance from my subject matter, which, by definition, was too intimate, I decided to work with a cinematographer, Grant Gee. We have met on a number of occasions and discussed my intention, the script, the aesthetics, as well as the tactile aspect of the project.

The shoot itself took three full days; another half day was spent on the animation of the button.

These are my reflections on the making, written just after the shoot:

- *On touch*

Once I embarked on the actual filming, I found it rather hard to concentrate on the tactile aspect of my film, since there was so much else to keep in mind, such as equipment, Anna¹²⁰ and all the various people involved, as well as the actual narrative and continuity. I was very glad that I instructed Grant beforehand on some of the ways I wanted the film to be shot, so that he could work without me telling him what to do. Despite this, the tactile element was always present, through the sheer physicality of the whole experience: carrying objects, lights and cameras, as well as forgetting things and having to run four flights for each one, through pouring and wiping water and getting wet and dirty, knocking down lights and pulling extension cables, even holding the camera fixed to the heavy rig, while viewing the footage Grant had shot, making the muscles in my arms ache.

- *On Light and Surface*

It was the first time that I had worked with artificial lighting in my film practice. The use of artificial lighting (with the possibility of introducing coloured tints) enabled us to bring out detail and texture in surfaces, by tilting and exploring the angle of the lighting. And it was through the movement of these lights, as we changed their angle and position, which in turn led to an enlivening of surfaces by animating the light and shadow, brought out by the lighting. For instance, with the help of my assistant, who moved the source of light, we filmed the texture of the stone staircase, creating an effect of outlines and textures coming to life.

- *On time and water*

Retrospectively I realized what Tarkovsky meant by cinema being ‘sculpting in time’. I felt I was working with time, both as subject matter and medium. Time, just like the water which was so plentiful during the filming, was present all around us and in its passing it enabled the film to happen. This struck me not just during the filming but also on coming back to London. I was curious to reflect on how the preparation of a script which itself was inspired by the past led to the practical arrangements: gathering of props, booking flights; all this for a period set in the future. And then, along time’s flow arriving at the first day of the shoot, passing through all the days of filming to the day of returning the equipment, and suddenly with a computer filled with time captured, memories materialized. Memories that became imaginings that turned into further memories – doubled memories, shared memories, memories superimposed. This process of materialization was/is itself tactile. Time around me felt tangible, as well as fluid, just like

¹²⁰ My daughter playing the role of young Karla.

water. On the other hand, time was also a constraint, which became most apparent on the last day of the shoot when most of it was needed in order to experiment with filming objects within the apartment, utilising what I have learned about embodied memory. On reflection, it is here that the film becomes weakest, because it is here that the emphasis should have been placed.

- *Summary*

Overall I found this a very intense experience. The most enlightening element was the transformation of thought into physical reality. There was something rather empowering and therapeutic about this, like a form of exorcism through re-enactment. With it came difficulties, connected to letting others, with all their preconceptions and personal motivations, into this private world of my memories and imaginings. There was often a sense of discomfort, a sense of constraint, a lack of spontaneity, which felt negative. Ultimately, the tactility, the ability to grasp the subject matter, was frustrated by my inability to communicate my intention to the crew, while being constrained by time. The importance of working more organically with people who are familiar with my intentions more instinctively became apparent, since that way the shoot could have the character of an experimentation and exploration, rather than demanding exact instructions to fulfil a specific vision.

Post- production

The process of editing led through waves of elation and disappointment. While initially happy with the rushes I soon experienced a sense of dissatisfaction in relation to the footage conveying any of the intended messages. As I assembled the first rough edit, the result appeared full of clichés, an illustration, rather than embodiment, of touch.

With the help of an experienced editor I decided, in many places, to replace the original abrupt cuts with gentle cross-fades, in order to prolong the moment of contact between surfaces, echoing some of the principles mentioned earlier. This was in contradiction to the original intention, which was to work with sharp edits to create a strong contrast between cuts. I also introduced the superimposition of imagery (something not originally intended), which enabled me to bring new associations to scenes that balanced precariously on the edge of kitsch. Other adjustments had to be carried out with regard to the use of colour. I made a decision to desaturate the beginning and final sections of the film, leaving only the middle section in colour. I felt that colour distracted the viewer from the tactility of the film, unless it was used with precision. It was only the red button, which was at times brought out in full saturation, on the otherwise monochrome background which served to draw the attention of the viewer. The vividness of the red thus gained a quality which had a physical effect on the eye, it was as if the eye was pulled towards it. It was, on reflection, in relation to the function of the red button that

the idea of colour as a haptic property of an object was first understood in practical terms. The use of colour as a haptic property is something I want to return to in the last chapter.

Together with the editor we “chipped” away at the timeline until at last a more refined story emerged from the crude blocks of imagery. I often found myself torn between my role as a researcher and as a film-maker. Certain shots which, in their stand-alone quality, worked successfully at conveying tactile qualities, had to be sacrificed because their presence weakened the overall structure of the piece. Ultimately it was the need for the film to work as a whole that had to be promoted over and above its separate elements.

While the final result was a film at once in accord with, as well in contradiction to, the original envisioning of it, it was also apparent that I was unable to utilize in practice some of the aspirations set in theory. Many of the tactile approaches to film-making gathered so far either did not communicate their desired intention, or they did not work in the context of the particular film I was making. It was the practical application of theoretical ideas that ultimately helped me to verify much and thus became an invaluable part of the process of learning and investigation.

Audience Feedback/ Personal Reflection

Once the film was made I screened it on various occasions and discussed my intentions with groups of artists, academics and the general public. Together with my own reflections I have come up with the following observations:

Elements that worked:

- *Conveying of the sense of temperature*
- *Sense of walking up stairs in wet tights (empathy)*
- *Abstract images of texture (in combination with sound), conveying tactility of surface*
- *Touch mediated through a third element, i.e. hand moving through water to touch an object) works well.*
- *Lighting (which helps to animate surface, Burch’s point)*

Elements that didn’t work:

- *Depiction of literal touch does not work as well in conveying tactility: it is too illustrative, it doesn’t embody what it sets out to do.*

- *The symbolic qualities, and the fable-like narrative, which take us away from tactile elements, and the sense of embodiment*
- *The symbols took us away from the specific, towards what was understood as too general*

Other points/ questions to address:

- *Need for an active involvement, interference, trusting the power to mould (as a film-maker I remained too passive).*
- *The importance of context of shots (what comes before and after), in conveying tactility*
- *The question of cross-dissolves as modes of editing. Are they too clichéd?*
- *How to experiment effectively with narrative?*
- *How to film objects without turning them into symbols?*
- *The presence of the cinematographer, while bringing the desired distance from the subject matter, which was extremely intimate, went too far the other way, ending up removing me to such an extent that I felt I was an observer, rather than a director shaping the outcome. I realized retrospectively that at this relatively early stage of my research it would have been more productive to experiment with the camera myself, as I have no way of communicating something I have not tried myself.*

7. Conclusion

In this project I tried, through the immediacy of touch, to reactivate some of the inner life of the house of my childhood: to connect elements of the tangible house as it stands in physical reality with some of the landmarks of its internalised structure, bringing the oneiric house into being within the cinematic space of the moving image. Rather than the final outcome (i.e. the film itself), it was the process of recording and gathering of memories, locations and landmarks that served to chart the terrain of my own lived space, while it was in the act of constructing the narrative for the film (during which connections were drawn and relationships explored), that the idea of mapping truly gained expression.

Yet having gone through the course of my making and completing the film, which represents the final outcome of this particular stage of my research, I realized that rather than succeeding in entering the tangible territory, unlike Maya Deren in *Meshes of the Afternoon* or *At Land*, I remain just an observer. The glass of the shop window, which introduces the heroine of my film as a mere reflection at first, came to symbolise something I did not grasp while still in the process of making the film: its surface is the

very membrane which divides me as a film-maker from my subject. The heroine, trying to touch her own reflection in vain (again a reference to Maya Deren and her *Meshes of the Afternoon*), is in fact myself as I attempt to penetrate through the invisible barrier and step into the tangible territory where at last the image can be grasped, held and bent to the desired purpose.

By drawing attention to physicality of objects and places and capturing the workings of time and memory through contact, *Melusine*¹²¹ illustrates rather than embodies the aspiration to use surface as a gateway into tangible territory. Instead of drawing us in, the surface deflects, like the glass of the shop window or indeed the computer screen, any attempt to get beyond it. It is unwilling to yield its depth to the viewer.



Fig.16 Stills from *Melusine*, 2010, Tereza Stehliková

I would like to argue that it is only at the very end, when the glass loses its solidity as it dissolves into a streaming screen of water, and the heroine is able to reach through it and touch her own living reflection, that a contact with tangible territory is made. The vital characteristics of water, a substance that acts as a medium through which objects can be in contact while not necessarily side by side, captures and also embodies the essence of what I argue tangible territory to be: a fluid and graspable, as well as fleeting, substance that has the ability to fill space and be held by its walls while also seeping through gaps, defying any constraints.

IV. Entering the Tangible Territory

¹²¹ Refer to the accompanying DVD to see *Melusine*.

Exploring the Dynamic Relationship between the Cinematic Image and the Viewer's Body

1. Introduction

So far I have identified some of the key characteristics of tangible territory in a schematic form. But while already anticipating a sense of living presence in its outline (and through the substance of water), the territory was until this point defined in a more or less two-dimensional, as well as static, form.

The aim of this chapter is to introduce a spatio-temporal dimension, as one of the key features of the terrain of lived space. It is this dimension, with the movement it implies, which allows an otherwise schematic representation to be transformed into a multi-dimensional living entity. Movement is an intrinsic part of haptic looking because haptic looking is modelled on tactile perception, whose mode of acquiring information, as explored in the first chapter, is time-based. "Through access to [this] movement, touch also opens up for us the sense of duration."¹²² Tangible territory only comes into being once journeyed through in a motion that is emotion, understood as a series of viewpoints that constantly shift (in a literal as well as metaphorical sense). Through being immersed in the tangible territory the boundaries between inner and outer scapes, subjective and objective states, become permeable, creating a space that is born of the seamless exchange between these two seemingly opposing poles.

To ascribe some of the properties of haptic space to my concept of tangible territory, I want to consider Lant's understanding of creating a haptic space by "moving toward the "gradual 'conquest of space'". It entails, besides the direction of actors into every nook and cranny of a box, the development of dramatic, artificial lighting to "give the image relief," destroying the boundaries of frame through dark shadows implying off-screen space through cast shadow, and employing photographic angles that avoid frontality."¹²³ And finally, it is the movement of the camera that gives the most direct sense of "the three-dimensionality of haptic space"¹²⁴ conveying this other dimension of tangible territory, which extends into physical but also emotional realms.

¹²² Giuliana Bruno, p.252

¹²³ Antonia Lant, p.71

¹²⁴ Antonia Lant, p.71

As the first case study, I want to analyse the collaborative Art in Touch show *Just Under the Surface*, which was conceived as an site-specific installation combining a multi-disciplinary approach to stimulate a sensory involvement with the space by visitors through artistic intervention. The second case study analyses the making of a short film, *Red Riding Hood*, which utilises the idea of “motion of emotion”, as explored by Giuliana Bruno in *Atlas of Emotion*. Both of these case studies are explored to give a sense of the terrain of lived space, highlighting its at once geographical as well as psychological features, and showing that an abstract concept can be embodied through an artistic practice.

Having revisited the city and the house of my childhood and documented it with the help of a cinematographer, somebody detached from the powerful memories and emotions which for me the location inevitably holds, in the next project I felt the need to become directly involved in the shaping of the work, through tactile as well as emotional involvement with the subject matter. I did not want to remain a passive observer, I wanted to step into the space, walk through it and grasp the subject matter. While *Melusine*'s symbolic narrative ironically prevents the viewer from entering its cinematic space (an observation based on the audience feedback, discussed in the previous chapter), partly because its plot hurries one along the horizontal axis without leaving time to contemplate the image itself (in the sense highlighted by Marks and Barker when analysing the role of the haptic image, which is self-contained, and does not represent, but embodies), the new approach I am looking for leads through contemplating the image both as an end in itself (a haptic image considered almost as a still), but also through exploring movement (i.e. a series of images). Movement, while introducing another (i.e. spatio-temporal) dimension into the register of artistic expression, is also a key characteristic of “moving image” itself in addition to the tactile sense which, unlike sight, is dependent on movement in time as a way of acquiring impressions. The utilisation of the literal movement of the camera within space, and the translation of these tactile encounters into subjective emotional states (an idea touched upon in my tactile workshops) is one line of my approach to introducing the body into the experience of moving image. In other words, the stimulation of the viewer's sense of their body's involvement with the moving image facilitates and deepens the mutual exchange between the audience and the film. This mutual exchange, as outlined in the first chapter, lies at the basis of haptic visuality, as does a lack of emotional neutrality, which is tied up with a subjective point of view.

This subjective, or in other words an emotionally coloured, view, resonates with what Henri Bergson calls “interested” looking, because according to him, perception “is always partial and interested, since it is located in a specific perceiver; it is necessarily embodied, located and contingent.”¹²⁵

Haptic looking could therefore be considered a kind of looking whose subjectivity is deliberately exaggerated, openly present. It is a looking that doesn’t pretend to offer a clear image of how things are. It revels in obscurity, in layering of impressions, it thrives on association, on memories and half-conscious inklings. Haptic cinema “encourages a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image”; therefore it is “not proper to speak of an object of haptic look” but instead “dynamic subjectivity between looker and image”.¹²⁶

Haptic cinema in its purest form could therefore be understood as a seduction of the viewer not through intellectual stimulation but through its sensual impact on her body. In the same way that the experience of peeling a lychee fruit blindfolded was later described by the participants of one of the tactile workshops as a multi-coloured planet, or a strange underwater being, thus gaining a mysterious dimension¹²⁷, the haptic image reveals itself not at once but gradually, sometimes layer by layer, and indeed it never offers a complete view of itself, remaining always semi-unknown, obscure, half-dreamt. “Instrumental and non instrumental, objectifying and intersubjective, vision aligned with mastery and vision that allows its object to remain mysterious.”¹²⁸

Since I am keen to understand the relationship between a journey through physical space and its emotional equivalent for a viewer I also want to consider Giuliana Bruno’s proposition of the direct connection between the engagement of early tourism with the picturesque tradition, and the transformation of a ‘picturesque’ traveller’s experience into the experience of a movie-goer. The idea that the journeys now undertaken by the ‘motion picture’ are indeed direct descendants of the ‘picturesque’ journeys embarked on in earlier times by tourists who sometimes even carried various framing devices, such as the Claude glass¹²⁹, which introduced special effects such as tint, distortion, and so on to the experience of the various views, helps me in understanding the way a film set can be approached. Or, in other words, the picturesque tradition shows us how space, and

¹²⁵ Henri Bergson, cited in Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p. 41

¹²⁶ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p. 164

¹²⁷ See Appendix IV.

¹²⁸ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p.131

¹²⁹ A small, slightly convex tinted mirror, widely used by amateur artists and tourists in the 18th century, producing the effect of composing the reflected landscape subject neatly and isolating the subject within a frame, the sepia tint of the mirror adjusting the tonal values of the scene so as to resemble the subtle, mellow lighting of the paintings of the French landscape painter Claude Lorrain.

from it narrative, is constructed, and how moving image, as a medium, follows this tradition. This is particularly relevant since the next stage of my exploration does in fact use landscape and nature as both its subject matter and setting.

“ Film becomes the reproducible memory of our kinaesthetic view of space, and of the tactile exploration that makes up intimate history of our emotional range.”¹³⁰

Yet it was the involvement of the body itself, not just the sights experienced from a distance, that was crucial, and carried a great appeal to the early traveller. As Bruno explains; “seeing with one’s own eyes involves a (dis)placement; becoming a direct observer, the tourist acknowledges her body in space.” She goes on to explain that: “modern tourism shows a tangible link – a haptic bond – to film and its way of making space. Creating haptic travelogues and simulated experience of travel, motion pictures participated in a movement: the cultural transformation of sightseeing into site-seeing.”¹³¹

To return to the subtitle of my thesis, *Inviting the Body into the Experience of Moving Image*, which was formed long before coming across Bruno’s book, I realised that Bruno’s analysis of the picturesque tradition introduces a useful way of analysing and understanding of the way in which the viewer enters the image “as a psychosomatic entity”, because her body is “both actor in and spectator of the drama of the space.”¹³²

Hence the separation between the observer and observed becomes fluid, as her body moves through the landscape while the landscape enters her. And this reciprocal process of emotional (internal) as well as physical (external) motion, extends to the expression of the moving image: “This geographical route is precisely the one the motion picture took as it created a haptic language of shifting viewpoints.”¹³³

The concept of a point of view is vital in my journey through the tangible territory, both in its literal as well as metaphorical interpretation. The shifting viewpoints of the picturesque tradition mirror the lack of fixed point of view noted when experiencing the world through tactile perception, something that came out of particular exercises during my tactile workshops. A purely haptic exploration can gain a sense of adventure precisely because the point of view is constantly changing as one’s fingers progress along

¹³⁰ Giuliana Bruno, p. 263

¹³¹ Giuliana Bruno, p.191

¹³² Giuliana Bruno, p. 195

¹³³ Giuliana Bruno, p.183

their tactile journey, while the tangible territory (in this case the surface of an object) is in a state of a constant flux.

It is the picturesque tradition which allows nature “to be experienced in the form and shape of a view and, like a picture, [is] to be viewed as an unfolding visual narration”¹³⁴, a narration that extends into the experience of moving image.

What I have been describing so far gives us a sense about one of tangible territory’s vital characteristics: Tangible territory is not so much a real physical space but a network of dynamic relationships and interdependencies (between the viewer/traveller and the landscape or space), which can be expanded and collapsed depending on one’s desire or situation, and which are therefore in a state of renewal and transformation. One such dynamic interdependency is expressed by a relationship of scales.

In the next section I want to look at the importance of scale and its connection with point of view, as a particular way of bringing the body into the experience of moving image.

2. *Nameless Wood*¹³⁵ – the Role of Scale and Point of View

“To use a magnifying glass is to pay attention - but isn’t paying attention already having a magnifying glass? Attention by itself is an enlarging glass.”¹³⁶

During some of my tactile workshops at the Royal College of Art, an exercise was set in which each blindfolded participant was given an unknown (to her) object to hold and experience through touch. After a couple of minutes the objects were removed and covered up. The participants were then asked to draw these on large sheets of A1 paper, from tactile memory alone.¹³⁷

The results of this particular exercise were striking, as they revealed a powerful connection between attention and scale. Minute detail, which would normally be overlooked by sight, gained great prominence in the drawings based on touch. Exactly as stated in the poetically precise language by Bachelard, attention has quite literally become a magnifying glass. And since touch by definition often prioritises properties that

¹³⁴ Giuliana Bruno, p.193

¹³⁵ Refer to accompanying DVD to see *Nameless Wood*.

¹³⁶ Bachelard, 1994, p.158

¹³⁷ See appendix III.

are different to those of sight, subsequently the visual representation of a tactile experience of an object appeared greatly distorted in scale.¹³⁸



Fig. 17 Tactile Workshop, Royal College of Art drawing studio, 2009

In one of my practical investigations I decided to explore further the idea of attention as a magnifying glass. What I would like to concentrate on in this chapter is a moving image piece entitled *Nameless Wood*, which was filmed with a macro lens¹³⁹, to allow me to study my subject from a very close range. Originally conceived for an site-specific video installation of a collaborative Art in Touch show entitled *Just Under the Surface*, which took place in the Crypt Gallery, London, Euston, in May 2011, the video captures Wistman's Wood, which can be found on Dartmoor. My interest in this particular location was originally triggered by reading of the last chapter of *The Tree*, by John Fowles. In it Fowles describes the wood, one of the last remaining patches of ancient woodland in Britain, in terms of its simultaneous existence within various temporal dimensions, some of which are so vast (due to its ancient age) that our human life cannot comprehend them: "a drama, but of a time-span humanity cannot conceive. A pastness, a presentness, a skill with the tenses the writer in me knows he will never know..."¹⁴⁰

What struck me most strongly when I first encountered the wood was that it was both

¹³⁸ Refer to accompanying DVD

¹³⁹ A lens designed specifically to enable taking photographs unusually close to the subject, with the characteristics of a magnifying glass.

¹⁴⁰ John Fowles *The Tree* (St Albans: The Sumach Press, 1992) p. 90-91

less and more powerful than I visualized it, mainly due to its size. In my imagination it was much bigger and denser, more forest-like. When I first entered it, it was tiny and somehow incomplete, as if it were a dream posing for reality, full of “holes” that were ready to give the illusion of reality away. Yet the longer I stayed there, the more my understanding of this particular impression altered: It was not in spite of, but precisely because of, its miniature size that the wood’s power and weight grew on me, as it gained the presence of the most vivid dreams. The place was no longer pretending to be real, it crossed into a realm of hyper-reality, or perhaps surreality, so that finally a square metre of this wood seemed to contain an almost infinite depth of possibilities and expressions.

The idea of scale was not just secondary, but is in fact one of the key defining factors of the wood. The trees in Wistman’s Wood are all oaks which, due to having been exposed to strong winds, only grew to about four metres in height. The forest is Bachelard’s miniature. But this particular feature, rather than diminishing the experience of being there, seems to heighten it, as if the limitation imposed on the growth of vegetation resulted in a sort of compacting of experience, so that every inch is saturated with the richest sensations. “Values become condensed and enriched in miniature”¹⁴¹.

Additionally the experience of miniature transported one into childhood and the space of the imagination, where things can be expanded and shrunk according to one’s desires, and it is the miniature, rather than the vast, that has the ability to draw one into its depth, one’s own depth. Or as Bachelard expresses this: “the miniscule, a narrow gate, opens up an entire world. The detail of a thing can be the sign of a new world which, like all worlds, contains the attributes of greatness.”¹⁴²

In the case of Wistman’s Wood the spatial scale extends into the temporal scale, which, too, plays an important role in one’s experience of Wistman’s Wood. The forest seems to exist on both the micro scale of most minute movement connected with the rather ephemeral aspects of its life cycle (seasons), while also holding the stillness of slow-moving centuries, as mentioned in the Fowles quotation.

To capture both of these scales became an artistic challenge for me. As mentioned earlier, I decided to use a macro lens (or Bachelard’s magnifying glass) to shoot the footage, which allowed me to more or less discard an external perspective (so closely linked to sight), and approach the forest through the dispersed point of view of deep proximity, which is a method much more akin to touch. I also used a tripod to avoid any

¹⁴¹ Gaston Bachelard, p. 155

¹⁴² Gaston Bachelard, p. 155

camera movement. This rigid framing was a way of limiting my expressive palette, and concentrate instead on the movement present within the forest itself.



Fig. 18 Stills from *Nameless Wood*, 2011, Tereza Stehliková

My main concern was to make a distinction between the mode of depicting the forest while using a macro lens and the numerous nature broadcasts which use similar techniques to achieve a very different end. I wanted not only to communicate what was there on a visual plane, but also bring in aspects of the interior life of the forest, which could only be experienced through a combination of the senses, in the encounter between two embodied presences. What I was hoping to achieve in my depiction of the wood was to bridge the distance normally associated with sight and instead bring in the haptic, non-instrumental vision discussed earlier, which would enable me to preserve the mystery associated with the image and therefore the subject matter, while also helping me loosen to some extent the boundary between subject and object, the inner and the outer.

3. Just Under the Surface - Video Installation

In this section I want to focus on a video installation form, and to explore it as an extension of the tangible territory. This terrain of lived space extends here beyond the two-dimensional constraint of the screen, through the utilisation of a projection field. While up to this point the projection field has only been mentioned in relation to the more or less two-dimensional surface, I now want to introduce a spatial dimension, which presents an opportunity to transform the passive viewer into an active participant whose body traverses a space, not just in a mediated way, but quite literally.

Some of the aspects of tangible territory, like the intertwining between inside and outside through bringing the intimate and interior into the public, exterior, can be seen in the works of the video and installation artists such as Pipilotti Rist or Mona Hatoum, both of

whom have incidentally used their own bodies as the subject of their video installations and have come close or indeed have crossed the boundary between inside and outside. Mona Hatoum demonstrated this in her *Corps Etranger*, where she used endoscopic technology to penetrate her own body and then projected the internal landscape in an enlarged form inside a public gallery space. In her London show entitled *Eyeball Massage* Pipilotti Rist, who approaches the body from an intimate perspective but whose vision remains sensual, rather than scientific, decided to balance on the threshold between the two spaces (giving us glimpses of her anus or mouth).

Yet it is Rist's playful exploration of the possibilities of a projection field, her inventive exploration of scale as well as point of view (tiny projection in the floor, projectors hidden inside watering shells and watering cans) forcing the viewer to crouch down or stand on tiptoes and insert one's head through a narrow opening, temporarily becoming disembodied, that were the most valuable source of inspiration and offered an opportunity of a dialogue when exploring the possibilities for my own video installation pieces.

As a case study I want to concentrate on the Art in Touch collaborative show *Just Under the Surface*, which has already been mentioned. I found that working site-specifically opened up a whole new area of investigation for me. Projecting onto an already emotionally-charged surface introduced a new level of depth into the moving image, so that the surface became an indivisible attribute of the work itself, lending it a material dimension which in film can normally only be communicated in a mediated way, via association, while the projected light brought both the surface but also the whole space to life. The video projection and the space were no longer distinguishable as separate entities but merged into one.

Hence it can be said that tangible territory comes into being through the interaction of the projected image and the physical site of the video installation, creating an immersive multi-sensory space which draws the body into it, triggering sensations that can often be experienced as emotions.

When curating the Art in Touch show we, as a group, were aware that the space of the Crypt itself became one of our collaborators. Working closely with a particular site taught me the importance of listening carefully to its requirements, and to fully appreciate how a place imprints upon the exhibits its unique qualities. At the same time, while experimenting with projectors on site, I also began to understand my work in

light and the space as two separate entities. The textures of the wall were brought to life, the passageway awoke from its sleep. By walking into the installation, one's body submerged in the flow, the visitor was no longer just a disembodied observer, but became a participant. The central passageway ended with a screen made of layers of fabric covered in a thin layer of clay, special handmade paper with textures created in ink, and a back projection of lichen, drawing the viewer towards itself. (Fig. 20)



Fig. 20 *Just Under the Surface*, 2011, Art in Touch video installation

The viewers also had the freedom to meander through the interconnected passageways, encountering other artworks which varied from hovering spheres of sprouting lentils suspended in space, made by Anais Tondeur, to sculptural pieces created from raw hide by Rosalyn Driscoll, and ceramic objects by Bonnie Kemske.

To focus on the projection elements of the show: the first turning into the smaller side passageway led to an encounter with large moss spores, created by the artist Anais Tondeur from wire, fabric and real lentils. These spores were distributed across the floor, giving a sense of growing from the ground. Over these a close-up projection of moss and real spores was superimposed. The aim of this particular piece was to give the visitors a sense of a different scale, by disrupting the habitual relationship between the viewer and a familiar object (in this case moss, normally perceived as very small in comparison to

the size of a human).

The second water projection took place in one of the corridors where gravestones are stacked along the sides. Here the projection was masked precisely so as to match the outlines of these stones, creating an uncanny effect of stone coming to life, becoming animate.

Finally, to the left of the central passage and in parallel with it, an elongated space, enveloped in exposed brick of various textures, offered a suitable enclosure for my *Nameless Wood* projection. (Fig. 21)



Fig. 21, *Nameless Wood*, 2011 (in *Just Under the Surface*, 2011), Tereza Stehliková

I now want to concentrate on some of the feedback received from the participants, since it is here that many of my ideas in relation to my research were tested, both individually but also as a part of a collective. The feedback was gathered by various means: dialogue with gallery visitors, a visitors' book for people to leave notes, and finally, and most crucially, in-depth interviews with philosopher and social scientist Claire Pettimengin. Pettimengin structured these in such a way as to allow the subject to become aware of his or her subjective experience and describe it with great precision, particularly in its bodily, sensory and emotional dimensions. The interviews were designed to stabilize and focus the subject's attention on the internal process by which they experienced the installation, rather than its content. They called on inner experience, not commentary, judgement or speculation. The interviewer continually refocused the subject's attention from the *what* to the *how*. She used a mode of questioning which was based not only on

linguistic indexes but also on gestures and sensory cues. I have catalogued here some of the key responses¹⁴³ and grouped them in themes, which I would now like to reflect on.

Just Under the Surface – responses to the video installation.

One of themes emerging from the detailed feedback, which I believe is relevant to my investigation of the tangible territory, is connected to the sense of the weakening of boundaries between oneself and the surrounding space. Subject D, for instance, describes this as “a softening of boundaries rather than a complete dissolving of boundaries”, while Subject F says “it’s like one’s own boundaries, like one’s outer body boundaries, are no longer so...relevant, so one can expand into the space, the mind can expand into the space...”

Some visitors described a sense of “elevation”, “lightness”, “sense of immersion” (Subject E), “feeling of being open”, “receptive”, of “something lifting slightly”, “physically it’s a feeling of expansion”, “like...being washed inside”(Subject B) “feeling of going upward”(Subject F).

At the other side of the spectrum was a sense of “threat”, oppression, claustrophobia, “like somebody opening up your heart”, “I felt like I was being pulled in somebody else’s world”, something questioning “where is the dead in you?”, “a feeling of being trapped”, “my body doesn’t want to be here, my heart doesn’t want to be here”, “I wanted to keep a barrier”(Subject C). Subject H stated he through he “was going to fall over when first entered the Crypt”.

One of the visitors (Subject G) felt like he needed to be accompanied, he felt a sense of threat on entering the space. He also didn’t feel comfortable remaining in the space for too long.

To translate this physical sensation into an emotional one, the words that best describe this, as expressed by Subject F, are: “vulnerability and openness”, an emotionally coloured description which captures the double-sided nature of this particular experience created by the installation.

From this brief account which nonetheless distils the most vital responses of the visitors to the Crypt, it appears that what was experienced here in practice was that which has been outlined earlier in this thesis in theory. Upon entering tangible territory (in this case

¹⁴³ For a more detailed transcription of responses see Appendix XIII.

a space of a video installation) the visitor experiences a sense of weakening of the boundaries between themselves and their environment. This increased permeability between one's body (and with it also the sense of self) and the surrounding space triggers a physical sensation which is very closely bound to an emotional state. While it could be argued that the physical sensation (primarily the loosening of boundaries) is more or less shared, the emotional interpretation leads to very different results: for example, a sense of vulnerability (implying a threat, fear, and so on) or on the other hand openness (a sense of lightness, immersion, for example), or indeed both at once.

“Outside and inside are both intimate – they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility. If there exists a borderline surface between such an inside and outside, this surface is painful on both sides.”¹⁴⁴ As Bachelard argues, in a chapter entitled “The Dialectics of Outside and Inside” from which the above quote comes, the oscillation between the experiencing of an external space as an internal one, and vice versa, leads to an external space losing its “void”, and the internal space its clarity, while the implications of this process for the individual can be either terrifying or liberating, depending on other associations present.

The substance of water, which in the installation was used particularly to create an effect of immersion, thus became both the activist as well as a metaphor for the reversibility of inner and outer scapes. The site was no longer an empty container, a negative space, but instead appeared to be filled with physical substance: transparent, permeable yet voluminous substances reminiscent of water, or as expressed by Subject A: “Room was made of this substance which was sort of flowing and running, or is like an animal, or is like...scattering around the room”.

This gives us a sense that the participation of the body can both enhance and frustrate the relationship between the viewer and tangible territory. To return briefly to the idea of scale here: it can be said that the relationship of one's body to the space in which it found itself was indeed made more conscious by the exploration of scale in the installation. Subject D reported a sensation of feeling “quite small”, “of being an explorer”, and “of magnification”. Yet there were elements of frustration in the visitors' relationship with the specific installation, since entering the space and changing the point of view led (in some cases) to a dissolution of the illusion, as explained here by Subject A: “I wanted to be in it, I wanted to sort of feel this motion around me, in order to be in it and be part of it, but my being part of it ruined it.”

¹⁴⁴ Gaston Bachelard, p.218

All these accounts serve as useful examples of the dynamic properties of tangible territory, as experienced in a site-specific installation.

4. *Red Riding Hood*¹⁴⁵

“Cinema is haptic both because of the cameraman’s profilmic penetration of the world, like the surgeon’s internal handling of the body, and because of film’s physical impact on the viewer, especially through its startling juxtapositions of scale, time, and space...”¹⁴⁶

As I have shown in the previous section, tangible territory extends into physical space, and can be entered by a visitor to a gallery installation. Yet there are other ways of stepping into tangible territory. As a film-maker I want to concentrate on modes of bringing tangible territory to life within the constraints of the sequence of frames. Since cinematic space is constructed through motion, I now want to primarily concentrate on ways of utilising movement.

The next project that I am going to study is *Little Red Riding Hood*, a short film which concludes the last stage of my PhD. As the title suggests, the inspiration comes directly from the classic fairy tale of *Little Red Riding Hood*, which served as the starting point of this exploration. I chose it to introduce a particular point of view (i.e. a young girl lost in a forest) and the psychological context for the character’s actions (The girl was sent to see her grandmother; through being curious she ended up getting lost, etc.). With the help of the basic narrative I was able to define certain key features of the character’s emotional experience, while being able to introduce my own creative interpretations and embellishments.

Through what Bergson defines as “interested looking”, i.e. looking that is “always partial and interested, since it is located in a specific perceiver; it is necessarily embodied, located and contingent,”¹⁴⁷ the forest was to be no longer simply itself, but is instead mirrored back to her, expressing her own psychological state.

¹⁴⁵ See accompanying DVD, *Red Riding Hood*

¹⁴⁶ Lant, 1975, p.69

¹⁴⁷ Henri Bergson, cited in Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p. 41

Having researched the origins of the *Little Red Riding Hood* story, I found there are not only numerous versions of it, but also numerous interpretations of its meaning. It has been suggested by many scholars that *Little Red Riding Hood* is in fact a tale of female initiation, and contains references to menstruation (the red cloak), sexual maturation (a choice between a path of needles or a path of pins, terms which are associated with entering certain stages in sexual development of girls) and seduction (the wolf representing a man). The fact that there were these deeper, more complex layers made this particular story all the more rich, and therefore attractive, as the basis of the film.

When constructing my storyboard I first isolated certain key building blocks or features in the development of the fairy tale: the journey of a young girl into the darkness of the forest; the carrying of food and domestic utensils associated with the consumption of food, and therefore feminine duties; the wolf, as the symbol of the male, as well as seduction, temptation to stray off the right path; the house in the middle of the wood, which at once promises safety but is in fact ominous. I introduced mushrooms into my own version of the story, partly because they are an intrinsic part of the forest, but also because their consumption is associated both with a delicious meal but also with poisoning that can be fatal. On a visual level mushrooms, in their endless forms and colours, evoke a space that resembles a seabed (taking us out of the expected environment, into a different place), while also bringing connotations of male and female sexual organs, because of their phallic and vulval shapes, seductive colours and glistening textures, a feature that fitted well with the aforementioned, more deeply concealed themes of the tale.



Fig. 22 Still from *Red Riding Hood*, 2012, Tereza Stehliková

From a practical angle I knew that the process of making itself had to embody my intention: I needed to immerse myself in the set of the film both physically (from submerging myself in the landscape to methods of carrying and moving the camera and the camera's interaction with the surroundings, as mediated by my body), but also emotionally, to identify myself with the character's internal state. I spent hours in the forest, crawling through the moss in an attempt to overcome the distance between myself and the subject of my film, the external perspective and the interior state of the mind.

Based on the feedback from my previous work, especially from *Melusine* (with a similar fairy-tale narrative), I made the decision not to depict touch directly, agreeing with Marks, who tells us that “looking at hands would seem to evoke the sense of touch through identification” while “the haptic bypasses such identification and the distance from the image it requires.”¹⁴⁸ In fact I went as far as to decide that no action would be instigated by hands, and instead the physicality of the journey must be embodied by the filming method, the way the camera moves, the objects and textures depicted.

The film's journey into the forest was thus established not to illustrate, but to incarnate the protagonist's descent into the physical, sensual reality of the forest. The camera was no longer just a passive observer, but an active agent which probed the forest, penetrated the deep moss and the fecund vegetation, in order to express the sensual awakening of the character, who is both seduced and repulsed by her experience, as she encounters

¹⁴⁸ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p.171

that which is strange and deeply intimate, alien and already known, disgusting and desirable at the same time.

And it is Bruno's concept of motion as emotion that becomes an invaluable articulation of my attempt to create a dialogue between the sensations produced by the journey and the interior emotional states of the protagonist. Thus the physical journey across an external landscape has to also be understood as an emotional journey through the interior geography of the mind, in the Surrealist tradition, through the "the (dis)placement of affect onto space [which] has given way to a passage, as the exterior world of the landscape has become protofilmically transformed into an interior landscape."¹⁴⁹



Fig. 23 Still from *Red Riding Hood*, 2012, Tereza Stehlíková

Basic camera techniques

During various fieldwork episodes I attempted to internalise the forest, to familiarise myself with it. I catalogued numerous locations, landmarks and textures, so that they could serve as shades and tones on a palette of emotions for the film.

Once I knew the landscape intimately, not just through sight but also by touch, the next step was to experiment with methods of recording it with the camera, in order to find ways of communicating some of the more internal states by means of the moving image.

¹⁴⁹ Giuliana Bruno, p.241

As mentioned already, the mode in which the camera was to move constituted a key feature of this particular journey. The camera needed to take on an expressive character; it had to become involved.

Types of camera movement practised:

- flight over moss
- slow creeping
- observation
- dragging camera through moss
- penetration into
- probing of vegetation
- pushing

Other types of movement:

- Focus pull
- Zoom lens

In terms of techniques related directly to the camera, I explored close-up shots, using a macro lens, with a very shallow depth of field¹⁵⁰ and therefore a very narrow band of focus. I found that the shallow depth of field did in fact correspond on some level to the experience of touch, as it brought to focus only a very narrow strip of the image, and the strip could be moved, through the focus pull, creating an indexicality between the action of my hand and the travelling strip of “detailed perception”. The aim was to create haptic looking, an emotionally coloured perception (expressed in the concept of interested looking) which as “this bodily defined sensation is the very basis of an emotional knowledge.”¹⁵¹

The use of a macro lens, which again functioned as a magnifying glass, allowed me to bring to attention areas and details that would normally be too small to notice. Just as noted in the previous section on *Nameless Wood*, it was the shrinking of the distance between subject and object created by the extreme close-ups that enabled me to introduce to visual imagery the properties normally associated with touch. Through these means the sense of scale was also affected, because as the micro world gained

¹⁵⁰ The given range in an image that appears in focus. It varies according to the focusing distance, the aperture setting (or f-stop) or the type of a lens used on a camera.

¹⁵¹ Giuliana Bruno, p.261

prominence, the habitual relationship between one's own body and the external world was changed.

Editing Techniques

The editing process formed a vital part of my investigation. It was here that the final version of the film took form. I would like to make a few points here about the technical details and process of the workflow, which I believe had an impact on the final result. I want to note here that I had just purchased the latest version of the editing software *Final Cut Pro X*, and after initial hesitation I was pleased to find that the new interface is much more user-friendly, interestingly exactly because many of the operations have been made more tactile: a magnetic timeline that snaps into place and can be stretched and squashed, while the gap between clips has been transformed from an absence into a presence, and is now a solid black lump, displaying physical properties that can be interacted with. The slowing down and speeding up of clips is no longer done by typing in percentages of the original speed, but is performed directly on the timeline itself, with the help of a retime editor, which functions as an elastic strip, and can be stretched or squeezed together, resulting in an organic change of tempo.

Effects

The software contains various effects, some of which have been incorporated from programmes that were previously independent. Through experimentation I found that some of these, when used minimally, help to enhance the material properties of the subject, especially when this is a soft organic material, such as moss or mushrooms, but also material such as bark.

I also had the opportunity to introduce effects such as *underwater*, which in its most minimal form gives an element of fluidity and mouldability to the image, and it is thus no longer rigid.

By working with strong colour I realized the potential of colour as a haptic property. This was particularly noticeable in colour red – it was the physiological effect of its brightness that pulled the eye, causing a physical sensation. The red colour also has a tendency to spill outside of its borders, and as if beyond the screen, introducing extra dimension to the image. On the other hand the colour green, with its soothing effect, often contributes to the sense of dissolution of the image, and evokes a sensation of coolness. Other colours, as for instance in the case of the beige or yellow mushrooms, seemed to enhance the texture of which they are part.

Because of these characteristics of colour, which adds another expressive dimension to the image, its presence has the potential to be enriching, but also distracting and

overbearing. For this very reason I decided to use colour sparingly and intentionally, only in specific sections, to utilise its power.



Fig. 24 Still from *Red Riding Hood*, 2012, Tereza Stehlíková

The greater control over the outcome through the ability to reshape and modify the image, the opportunity to extend or shrink the duration and pace of clips by squashing or stretching them on the timeline, the modelling of gaps and the overall elasticity of the timeline - these all led to what I would argue is a more fluid exchange between the maker and the film, and I believe this, too, impacts on the final result.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to bring tangible territory to life. I have established that the territory, rather than being a physical space with boundaries, is as a network of dynamic relationships and interdependencies, which change form and meaning depending on context, movement, scale and point of view, emotional state, associations and attention/focus. In the same way we need to see “meaning and emotion not as residing in films or viewers, but as emerging in the intimate, tactile encounter between them.”¹⁵²

Just like water, which metaphorically seeps through much of my film work, tangible territory displays the characteristics of permeability, voluminosity, malleability, the ability to be entered into while also entering the “enterer”.

¹⁵² Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 15

This possibility for interchangeability can be perceived as both life-affirming and threatening, since it dissolves to a certain extent the boundaries between oneself and the surrounding space, weakening one's sense of independence, or even the self. It therefore makes us both more receptive and more exposed, in adopting the characteristics of haptic visuality, which itself "implies making oneself vulnerable to the image."¹⁵³

To look at other examples of its cinematic incarnation, I want to bring to mind the Zone in Tarkovsky's *Stalker*¹⁵⁴. There, the seemingly unremarkable landscape gains a terrifying dimension precisely because of its interweaving with the traveller's psyche. It is ready to give emotions a material form so that the internal state has the potential to create exterior trappings: bogs, abysses, etc. Here the terror of the internal world being externalised is given its full creative expression.

To enter tangible territory means to a certain extent to give up one's separateness from it. And in the process one is inevitably changed. In the case of *Stalker*, the characters reassess what they themselves believed to be their hopes and desires. As the character of Stalker shows us, it is through humility, vulnerability and softness, which lie in opposition to rigidity and atrophy, that one can gain anything within the Zone.

Finally, because of its dependency on movement (both in relation to moving image, camera movement, and the movement of the viewer through a space of an installation) I have established the need for a spatio-temporal dimension, without which tangible territory remains a schematic representation, rather than a terrain of lived space. Maya Deren, whose idea of vertical time was briefly mentioned in Chapter III, serves here as a good example of an artist acutely aware of the relationship between the subject of the film, the camera's positioning (and the viewer's point of view), and the resulting impact on the presentation of space in the film. Through cleverly constructed shots that treat the camera as if it were a dancer (Deren herself was a dancer and her films contain a strong element of choreography), itself in a dialogue with the character on screen, Deren is able to create a cinematic space that is intriguing, mysterious and discontinuous. As we watch her films our bodily knowledge is called forth to help bridge the gaps in our intellectual understanding, and even if ultimately the narrative remains obscure, watching one of Deren's films gives a viewer a sense of wholeness rather than fragmentation.

¹⁵³ Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p.185

¹⁵⁴ *Solaris*, dir. by Andrei Tarkovsky (Artificial Eye, 2008)

Moreover, for Deren (as for all dancers) movement is directly connected to the expression of emotion. To come back to her understanding of vertical or poetic cinema, I want to quote a transcription from the *Poetry and the Film* symposium mentioned earlier, where Deren conveyed some of her thoughts on the role of emotion in poetic cinema: “vertical --that is, the relationship between the images in dreams, in montage, and in poetry--is ... they are related because they are held together by either an emotion or a meaning that they have in common, rather than by the logical action. In other words, it isn't that one action leads to another action (this is what I would call a "horizontal" development), but they are brought to a center, gathered up, and collected by the fact that they all refer to a common emotion, although the incidents themselves may be quite disparate.”¹⁵⁵

To come back to the example of the *Zone* in *Stalker*, we see that movement and its connection with inner psychic and emotional states is crucial in defining tangible territory: it is through the passing across the landscape of the *Zone* that obstacles are met and psychological states revealed. And it is precisely this interweaving of geographical and psychological positioning, brought on by motion that is transformed into emotion, which gives rise to what I call tangible territory.

In my own work I explore tangible territory by focusing on the concept of point of view, both as an emotional as well as a physical placement. The subjectivity of this “interested looking” is communicated through the deployment of haptic visuality, a visuality which promotes the dissolution of the boundary between subject and object, creating the possibility for its interchangeability. It is this constant state of reversibility which creates a tension between the viewer and the film and helps to involve the viewer’s body in the experience. Barker compares this mutual experience to a form of breathing, as film literally in-spires us, it enters us and we enter it: “Circulation of meaning within the circuit of both.”¹⁵⁶

As participants we are no longer able to remain passive – we are forced to become involved, and this involvement encompasses both physical as well as emotional states. “A lived-body is always in the act of perceiving expression an expressing perception.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Maya Deren, 1953, cited by Willard Maas, 1963, p.59

¹⁵⁶ Jennifer M Barker, 2009, p.156)

¹⁵⁷ Jennifer M Barker (2009), p.8

While my camera is significantly more static than in the example of Deren's work, it is however one of my aspirations to introduce more dynamic into my own film-making practice, in order to penetrate even further into tangible territory.

As I have shown in this chapter, all of these concepts and properties have been tested in practice, through film-making as well as video installation, and as feedback from the audience, in the form of interviews, recordings of visitors' responses, email correspondence and dialogue.

Tangible Territory: An Overall Conclusion

At the starting point of my investigation was a vague yet powerful sense of dissatisfaction with my medium of artistic expression, film-making, and the lack of physical engagement I had with it. Having experienced using both CGI and 16mm film, I understood at least to some extent the source of this frustration. I was longing to touch the subject, which was hiding behind the impenetrable screen of the computer: to grasp it and mould it into the desired shape, to make my imprint on it. The inability to do so led to work which felt insipid, distant, disembodied, uninvolved, both on an emotional and visual level. I looked towards other film-makers, and especially those working with stop-frame animation, whose tactile imprint on their work I wanted to emulate.

Since coming across Švankmajer's tactile experiments, I have realized there is indeed a path which could potentially lead to a more rewarding relationship between moving image and tactility. Jan Švankmajer's claim, which can be summarized by his belief in "the conjunction of 'touch-vision' senses" and his strong conviction in "sight [being] capable, to a greater or smaller extent depending on individuals, [of transferring] tactile sensations in a mediated way"¹⁵⁸, thus formed the basic hypothesis and the rest of my journey consisted, to some extent, of testing and exploring whether this idea could

¹⁵⁸ Jan Švankmajer, interview with author, 2011, please see Appendix I

indeed be formalized and replicated by similar but also, and perhaps more crucially, different means.

Having set out from the metaphorical as well as literal darkness of *Dans Le Noir* and *Dialogue in the Dark*, in relation to my limited understanding of this issue I was fascinated to encounter a tactile terrain, the experience of which transformed even the most familiar, everyday object into an unknown territory of dream-like vividness. During experiments in my tactile workshops, when participants were asked to explore unknown objects while blindfolded and draw these from memory without ever having caught a glance of them, I was able to confirm that touch prioritizes features in a different way to sight. An object known by touch was no longer a simple representation of its utilitarian function, symbolized by its outline. Instead of a static image, it became a winding journey full of unexpected valleys and hills, traps and pleasant encounters. Here I was reminded again of the distinguishing feature of touch, a sense that acquires information through movement across space, through a process rather than a snapshot.

It was at this point perhaps that Bachelard's musings on the miniature gained a new significance. I was taken back into the world of Andersen's *Thumbelina*, from the days of my childhood, a world so rich from her "tiny" perspective. The importance of scale and the point of view associated with it became a focus of my investigation, and later led to my study of landscapes with a macro lens.

While my dialogue with Jan Švankmajer's work remained the underlying thread, I was also keen to investigate theories of haptic visuality proposed by academics such as Laura U Marks and Jennifer M Barker, and also found in Giuliana Bruno's *Atlas of Emotion* the perfect mirror in which to reflect on my work and thoughts.

Over and over again, the journey towards tangible territory seemed to have led me back in time, towards the period and location of my childhood in Prague. It was here that my theories of embodied memory, as well as the Surrealist idea of "morphologie mentale", could be best tested: in the house I grew up in, on the spiral staircase of my childhood home which contained my first conscious memory, and which merged for me with Bachelard's definition of humans as spiral beings. Capturing these locations on camera became a challenge for me, yet the outcome of the project did not live up to the high expectations I had of it. The internal image found little expression in my film *Melusine*, which heralded the conclusion of this particular 'homeward-bound' phase.

I was now drawn out of a city, away from buildings, towards the landscape of southern Bohemia, which I photographed, experimenting later with layering of imagery in what I later understood as an emulation of Deren's vertical time. I placed some of these images on the timeline of my editing software, joining them in slow cross-dissolves, and saw something like an opening into another space, located somewhere at the mid-point of the transition between the two passing images. Yet this moment was too brief to allow me, or the viewer, to enter the secret space before it disappeared again, and I decided not to pursue this path.

As my practical work developed, it took me towards a space of collaborative video installation, as well as setting up the Art in Touch group, an informal arts network, whose first project resulted in the *Just Under the Surface* exhibition, at the Crypt Gallery, London. On location at the Crypt I had a chance to explore the now semi-defined concept of tangible territory in a literal form, i.e. a gallery space, which could be entered by the exhibition's visitors. The feedback from this particular work allowed me to identify more precisely what the nature of tangible territory was. I understood here a number of things: the importance of motion and its close connection to emotion; the importance of a projection field which lends materiality to the ephemeral image, but also the reverse side of this, "dead" matter coming to life by the light of the projection, and the close relationship between being submerged in a space that demands from its visitors openness / receptivity, the other side of which brings extreme vulnerability, characteristics that to a great extent define the basis of all tactile experience.

The final stage of my investigation took me to a central European forest, just beyond the house I spend my summers in, a location which is at once familiar and alien. The forest as a symbol captured the two discrete aspects of my own investigation – i.e. the known made strange, and the unfamiliar waking to elements of the deeply intimate. Having taken the story of *Little Red Riding Hood* as my starting point, I decided to focus primarily on depicting a deeply subjective perception of the forest, from the point of view of a child protagonist who is both lost and scared yet fascinated by where she finds herself.

As the journey neared its end, I realized that in order to penetrate tangible territory, I finally had to give up my distance from, and lack of involvement with what I was trying to capture. I had to grasp and mould the subject, while also being brave enough to allow the subject to enter me, not only metaphorically, but also literally: I was forced to crawl through the undergrowth and mud, while being bitten by ruthless mosquitoes which I was unable to squash lest the shot was spoiled, to lie in deep moss for hours, to become

part of the landscape while also violating the landscape in a small but personally significant way, so that it carried the imprint of my presence in my film, the way an animator who builds their own set is used to doing.

At the very end of my journey - right here, in fact, I was able to confirm what I sensed all along: that rather than entering a completely unknown territory, I was in fact making sense of that which was with me from the beginning. Despite its name, the “Tangible Territory” that I discovered at last remains hard to grasp. From where I stand now, I understand it as a liminal space which comes to life through the encounter and tension between the interior and the exterior, the known and the unknown, the subject and the object, the film-maker and the film, the film and the viewer. It is never static, it relies on movement (whether camera movement, the movement of the narrative, the movement of film reel, or movement of the gallery visitor) to gain expression. It demands, both from the maker and the viewer, an openness and receptivity, and emotional as well as physical engagement. Just like Tarkovsky’s *Solaris*,¹⁵⁹ tangible territory has the ability to take on endless forms, so its nature cannot be assumed from any single incarnation, but can only be understood in terms of one’s relationship to it, and therefore, most crucially, only from an embodied perspective, a vantage point that is by definition in a state of flux.

Looking ahead

Having reflected on my journey so far, I want to put forward some thoughts in relation to the general application of my research, as well any future directions this journey might now take. This concerns primarily the relationship between tactility and the digital media (with a special focus on CGI), which is becoming increasingly more topical as we collectively enter deeper into the realm of the digital. As I mentioned in my introduction, it is precisely in the context of the field of the digital, the intangible, that the need for tactility and embodied memory becomes most pressing, and it is in this sphere therefore where the greatest applicability of my research lies. To find ways of bringing tactility into areas such as the CGI has become an interesting challenge for me. Specifically designed tactile workshops, which would allow animators and other artists involved in a particular project to feel and experiment with the textures of materials they are trying to emulate digitally, could for example be employed as one of the methods of tackling this problem. This would both help to diminish the natural frustration experienced by people working with digital technology, but hopefully also communicate the embodied knowledge and understanding acquired in this way through their work.

¹⁵⁹ In Tarkovsky’s film the planet Solaris has the ability to tap into the astronauts’ psyches, and access their memories and desires, and give them a material expression. (Tarkovsky, *Solaris* (Artificial Eye, 2008))

While technology is praised for its ability to represent reality more and more precisely, one must remember that ultimately it is the human experience of this reality that stands as the benchmark of technology's aspirations. The return to the most "basic" modes of exploration of the physical world serves to verify the success of the advancement of technology, by measuring the "hi-tech" against the everyday.

The tactile initiation¹⁶⁰ of the film-maker and the crew (cinematographer, animator, set designer, sound designer and so on) prior to the shoot could function as a very productive way of sensitising them to the importance of the body's involvement, especially before being on set, limited by time and other practical concerns. Again, specially devised workshops seem to be a simple and effective method.

In terms of the development of my own filmmaking vocabulary, the challenge lies in exploring a narrative mode that moves away from the illustrative, plot driven mode, creating a narrative that is experiential. One such approach leads through employing the documentary format. While the characters' story provides a narrative focus, the interior state of their mind is expressed using some of the methods and tools identified in my thesis. Such a documentary is built around strong poetic elements, assembled according to Maya Deren's vertical structure, rather than the horizontal narrative line. A good example of such an approach is the work of the British filmmakers Andrew Kottling and Ben Rivers, as well as the Scottish filmmaker Margaret Tait. All of these artists have used landscape not as a simple backdrop, but as a tool of great expressive powers.

Another strand of investigation is the site-specific video installation, which I began to focus on throughout the research. The two key aspects of this are the collaborative element and the employment of the projection field, which offers a tangible dimension to the moving image medium, with its own embodied history. An environment thus created allows the visitor to become fully submerged, and is the only practical and direct way of overcoming, to some extent at least, the constraints of moving image, which lacks a material dimension. In the future I am interested in devising much more tailored and targeted collaborative installations, which would focus on selected responses received from the visitors of previous shows, and develop these further as a group. As a reference I use the work of the Swiss video artist Pipilotti Rist, whose installation pieces I briefly discussed in the previous section as well as Susan Hiller, an American born installation

¹⁶⁰ A set of tactile exercises designed with a particular intention: see Appendix III for an example.

and performance artist, whose recent show at Tate Britain was a valuable inspiration for my own research, as well as the American artist Shimon Attie whose work has been discussed in Chapter III.

Finally, there is the tactile lexicon, which I compiled in order to offer a clear and concise summary of the most vital points related to tactility and film, understood here as tools and methods needed for entering tangible territory, both in theory but also in practice.

*

I want to conclude my thesis by calling on other film-makers and artists, particularly those working in digital media, to explore some of my proposed methods of bringing the body into the experience of the moving image, and to develop them further to ensure that technology serves both our bodies and our imagination.

Lexicon of Tactile Evocation in Moving Image

For the benefit of film-makers, artists and others interested in the relationship
between touch and vision



The Lexicon exists as a distillation of the key ideas explored in my thesis, but should also be understood as an independent piece of text which has its own particular style and function: a manifesto that calls for practical as well as playful investigation. It is both a record of my journey into Tangible Territory and an itinerary for possible future explorations.

A

Active Involvement

requires that the viewer cannot remain passive – she must be enticed to become involved, and this involvement should encompass both physical and emotional states.

Actor

should be initiated into tactility prior to filming.

See also **Crew** and **Mimesis**.

Affect

1. to act on; produce an effect or change in...
2. to impress the mind or move the feelings of...
3. to attack or lay hold of.

Affect implies an active involvement.

See also **Emotion**.

Art in Touch

is an informal tactile arts network, set up by Tereza Stehlikova in 2009.

www.artintouch.co.uk

See also *Under the Surface*

Association

is evoked both voluntarily and involuntarily. The sensation of peeling of a lychee fruit while blindfolded can conjure up images of “a prickly dark fish, which had beautiful opaque colours on the inside”, or “a planet that nobody would like because of its painful asperity.”

Attention

“Attention by itself is an enlarging glass” (Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*)

In film this is can be translated into using a macro lens.

See also **Focus** and **Macro Lens**

B**Blindfold**

is a simple and effective prop that can be employed to isolate touch from sight. It is extremely useful during tactile workshops.

Body

as a whole should be involved in the experience of moving image.

See also **Kinaesthesia**.

C

Camera

should imitate the function of a hand or even the whole body, not just the eye. Its movement should convey involvement, not distance. It can include: probing, stroking, pushing, pulling, turning, creeping, dragging, penetrating. Other types of movement can be created by the use of focus pull and zoom lens.

Celluloid acetate Film

is a thin flexible strip of celluloid acetate, coated with a sensitized emulsion of gelatin and used as a substitute for photographic plates. Its body can be painted, scratched, covered with moth wings or blossoms, it can be dragged through the ocean, buried in the ground, left to disintegrate...

Please see accompanying DVD (Stamp Exercise)



Colour

can be used as a haptic property. Its different frequencies have a physiological effect on the viewer. Colour must be used carefully, as there is a fine line between employing it to enhance tactility and it becoming a distraction to materiality and texture of objects.

Computer Generated Imagery

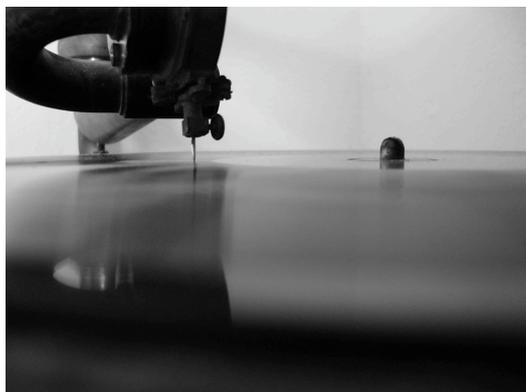
lacks a physical dimension. Artists involved in CGI should be encouraged to participate in specially designed tactile workshops, which enable them to feel and experiment with textures of materials they are trying to emulate digitally: this is to diminish the natural frustration originating in the lack of physical involvement with the CG work, while also informing their understanding of materials through touch.

Conspirators of Pleasure

is a feature-length film directed by Jan Švankmajer (1996). It is born of the legacy of his tactile experiments and serves as a great example of the way in which tactility can become both the subject matter and the mode of artistic exploration in the medium of moving image.

Contact

is the precondition of touch.



Crew

is best initiated into the role of tactility in a film through a set of practical exercises, that take the form of tactile workshops. These can be performed in a group, and should ideally be done on the set, using tools and props that are found locally.

(Crew includes actors, cinematographers, sound designers, composers, editors etc.)

See also **Actor**, **Tactile Initiation** and **Tactile Workshop**

Cross-Dissolve

evokes tactility through the prolonged contact between two or more different images.

See also **Sensory Strata** and **Editing**

D

Dans Le Noir

is a restaurant at 30-31 Clerkenwell Green, Farringdon, London. The dining area is set in complete darkness and visitors are looked after by blind waiters. The experience of

visiting the restaurant is helpful in exploring tactility, the role of visual imagination and taste.

Depth of Field

is the amount of distance between the nearest and farthest objects that appears in sharp focus. By adjusting the distance, the area in focus moves across a given surface like a finger studying its texture.



Dialogue in the Dark

is a large-scale international project which consists of exhibitions set in complete darkness, enabling visitors to gain an understanding of blindness. It serves as the perfect controlled environment to gain practical insights into the role of touch.

Dreams

can be a useful source of inspiration. It is helpful to keep a diary of tactile dreams (one's own and also others').

"I had the most tactile of dreams picking fruit of otherworldly perfection. Their ripeness almost spoke. They were breathtakingly tangible."

E

Editing

is vital in evoking tactility. Attention should be paid to pace, rhythm, and the sequence of different shots. An editor can employ sharp cuts, strong juxtapositions of

contrasting textures and shapes, or slow cross-dissolves, where the distinction between separate shots is lost, and the viewer must participate in making sense of the image.

See also **Effects, Juxtaposition, Magnetic Timeline**

Embodied Memory

is a memory that resides in the body, or the physical objects which we encounter. It often bypasses our conscious mind, and can be triggered through the various functions of touch.

Emotion

stems from Latin *emovere* an active verb composed of *movere*, “to move”, and *e*, “out”. “The meaning of emotion is historically associated with “a moving out, migration, transference from one place to another.” (Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*)

See also **Motion**.

Empathy

is the capacity to understand a person (or an object) from within their own position.

Evocation

is an act of bringing forth an experience that is already known from direct experience. Its function is vital because touch cannot be employed directly in moving image, but only through evocation.

Exterior



F

Fetish

is an object that gains its power from direct contact with other objects, people etc. Objects in film should be employed as fetishes, utilizing their embodied memory.

Focus

can mean attention, through selecting what is sharp and what dissolves into blurry softness.

Frottage

is a Surrealist technique of covering an object with a sheet of paper and rubbing charcoal or other soft pencils over its surface, bringing out the texture on paper. It can be useful in exploring tactility in visual terms.

G**Gestic sculpture**

comes from the word “gesture”, which can be impressed into materials (especially pliable materials such as clay) in a raw and spontaneous manner, preserving thus its emotional immediacy. Švankmajer used gestic sculpture with great success in some of his films, such as *The Fall of the House of Usher* and *Dimensions of Dialogue (Passionate Dialogue)*.

H**Hand**



Haptic visuality

implies a mutual engagement between the viewer and the image, rather than an attempt to represent or dominate the image by the perceiver. In haptic visuality the viewer is drawn into the image, she cannot but identify herself with it, participate in it, she is unable to remain emotionally neutral.

Hmat

is a Czech word for touch. Its root is very likely shared with the word *hmota*, which means matter.

See also **Matter**

House

“The house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits. After twenty years, in spite of all the other anonymous stairways; we would recapture the reflexes of the “first stairway,” we would not stumble on that rather high step. The house’s entire being would open up, faithfully to our own being.” (Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*)

See also *Melusine*

I

Imagination

is the act or power to form a mental image of something not present to the senses, or never before wholly perceived in reality.

Installation (video)

can offer an immersive environment where the viewer becomes a participant within a three-dimensional physical space.

See also Projection Field

Interior



J

Juxtaposition

of materials and textures serves to enhance the sense of tactility, as it draws attention to contrast.

K

Kinaesthesia

is an awareness and control of the position and movement of the parts of the body by means of sensory organs (proprioceptors) in the muscles and joints. It is used interchangeably with the term proprioception.

L

Liminal

: relating to a sensory threshold

: barely perceptible

: of, relating to, or being an intermediate state, phase, or condition: in-between, transitional

Lighting

assists in bringing out detail and texture in surfaces, enhancing the tactility of an object. It can also be used to animate textures and volume.

M

Macro Lens

is a photographic lens specially designed to work at close range. It captures detail, enabling thus a work on a different, much smaller scale.

Magnetic Timeline

is one of the new features of Final Cut Pro X editing software. Working with it enhances the sense of tactility of the interface, because the timeline displays tactile properties: it is elastic, it can be stretched, squashed, it snaps together when a new edit is made.

Manifesto of Tactilism

was written by Filippo Marinetti in 1921. In it he claims that he has “created a first educational scale of touch, which is, at the same time, a scale of tactile values for Tactilism, or the Art of Touch.” He did this by categorizing tactile impressions according to their emotional content, and matched these to textures of materials.

Matter

is something that occupies space and can be perceived by one or more senses; a physical body, a physical substance, or the universe as a whole.

See also **Hmat**.

Melusine

is a short film which explores some of Bachelard’s ideas of the ‘oneiric house’ by returning to the location of my own childhood, Prague.

Please see accompanying DVD.

See also **House**

Mimesis

comes from the Greek *mimēsthai*, “to imitate”. It suggests that one represents a thing by acting like it” while a “mimetic relationship between perceiver and object” is a relationship which “does not require an initial separation between perceiver and object that is mediated by representation.” (Laura U Marks, *The Skin of the Film*)

Morphologie Mentale

is a term applied by the Czech Surrealists to the meshing of subjective experience with external topography, so that particular external landmarks (such as houses, staircases, or trees) are integrated into one’s psyche, and affect its formation in the same way that certain vital experiences can.

Motion

introduces a spatio-temporal dimension into the cinematic space. According to Giuliana Bruno, motion produces emotions, while emotions contain a sense of movement.

See also **Emotion**.

N

Nameless Wood

is a moving image piece that captures Wistman's Wood, an ancient forest on Dartmoor. In the Lexicon it serves to illustrate the effects of using a macro lens.

See also *Under the Surface*

Please see accompanying DVD

O

Object



See also **Embodied Memory**

P

Peeling a Fruit

is a tactile exercise exploring the relationship between touch, imagination and association. It involves the peeling of a lychee fruit and a series of free associations.

Perception

is the act or faculty of apprehending by means of the senses or the mind; cognition; understanding.

Physical

means of, or relating to, the body as opposed to the mind.

Play

is an important element of tactile methodology, and was employed by the Surrealists. It frees up the imagination, and helps to trigger associations and memories. Play is an essential component of creativity.

Point of View

in a tactile encounter is rarely static, as it follows the point of contact. Tactile point of view is a journey rather than a single point. Obstruction of a point of view can help to draw the body of the viewer into the image.

**Process**

is a series of actions or steps taken to achieve an end.

Projection Field

is where the intangible image, consisting of projected light, encounters a physical surface. It can be employed creatively by a film-maker to give the work a tangible dimension.

See also **Installation** and *Under the Surface*

Proprioception

See **Kinaesthesia**

Q**Questionnaire**

should be used imaginatively, to find out the content of dreams, associations, memories and the responses of participants of tactile workshops or gallery visitors.

R

Reciprocal Relationship

in a tactile exchange implies that when you touch something it also touches you.

Red Riding Hood

is a short film exploring a forest from the point of view of a child while utilising some of the properties of **Tangible Territory** (see this entry).

Please see accompanying DVD

S

Scale

relates to proportion, which itself refers to the relative size of the various elements in a given scene/image etc. It concerns the relationship between these elements, but also the human body's relationship to the image.



Screen

See **Projection Field**.

Sensation

is a physical feeling or perception resulting from something that happens to, or comes into contact with, the body. Sensations can sometimes produce emotions and vice versa.

Sensory Strata

implies the layering of imagery so that different impressions, textures, and scales are all combined within a single image.

See also **Vertical Time**

Sound

contributes greatly to the evocation of tactility in the medium of moving image. The artificial enhancement of a sound effect can achieve the heightening of the physicality of the image, and can therefore impact more viscerally on the audience.

Spiral

"But what a spiral a man's being represents!" (Bachelard)



Subject

is a being that has subjective experiences, subjective consciousness or a relationship with another entity (or object). A *subject* is an observer and an *object* is a thing observed.

Surface

"Depth is hidden. Where? On the surface." (Hofmannsthal)

It has many incarnations: from skin, to wall, to map, to projection screens or even the surface of a celluloid acetate film.

Also see **Texture, Light, Projection Field** and **Liminal**

Š

Švankmajer

is a Czech artist and film-maker whose cinematic work is directly influenced by his tactile investigations. The films most directly inspired by his tactile experiments are *Conspirators of Pleasure*, *Dimensions of Dialogue* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*. See also **Conspirators of Pleasure**.

T

Tactile

- a. Perceptible to the sense of touch; tangible.
 - b. Characterized by or conveying an illusion of tangibility
2. Used for feeling: a tactile organ
 3. Of, relating to, or proceeding from the sense of touch; tactual: a tactile reflex

Tactile Conversation

is a tactile exercise in which the participants are blindfolded and paired up while each is given a piece of plasticine. After shaping it, they pass it to their colleague, and this exchange is carried on until finally the two pieces are combined. The tactile conversation plays itself out on a tactile level alone, and the results are only revealed at the end.

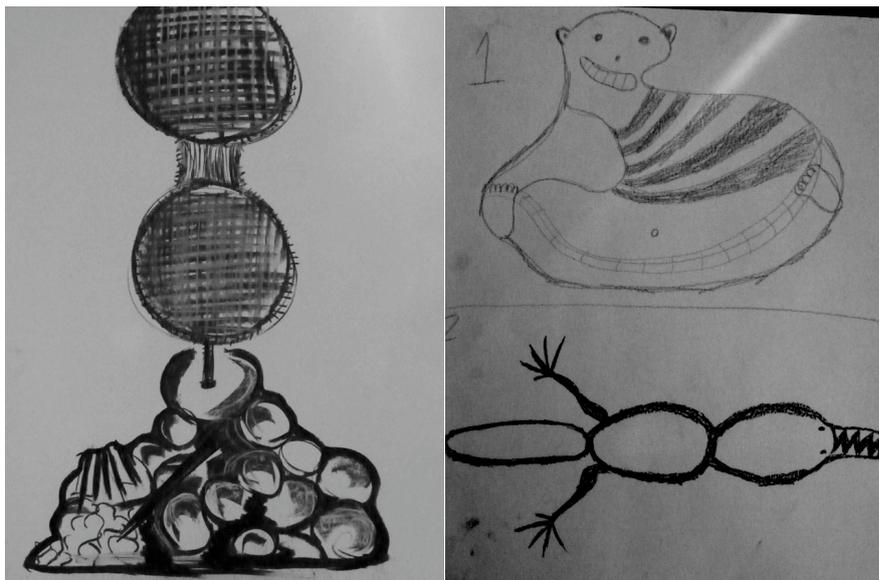


The result of a tactile conversation, tactile workshop 2009

Tactile Initiation

is a formalised process of becoming sensitized to touch through a series of specifically designed tactile exercises.

Tactile Memory Drawing



An example of two objects drawn by two different people, experienced through touch alone without ever having being seen.

Tactile Workshop

functions as a testing ground for various practical propositions as well as being an imaginative way of gaining new insights. It consists of a series of playful experiments/exercises.

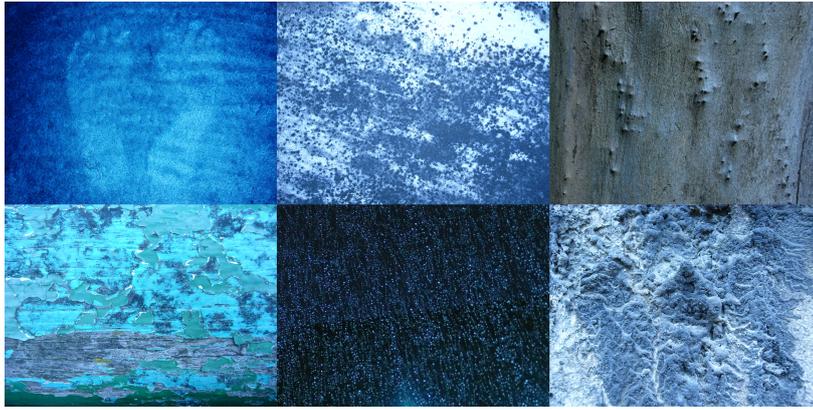
See also **Frottage**, **Tactile Conversation**, **Tactile Initiation**, **Tactile Memory Drawing**

Please see accompanying DVD

Tangible Territory

is a term which encompasses both an external geographical space and an internal psychological or emotional landscape. It consists of a network of dynamic relationships and interdependencies, and comes to life through motion (that can also be emotion), changing form and meaning depending on external factors such as the context of scenes or point of view of the camera, and internal or subjective factors such as emotional state or the subjective associations of the viewer/participant. It displays the characteristics of permeability, voluminousness, malleability; it can be entered into while also entering the “enterer”, making them thus feel affected, open and vulnerable. All other terms in the Lexicon are related to it.

Texture



examples of

Threshold

is the point that must be exceeded to begin producing a given effect or result, or to elicit a response.

See also **Liminal**

Time

is a precondition of a tactile exploration and also of moving image. The temporal dimension is an essential feature of Tangible Territory.

Touch

is a sense that enables us to feel temperature, pressure, consistency, weight, texture, volume, shape, etc. It encompasses kinaesthesia and balance.

Touch and Imagination

is a book of collected tactile experiments, tactile art and reflections on tactility, gathered and written by Jan Švankmajer and published in 1994 in Prague.

U

Under the Surface

was an Art in Touch exhibition held in the Crypt Gallery, London, 2011

See also **Art in Touch, Installation and Projection Field**

**V****Vertical Cinema**

is a term coined by the film-maker Maya Deren; it describes the uniqueness of a poetic structure which probes the ramifications of the moment and is concerned not with what is occurring narratively (or horizontally), but with what it feels like or what it means.

See also **Sensory Strata**

W

Wallis Eats

is a short filmic exercise involving the consumption of a meal of four courses. It is directly inspired by a visit to the Dans Le Noir restaurant, and explores tactility through mimesis.

See also **Dans Le Noir** and **Mimesis**.

Please see accompanying DVD.

Water

mediates contact between things that are submerged in it, even if these are not touching directly.

X

X-Axis

is one of the three coordinates which defines a three-dimensional space, and is used in 3D animation software. The x-axis represents horizontal distance.

Y

Y-Axis

is one of the three coordinates which defines a three-dimensional space, and is used in 3D animation software. The y-axis represents vertical distance.

Z

Z-axis

is one of the three coordinates which defines a three-dimensional space, and is used in 3D animation software. The z-axis represents depth.

Zone

in Tarkovsky's *Stalker* shares some of the vital characteristics of Tangible Territory, as it responds to the internal psychological and emotional states of the protagonists, becoming to a certain extent an external reflection of internal states of mind.

See also **Morphologie Mentale** and **Tangible Territory**



Zoom

Zoom in a camera can be used to pull an image closer or push it away.

Appendices

Appendix I

Jan Švankmajer Interview, 2011
 Questions asked by Tereza Stehlíková

Tactility and Film

1. **What methods do you consciously employ in order to make your films more tactile? I have in mind both in pre-production [choice of location, experiments], production, and post-production [particular methods of editing etc]?**

Until my first experiments with tactile objects I was unaware about what an important role touch played, even in my early films. What I have in mind in particular is the use of large detail, depicting textures of objects photographed. The film “J.S. Bach Fantasia G-Minor” is built entirely on this unconscious tactility. My tactile experimentation began, amongst other things, partly as a reaction to being banned from film-making (1973 – 1980) and was directed towards an imagination that stood at the opposite pole to the audio-visuality of film. Despite this fact, once the ban was lifted, I utilized my experience from these experiments in the film *The Fall of the House of Usher* already. In particular, this concerned the sequence of impressing gestures into a lump of clay, which interprets Poe’s *Enchanted Castle* poem through tactile language. Here I applied my experiments with gestic sculpture, but have also given it a kinetic dimension with the help of a trick camera. In the film *Pit, Pendulum and Hope* I worked with pathology of touch, with torture (?). In *Conspirators of Pleasure* I utilized my experimentation with New Eroticism. In *Dimensions of Dialogue*, in the story *Passionate Dialogue*, once again I work with gestures imprinted in plasticine.

2. **When making *Conspirators of Pleasure*, which is very directly based on your tactile experiments, did you in any way brief your crew to make them more sensitized to touch? Were the actors in any way involved in tactile experiments prior to the filming? Did you experiment on yourself?**

Since *Conspirators of Pleasure* was basically about an application of experimentation with tactile props which was concluded (New Eroticism), I did not perform any new experiments with the actors. I only made the results and conclusions of this experimentation known to them. It’s important to note that in *Conspirators* New Eroticism is used together with arias from Italian romantic opera, a dialogue which introduces an ironic dimension.

3. **While I understand that you are not so directly involved with tactile experiments any more, would you say that your work carries traces of their effect on your most recent work, say in *Lunacies*, or *How to Survive Life*?**

I am still involved in tactile creativity, although perhaps not with such an intensity as I was in the 1970s and 1980s. In this regard I still mainly create tactile and gestic poems. I have already mentioned the films in which I utilized experiences from my tactile experiments, but even in the latest films, where the tactile experience isn’t notably visible, it is present in a latent form. I am convinced that these films would look very different were it not for the previous tactile experiences.

4. **What is your view on the apparent contradiction between film as an audio-visual medium, and your desire to capture the material presence of objects in your work? Do you see it as a frustration, challenge? How do you counteract that tendency?**

It is true to say that the film viewer does not experience tactile sensations directly on his or her body, as is the case in communication with a tactile object or a gestic poem. However I rely on the conjunction of "touch-vision" senses, learned from the practical tasks of everyday life and also on the effects of reflexive psychosis, which to a certain extent governs even the psychology of us, normal people. Basically, I believe that sight is capable, to a greater or smaller extent depending on individuals, to transfer tactile sensations in a mediated way. Of course a certain sense of frustration will probably always remain.

5. **What is your view of the digital medium? Do you feel there is any relevance in regard to celluloid acetate being more tangible, or is this irrelevant?**

Here lies the central point of my reservations about computer animation. Virtual reality has no tactile dimension. It is an „untouched reality“. It is therefore not charged by strenuous human emotions. It is a stillborn child.

Jan Švankmajer
Prague, November 2011

Appendix II

Marinetti's scale of tactile values

First scale, flat, with four different categories of different touches.

First category: certain, abstract, cold touch.

Sandpaper,
Silver-coated paper.

Second category: colourless, persuasive, reasoning touch.

Smooth silk,
Silk crepe.

Third category: exciting, lukewarm, nostalgic.

Velvet,
Wool from the Pyrenees,
Plain wool,
Silk-wool crepe.

Fourth category: almost irritating, warm, wilful.

Grainy silk,
Plaited silk,
Spongy material.

Second scale, volumes

Fifth category: soft, warm, human.

Suede,
Skin of horse or dog,
Human hair and skin,
Marabou.

Sixth category: warm, sensual, spirited, affectionate.

This category has two branches:

Rough iron
Soft brush,
Sponge,
Wire bristles,
Plush,
Human or peach down,
Bird down.

From Marinetti's *Manifesto of Tactilism*, F.T. Marinetti, Milan, 11 January 1921.

Appendix III
Tactile workshop 2009 script
Tereza Stehlíková

Morning

Experiencing

(relationship between tactile experiencing and visual imagery, focusing attention on the tactile)

Participants put on blindfolds on + gloves

The Magic Ritual of Tactile Initiation
 (Jan Švankmajer)

The novice is isolated in a dark room
 He has to leave his hands submerged in a black ointment
 Meanwhile bandages from finely chopped stinging nettles and goose fat
 are alternatively applied to his back.
 The sole of his left foot is touching the surface of hot water
 The sole of his right foot the surface of cold water
 After three days the feet swap
 A hairdryer blows a stream of lukewarm air into his face
 If a man, the penis is inserted into a scroll made of rolled up sandpaper
 and then bandaged
 Kneecaps are gently tapped with a golden hammer
 The left arm is injected three times a day with a fine dose of mescaline
 After a week of such preparation the novice is introduced to the workshop
 of the great Tattooist, who proceeds to tattoo his enlarged thumb
 print upon his back
 while he talks to him in this fashion:
 Make that which is cool, warm, soft, hard!
 Flowing becomes compact!
 Rough becomes creamy!
 Injuring becomes caressing!
 And vice versa
 Without sight noticing and being able to warn touch in time
 Keep breaking the utilitarian habits continually with disorientation,
 mystification, panic!
 Do not forget our whole body is one erogenous zone!
 Do not straighten up crumpled bedsheets!
 In winter kick off your covers
 In August nights crawl under a duvet!
 Do not hold masturbation in contempt!
 Do not get the soles of your shoes mended!
 Do not urinate before sleeping!
 Be squeamish about everything but touch everything!
 Love insects!
 Tire yourself out!
 Because only Touch that is free of its utilitarian connections,
 constantly coerced into experience and self realisation will, at a
 given moment, cross the identification barrier of its existence, and
 without noticing, will start to speak the language of a poet.
 * **Material exploration (15minutes)**
Experiencing various forms of textures and consistencies

Difference between passive and active/dynamic touch.

The role of imagination, associations and emotions in tactile perception.

Touch is a very complex sense, which contains not just one but many scales of values

(ie, temperature, texture, consistency, weight, proprioception etc.

This exercise is designed to heighten your tactile perception by taking the attention away from sight and directing it towards tactile impressions.

There are two aspects to it:

Firstly to observe various different properties of materials and objects

Secondly to explore links and associations between tactile perceptions and imagination.

I think of touching materials as a conversation, the difference between active and passive touch seems to me the same as the difference between speaking and listening.

First you need to listen to learn what the objects have to say. Consider what feelings the impressions evoke in you. Pay close attention to any memories or associations that come to you, however bizarre or unrelated they may feel. You can express your ideas aloud.

(going around with feathers, brushes, water, stroking, scratching, tickling....

Practical

Objects to feel and compare

Think about:

The different weights

Notice how your muscles tense up, according to the weight of an object, how your joints move as you explore an object.

(pass skulls, heavy stones etc)

Take gloves off

The different temperatures

The relative smoothness or roughness

The relative hardness or softness

The relative toughness or fragility

The relative wetness or dryness

The relative thickness or thinness

Solid or loose?

Painful or pleasant?

Velvety, prickly, creamy, sticky?

Liquid, jelly, lumps?

Is it organic, did it come to existence by growing?

Or is it man-made, pressed in a form, assembled from smaller parts?

Think of your hand and the way it explores objects and materials.

Notice how the objects modify your hand, try and imagine the impression the textures make in your skin, the dents, the pressure, the friction between your finger and the material.

All that gives you information about the object, material.

Observe the way your hand tests materials by squashing them, pinching them, and how the material responds.

What do they tell you by their shape and texture?

What do these textures/materials evoke in you?

What associations (Do they remind you of something?)

What memories (have you got any memory connected to any particular feel?)

What emotions these textures bring out (are they pleasant or unpleasant, or both?)

Or you may simply want to experience the materials without using the "head".

Also – stroking velvet (viz Wagner)

*** Tactile exploration/narrative
exploring associations
10min (lychee)**

Feel the object first.

Imagine what it could be?

Picture it as some sort of creature.

Think of its properties and consider what sort of environment it would be suited for?

Does it live under water, in river, in the sea, or in the ground?

What could it be called?

What does this creature look like? Does it have eyes? Mouth? Tail? Any feet? Fins?

Wings? etc?

Do you perceive it in any specific colour?

What sound does it make?

Press it and consider how the spikes impress into your skin.

Squeeze it more, until it almost hurts. Hurts you or it?

What is the consistency? Is it tough, vulnerable or both maybe?

What do you think it feeds on?

What do you think it dreams about?

In order to find out more about its secrets, you must be cruel.

Find a way to crack its shell, dig a nail in...

How does it feel?

Begin to peel slowly, paying close attention to the sound, texture etc.

What is under the shell? How does it feel especially in comparison to the shell?

Consider the flesh, the temperature?

Consider your own feelings?

Do you feel disgusted, threatened, squeamish, curious etc?

What if there is something very surprising underneath the flesh, does this possibility disturb you or excite you or both?

Do you have a visual image of the colour of the flesh, its texture?

And the colour of the cool liquid oozing from it?

Is there anything this reminds you of?

Squeeze the flesh.

Dig your nail in.

Do you feel pleasure or disgust?

Find the centre.

What does the centre feel like?

Compare it to the flesh?

What could this centre be? A heart? A stomach?

What do you picture in its stomach?

Where else could this take you?

BREAK – answer questionnaire

*** Tactile perception translated into visual image:**

(30min)

Feeling a small object and translating it into a drawing. What becomes prominent? What is important for tactile sense may be different to what is important to visual perception.

*** Tactile impressions communicated and then visualised:**

(30min + 10min to draw)

play music/effects to evoke certain feelings

Plasticine conversation (in pairs) – after that draw the result without looking at it first. Compare the two drawings by each pair.

When we feel a piece of iron, we say: this is iron; we satisfy ourselves with a word and nothing more. Between iron and hand a conflict of preconscious force-thought-sentiment takes place. Perhaps there is more thought in the fingertips and the iron than in the brain that prides itself on observing the phenomenon. - F.T. Marinetti, 'Tactilism'

A conversation between hands and material

You are your hands, and the plasticine becomes the equivalent of language, used to communicate. Therefore pay attention to what you receive, what shape. You must remain open and respond. But it is not an intellectual exercise, but it is more in the style of Marinetti, and exercise on a pre-conscious level.

Every object is a kind of accumulator of emotions that people store into it by their touch. Other people who touch the same object can read these emotions with their hands.

Every time we touch an object, we take add something to it, and we receive something back.

New layers are being constantly added and taken away.

In this way object or material we touch never remains the same.
 What begins as a block of dead plasticine will come to life.
 It will be a form of dialogue between you and the person opposite.

First quite a quick exchange
 Press it, and swap it.

Later it slows down
 You can start to react to the other person's imprints, and interventions, by
 your interventions.

Later you can start adding small details and textures.

You can join the two sculptures together, and work on them together.

After a while we give them another piece, different colour.

* Draw the object from memory before looking at it! Compare different results.

Afternoon

1st Defining a shared palette of tactile values, by linking tactile impression to
 emotional meanings or concepts or memories) (Refer to Marinetti).
 (ie. a tactile object can become a sort of symbol of memory, or a concept)

2nd Applying the palette to creation of a tactile story, portrait, poem, map. (1hour)
Reinterpreting it (30 min). Discussion. (30 min)

A Brief

Tactile journey/story

(Tereza Stehlíková)

Tactile story told and interpreted

Work in pairs

Bring in Poe's tactile stories for those who may feel stuck (also bring in books JS)

Part A (individual)

1. Consider a story, a journey, a dream, a memory - how would you say it
 though touch? Chose the most evocative one. It can be anything you like,
 but you need to be clear in yourself about what you are trying to
 communicate.
2. Identify the key elements in the story, and consider them in terms of
 touch.
3. Create your own personal tactile palette directly inspired by the "story"
 you are going to tell. You can go outside to find materials specific to your
 story.
 Consider how you can creatively translate emotions to textures, by being
 imaginative, rather than literal.

4. Assemble your tactile journey/story. Think about sequence (whether you want your story to be followed in a certain way) or whether you want others to explore of their own accord.

Part B (in pairs)

Take your partner and “tell” each other the story you constructed through touch. Make sure the “experiencer” is blindfolded, so that the only input is touch. As an experiencer, in order to remember the story, you can use various narrative techniques to link the impressions together, and create your own version of it. Make sure you don’t see the work.

.

Part C (individual)

Translate your experience into a different medium (ie not the tactile). You can write a story, make a visual representation, use frottage, make a map or anything else that inspires you.

Conclusion

Compare the results and discuss.

Appendix IV

Tactile Workshop - Responses to feeling materials + peeling a lychee¹⁶¹

10th February 2009

Subject A

The fictional story we begun to put together about the fruit was I feel the most alien and interesting experience. The idea of seeing something totally different because of the lack of sight is something that we very seldom do. Also the contrast between some of the pieces like sandpaper and pasta.

*

Subject B

The tactile experiences were so different. I felt my sensitivity heightened and I felt childhood memories return of playing with different textures, the hedgehog, conjuring up images, others just felt beautiful and very therapeutic. The combination of mixing them together was interesting, the coldness of cucumber, the scourer unravelling it, hardness, softness. Softness of flour, water, changing texture, rubbing.

I visualised a prickly dark fish but inside were opaque beautiful colours. He was fed by streams of light from the sea entering a small telescopic hole. The hard outside protected him from his most sensitive of creatures, making a bridge I entered the centre. I was surprised how tough he was to open. Splattered.

*

Subject C

It was quite a strange process and a bit scary too if you are not sure what you are touching. But I was most surprised by how sensitive my hands were, I don't know if because of the gloves.

Especially when some kind of duster or brush/fabric was swept across my hands. They would tingle for a few minutes after. But mostly I was desperate to wash my hands! I guess I didn't really like things that would leave a trace of liquid on my hands, I preferred the smooth and dry things.

*

Subject D

It is interesting to discover object without seeing them. But as soon as you discover what the object is, you lose what you realised before, that the object had texture, temperature etc. The fact of realising what you have in your hands immediately brings in your mind colours and seen textures.

*

Subject F

Anxious

Amazing heightened sense

Cold

Wet

Sharp

Recognised materials but some took time

¹⁶¹ Transcribed directly, leaving all grammatical imprecisions.

Flour – comfort/soft

Spaghetti – wasn't sure if it was worms! Dropped quite soon after I was handed it.

Didn't recognise scouring pad.

I could not disassociate the lychee from being a fruit – so I could not visualise an animal. But I did think if it was an animal I don't think I would hold it.

*

Subject G

Recognising materials was distracting to fully enjoying and feeling the qualities of the different materials, the element of surprise and contrast of temperature and dryness.

The rough textures of organic object was more interesting. Visualising something made it easier to concentrate on the qualities as a starting point. The smell also became very important and sound especially the snapping of the green bean was very satisfying.

*

Subject H

rolling animal egg

scared

secure through shell

red/light orange life

A squeezezy slimy made the most fun

Waffle – sticky to hands, take of like part of skin peeling off

Elastic band – like fine flower art, colourful, much more rough in real life

Opening tea bag left peeling little corny surface

Sound of cracker was great

White soft with spaghetti felt appealing, softening

Powder felt liquid at first

Colours completely different in mind.

*

Subject I

I like the combination of tribal drums and exotic fruits. It makes me feel I'm in a jungle, touching my little reptile friend.

The rice biscuits led me instantly to vanilla ice cream. Don't know why?

I felt taste as some kind of third hand.

*

Subject J

My first instinct was to guess what the object was. I also wanted to smell...what stuck out most was the teabag, it came after the powdery stuff and the fact that powder was contained within this skin was somehow pleasurable. I got the smell of washing up liquid and this really heightened the sensation.

I was able to guess what each object was and this somehow reduced any possible anxiety. The groove in the horse chestnut also offered a real exploration.

With the final fruit I couldn't imagine any colour. The creature belonged to underwater...as soon as the eye was mentioned it became an eye. The moment that the skin cracked was violent. It somehow died and this became its opposite. I imagined the inner colour was a dark red/blue like oxidised flesh. At the start when I was squeezing it I was imagining a lola ball. My sister had one when we were kids. (includes small drawing of a lola ball)

with lola balls you stand on it and bounce up and down. The ball was yellow on my sister's one. The disk that you stand on was blue.

*

Subject K

Was very interesting experience as it reminded me the perceptual feeling I've forgotten for long time. The first object, a cucumber was sensational. It took a while to identify until I smelt it. I tried to squash it. Tried it and enjoyed the texture and elasticity of it.

Scourer (metal wool) was another interesting to touch. Although I knew what it was it was interesting to not see. Not see the aggressive look of metal. Suddenly I lost the fear of touching the metal (harmful material)

The last piece, a fruit was nice to experience it.

My story is: he stays under the soil for a long time, 4 – 5 years without shell. He is very soft, white creature and sleeps all the time.

When he wakes up from very long sleep, he goes to climb a tree and stay steady for about 12 hours till the brown shell weaves itself. He eats only juice from tree (do you call it amber?) to find female to mate for 2 weeks and die.

*

Subject L

intensification textures

real contrasts – sharer (needles of the 'dog' – quite painful)

- Texturality (softness / cream +spaghetti = unexpected feel after a while – got playful; could almost travel in the different asperity of the surface, as if travelling with/through touch
- Scale – lentils, quantity seemed emphasised
- Glass seed seemed really important = real entity
- Discovering shapes
- Figuring out geometry, length of the element
- Smell of some elements was emphasised, giving clues of how they could visually look like, eg: white, beige, brown; cucumber greener, watery, lighter

Second exercise

The shape became a planet that nobody would like because of its painful asperity but inside was very weak and fragile. Nobody would realise that.

Energy planet auto-generated by its inside seed. A seed which wasn't a grain but a tooth. Tooth of a creature to be born from this planet.

Appendix V

RCA MPhil Animation: Dans Le Noir Tactile Experiment.

Exploring the connection between the deprivation of visual perception and the heightening of the remaining senses (with particular regards to the tactile), and its potential application to an audio-visual artistic practice.

Place: Dans Le Noir, 30-31 Clerkenwell Green, London

Date: 5th December 2008

Time: 9.00pm – 12pm

Informed participants: Deborah Levy, Tereza Stehlíková

Abstract

Hypothesis

Removing the input of visual perception leads to a heightening of other senses as these try to compensate for the loss. Rather than being the result of physiological changes, this is the result of focused attention.

“Scientific experiments have demonstrated that blind people do not hear better than others, they merely learn to pay more attention to the auditory cues that sighted people can afford to ignore. Similar tests dealing with the sense of touch have yielded comparable results.”

- from *The Unseen Minority*, by Frances A. Koestler

The aim of this study is to investigate the role which attention plays in the heightening of the remaining senses, when sight is taken away. Subjects with no visual impairment are tested in a controlled environment with no source of light, thus simulating the experience of being blind.

The study will further explore how this heightening of perception is manifested. The proposition is not only that other senses become heightened through focused attention, but also that the role of imagination is also heightened. This heightening of the senses through attention as well as imagination can become a useful tool for an artist and can help to enrich the creative palette of her expression.

The controlled environment chosen for this project is a restaurant, Dans Le Noir, where the participants have their dinner served in complete darkness by blind waiters. The session lasts a maximum of two hours.

The questions I propose to ask:

1. How does a (temporary) deprivation of sight affect our
 - tactile perception and its use
 - awareness of space in such a situation (what happens to scale and distance)
 - perception of sound (and does this in turn affect our conversation)
 - perception of taste (does food become more pleasurable or more threatening because it cannot be assessed by sight)
 - attention
 - visual imagination
 - memory of the event?
2. Is there a connection between these and can non-visual impressions be visualised, particularly with regard to touch?

3. Theoretically, and with a particular focus on audio-visual media, could such an experience be utilised for the purpose of enriching the artistic expression of an artist?

The participants in the experiment are Deborah Levy and Tereza Stehlíková. The approach to the experiment is a creative and imaginative one and its focus is on recording the qualitative nature of the experience rather than on quantitative data.

What I predict is a heightened need for tactile interaction in relation to touching our surroundings, the food on the plate etc. The need to use touch will further increase the consciousness of the tactile sense. Imagination will work harder to compensate for its visual deficiency. This may lead to interesting and unforeseen results. Attention will become more focused. In direct correlation to heightened attention, memory of the event should also become heightened.

Methodology

Design

The design is set by the dining procedure of the restaurant Dans Le Noir.

It is a restaurant which has a maximum capacity of 60 diners, and there are two evening sittings, at 7.15pm and 9.15pm. All guests for each sitting must enter the restaurant at the same time. The participants must leave all their belongings, including mobile phones, in a locker outside the dining area. The controlled environment is the main dining area, which is completely darkened, so that there is not the smallest source of light. The diners are served by blind waiters who are familiar with the space. The light is turned on only in the case of emergency (in a gradual manner so that it doesn't startle participants).

Because this experiment deals with qualitative experience, comparison based on dependent and independent variables is not the method I will use. Instead, a subjective imaginative experience is the main focus of my investigation. The main points I am focusing on are:

Change in immediate perceptions / change in emotions / perception of space / tactile perception /
other perceptions; and the role of imagination / attention / memory and movement

Subjects

Subject A – Tereza Stehlíková

Subject B – Deborah Levy

Apparatus & Materials

White Menu - surprise

Blue Menu - fish

Table + two chairs

Wine

Water

Cutlery

Procedure

Upon arrival the subjects are asked to leave all their belongings in a locker provided. After that they proceed to the upstairs bar, sitting down while they wait to be called. A waitress comes to take their order. The subjects had a choice of four menus.

White Menu – surprise / Green Menu – vegetarian / Blue Menu – fish / Red Menu - meat

Subject A chose the Blue menu. Subject B chose the White menu. At 9.15 the subjects are called along with the others to come downstairs. They are asked to form a neat row, one behind the other, holding shoulders. A blind guide/waiter joins the group at the front.

The subjects are led through a corridor, which resembles a photographic dark room illuminated by a low level red light. The subjects pass through a velvet curtain and enter a dark space of, to them, unknown size and appearance. The subjects are ushered to their table and sit down, assisted by their guide.

After 15 minutes the starter arrives. After 30 minutes the plates are collected. After a further 15 minutes the main course arrives. The subjects leave 20 minutes later. They are led out by their guide in the same manner they entered, holding each other's shoulders.

The subjects are then shown the meal they had in a photographed menu. The subjects sit down and discuss their experience.

Results

The following responses were found to the questions proposed.

In the absence of vision the sense of touch became an essential tool of perception. The tactile sense was used to measure the amount of liquid in a glass when wine or water were poured, and it was utilised to feel food on a plate before it was brought to the mouth (cutlery was dispensed with). It became an important method of communication, of attracting attention and of locating one's body (and also that of others) within the space. It helped to locate objects in space and identify special relationships between them. For these reasons the tactile sense became heightened, or perhaps it is more precise to say it became more focused because the subjects were not able to rely on vision. This led to a more acute and richer tactile perception reported by the subjects.

The awareness of space was created by body experience, such as the number of steps taken to arrive at the table. A certain sense of direction was preserved. Spatial dimensions were assessed through sound and how it travelled through space. Scale and distance took on a different meaning, certain objects on the table felt close together while other seemed impossibly far, and the differences in size (of glasses etc) seemed more dramatic than when perceived by sight. Tactile perception, deprived of its dialogue with sight, focused more precisely on material properties: texture, temperature, consistency etc thus literally making detail grow in prominence.

The sound in the dining area, contrary to expectation, was very loud. The other subjects in the restaurant spoke very loudly, forcing the subjects also to speak quite loudly in order to hear each other. Voices appeared disembodied for there were no bodies to attach the voices to. The line of a conversation became a sort of lifeline, because in complete darkness it was the only thread that bound one person to another (when touch was not being employed).

The food's taste appeared heightened, as did its smell. However, this heightening had a double effect: it made certain food very appetising, while other food became

threatening and confusing. The smells in the dining room felt potent and their interaction made Subject B feel slightly nauseous.

Attention became more focused due to the fact that vision was disabled. A struggle to clarify perception led to a heightened attention. The subjects became more aware of attention dividing, so it could flow in two opposing directions – inward to observe the internal movement of thoughts (which now felt strongly disembodied), and outward, towards confirming the reality of one's surrounding through touch - feeling the wall, chair, table and the food on the plate (a literal grip on reality). Sound played an important role in this focusing of attention, because, as a sense, it felt closer in nature to the missing vision than touch with its primacy and directness (one could participate in a flow of a conversation without breaking any social taboos). The need to lean closer during a conversation assisted in focusing kinaesthetic awareness of one's own body and brought extra awareness of the proximity of one's dining companion.

The visual imagination became heightened. Touch produced strong visual images and specific colour associations, which were very vivid, although not necessarily right. Imagination acted to fill in missing details, seeking to keep the world as close to normal / complete as possible. It kept the subjects calmer by generating visual imagery of the space, thus holding the sense of panic at bay. Visual imagination also produced images through associations and daydreams, triggered by the conversation or internal thoughts.

Memories of the actual experiment, although non-visual, are now located within a 3D space, and in fact have a visual aspect, which is similar in quality to a certain dream image: i.e. it is very particular but lacks detail. Rather it appears to be built from emotional content, which is not perceived by the senses. It feels whole but lacks general detail. There is no direct colour in the memory. The memory relies heavily on movement, and moves in the same explorative way as attention did during the experience.

There is an interplay between attention, imagination and memory. Attention helps to deepen the perceptual experience, while imagination helps to fill in gaps in perception. Memory relies for its recall both on attention as well as imagination.

Discussion

It was concluded that changes in perception occur when sensory deprivation (of sight) is introduced. This is due to the need to concentrate on the remaining senses, employing the power of attention, which in turn leads to the heightening of tactile, audio, olfactory and gustatory impressions. While the visual sense is eliminated, it does not cease, but is in fact replaced by a vivid visual imagination, which helps to fill in missing information.

Because the main focus of the study is the examination of the interplay of the tactile sense with the audio-visual senses, the discussion will primarily concentrate on this, using the identified key concepts of attention, imagination, memory and movement as the framework.

It has been found that the key to increased sensitivity of perception lay in the focusing of attention, which had to compensate for the missing senses. Therefore it can be suggested that the heightening of perception caused by sensory deprivation may not necessarily be a physiological heightening, but a heightening of conscious perception (versus unconscious input). This is interesting from an artistic point of view, for it

lends itself to direct exploration and utilisation in order to communicate to audiences more precisely and with greater depth.

For practical reasons, other senses had to be relied on (which normally are not). So, not only did attention become more focused but the need was also felt by the participants to perform extra activities (such as touching the food with one's hands and smelling it in order to identify it), which led to a more playful exploration of the surroundings, which normally does not happen. The heightening of sound was due both to the actual focusing of attention as well as the general raised level of conversation in the room, due to a lack of visual communication between dining companions. The heightened awareness of smell and taste resulted in both greater appreciation of new tastes and smells, but also fear and disgust.

Imagination acted as a unifier, allowing an experience of the surrounding world to be perceived as a whole, or as close to a whole as possible. When employed in this way, imagination acted as a perfect tool towards bridging fissures in the experience of reality, filling in visual details such as colour, arrangement of space etc. When less controlled, imagination caused fear and paranoia, which manifested itself in the fear of eating unknown food on the plate, the fear of the solid darkness itself etc. In such a situation imagination, rather than substituting for reality, began to bring associations, memories and visual imagery much closer to daydreams and fantasy.

Memory, examined two weeks after the event, appeared on first consideration to be non-visual. The strongest memory seemed a proprioceptive memory, i.e. the position of one's body during a conversation, as well as tactile (the feel of textures in hands and mouth). The statement on the absence of visuals is slightly misleading though, for, after a more thorough investigation, the awareness of something like a visual memory was detected. However, this memory resembled a certain type of dream image, which is recognised emotionally but lacks precise detail. The details of visual clarity can be identified as the moments when attention was at its most acute – touching the padded wall or exploring a particular piece of food.

The importance of movement was even more apparent in the absence of visual imagery. Movement is directly connected to attention – it is necessary as a way of progressing through a space which lacks visual markers. Therefore the movement of a conversation became important, as did the movement of thought, imagination and one's own body. In the first instance of entering the dark space, movement also calmed and protected against the rising panic which was triggered by the stillness (this stillness symbolised, and even embodied, by the surrounding 'solid' darkness).

The experience of *Dans Le Noir* now exists as a heightened memory, where details which would normally be forgotten are deeply imprinted in the mind. Its representation in the memory now exists as a dreamlike image, which contains vivid details, some of which are visualised through imagination, while other areas remain in darkness and are defined purely by non-visual perceptual memories. Despite the obvious lack of visual memory of the event, the richness of the experience is clearly apparent and it holds a strong potential for utilisation (and enrichment) in the creative expression of an artist.

Tereza Stehlíková, 10.1.2009

Appendix VI

Dialogue in the Dark An exhibition in the dark Hamburg 21st March, 2009

Report:

We arrived in the exhibition space at 12.20.

We left our coats and bags in a cloakroom.

At 12.30 a sighted man called our group, number 11, and asked us to gather by the entrance, in a semi-darkened corner, to help us get used to the dark.

There were 8 of us in a group.

Only myself and G were English-speaking.

All the instructions were first given out in German and only then English, in a more abbreviated form.

The instructor gave each of us a cane, its length determined by our height. We were told how to use it, holding it from the top, moving it left to right, right to left in short sweeping movements, always touching the ground.

The guide further informed us that if we need anything, we must speak up and ask our guide, and if we feel uncomfortable we can ask, at any point of the exhibition, to leave. He assured us there are many doors all around the spaces, to ensure a quick exit if necessary.

Once we were informed about the basic facts, we were invited into the dark entrance, and met our blind guide. By this point we were enveloped by complete darkness and only heard the voice of our guide, who introduced himself as Tobias, or Toby. Toby asked us to step towards him in the dark.

*

As the first of the group, I walked slowly towards him, guided by his voice on the distance and proximity to him. At one point I got so close I could smell his breath. Toby asked us to wait until the rest of the group gathered nearby. This was the moment I felt most uncomfortable, aware of a mild panic rising, but it never surfaced and I managed to stay relatively calm. The fact I couldn't understand German made matters worse, because I felt doubly trapped, by darkness and by language.

Toby explained to us that once we entered the room we needed to turn sharply to the right, as there is a water fountain on the left, into which we could fall. As he spoke, in the distance I could hear birds singing.

I stepped in and the air changed. It was cooler and there was a slight breeze. I relaxed straight away. I could hear the sound of water on the left, and the birds singing. Toby splashed some water in my face. It felt nice. I walked a tiny grassy slope. The earth under my feet felt soft. Soon, I felt gravel under my feet and heard it crunch, the guide told me it was a path. I was unsure where to go, and unclear about space and its borders. I couldn't identify where the middle of the room was, and ended up getting stuck in some branches by the wall. The branches felt artificial, but in fact later the guide said they were real plants. There was a wooden bridge, which we had to walk

across, and a small bench which I felt with my hand, but didn't want to sit on. I also felt a plastic bin, which I could identify quite easily.

After what seemed like a very short time we gathered around the guide and waited to enter another room.

*

As we entered our guide asked us to guess what objects we could feel and where we thought we were. The strongest impression was the smell of spices, so that immediately one imagined a warehouse or a ship transporting spices and teas. I tried touching objects in the dark while also holding my cane and trying not to lose touch with G. I felt a barrel suspended in space, and some boxes covered with fabric. Otherwise the room seemed relatively empty.

The main problem was navigating other members of our group, trying not to bump into them.

*

The following room was a market. We could hear voices of people and the smell in the room changed. Retrospectively I have a very specific image of this space, and a staircase plays a major part in this image, although objectively I know there was no staircase and it all happened on one level. The only explanation for this imaginary staircase is that it was created in my mind as an anticipation, born from a single small step which we had to take in order to enter the market place.

The market consisted of small baskets on the left hand side, by some wooden fence, and few fruits and vegetables in the baskets. The wooden fence was very smooth and all sharp edges were smoothed down. The first vegetable I could identify was cabbage, then also celery and other less obvious things, which I couldn't even tell by their smell. At one point my finger touched something sludgy, like a squashed banana, but I wasn't quite sure what it was.

*

After the market we entered another room. This room was empty and all I could feel in the space was a sort of banister. I walked around this banister, in order to find Toby, whom we all followed by his voice. Because I couldn't cut across, and the banister was taking me to the right, I was worried about getting lost in the darkness. The banister felt impossibly long, and I must have walked impossibly slowly to get around it.

*

Toby prepared us for the next stage, which was to cross a road. This stage was and still is now, in my memory, one of the most confusing in the whole journey. I had a no clear idea of the space. It was very noisy, with sound of cars passing by. Toby told us that when he wants to cross the road in Hamburg, he must try and identify when the green light comes on, often without any help of sound. He lets at least one cycle of traffic lights go through, to make sure he doesn't make a mistake in his assessment.

I stumbled somehow across the streets, stepping up a kerb, unsure about directions.

*

Before entering the next room Toby told us to stay by the sides, as that was where all the action was. I followed the wall on my right hand side, touching the walls, quickly realising this was the interior of a ship. I felt lifebuoys, and nets, and some metallic objects, like bolts or handles on windows, which felt very satisfying to hold and touch. Toby told us not to open any doors or windows, otherwise lots of dirty water would rush in. I felt a small window on the wall, and assessed its shape by touch. It wasn't difficult. The next window was all wet, as if steamed up. I tried stretching my arms, touching things above, but there was nothing.

*

Toby led us to a bridge and asked us to cross it. At the end of it, he asked each of us to stand and wait for him. When he came to get me, he led me to a different space, and asked me to step over something and then sit down and slide myself along as far as I could. I kept sliding and sliding and going around corners, until I felt myself close to one of the girls on our tour. I realised we were on a boat – the solid ground was in fact gently rocking. For a moment I felt a bit panicky, imagine feeling nauseous without being able to fix my gaze on something stable, but I soon calmed down. When we were all in the boat, Toby said he would take us across to the other side. He asked us to not to touch anything outside and not to use our cane to touch anything outside. He switched the engine on and we begun to move. The wind picked up and blew in our faces, and occasionally we got sprayed with water. This was a very exhilarating experience, and was just as exhilarating as being on a real boat on a sea, being able to look around. Although we quickly realised the boat must have not moved from one place, for a moment I entertained the idea of actually moving through the dark caverns of an artesian river.

*

We stepped out and Toby led each of us into another room. When he grabbed me by the hand he led me very quickly (in comparison to my slow crawling and groping in the dark). Toby's pace felt like running, when it was probably just an ordinary walking speed. He asked me to stand by the wall, and went to get others.

When we were all gathered he asked us to lie down, with our heads to the wall. He told us to relax for 10 minutes, while listening to some music. As I put my head down on the surface which was a sort of fabric, I could smell an unpleasant smell rising. I wasn't sure whether it was part of the experience, but was sure I did not like it. The smell was heavy and intrusive. I felt myself panic, worried it might make me choke. The darkness and its weight enhanced this feeling of choking, not being able to breathe. The sound played was a mixture of some African chanting as well as other more tactile effects, like water dripping in caves etc.

After what seemed like a very brief time Toby came to collect us. He led us to the last stage of our journey, a bar. One by one we glided along the bar table, to find our place. We were asked to purchase a drink; I didn't bring any money. So we only asked for glass of tap water. The waitresses on the other side of the bar table quickly served us. She passed the glass to me and I quickly found it. Toby took us to sit down. We lowered ourselves down, and slid along the long bench until we were far enough to allow the others to come and sit down. G knocked my glass of water, which I still held in my hands, and it spilt in my lap.

At the table we had an opportunity to ask questions about the experience as well as Toby himself. G asked whether we would be able to see Toby, so that we could assess how differently we may have imagined him. Toby said he would not come out into the light with us, because he will never see us either.

He told us he has been blind since birth and therefore has no concept of colours, images. When he dreams he dreams in sounds and tactile impressions. He said that as a child he would often get frustrated when his family or friends wanted to describe colour to him. For him colour doesn't exist. This triggered in me the thought of temperature, and how best describe the values normally assessed by one sense, in values comprehensible to another one. In terms of colours it seems most logical to speak of temperature.

I asked Toby of what is favourite pursuit was, thinking of feeling the wind in my face when on boat. Toby replied listening to reggae. Toby's girlfriend came over, and I had a clear sense of her standing behind his back as he was sitting down, touching his shoulders. The image was so strong I feel I saw it, although it may not be true at all.

Toby also told us that his sense of hearing is very good and he uses it to assess where other people are within a given space.

Towards the end, I couldn't wait to be out in light. I experienced the darkness as a physical weight pressing on me, and wondered how differently the blind perceive it. I realised that for them, this release of stepping back into the light will never come. They live in a strange, introspective space, which can become terrifying as well as surprising and is always very immediate. In comparison to sight it is a very fragmented space, either solid, or empty, there are few in between, few gradations, no smooth transitions. It is a very tiring space.

*

Reflections

What is the world of the blind like?

It is a world of surprise.

Objects are either completely present or they are not present at all, they are constantly disappearing in a void. Things and objects jump out at you. There are no gradual transitions.

It is very hard to orientate oneself in space. One tries to construct internal maps but sometimes these collapse because they are wrong. Because it is hard to assess things and their relation at a glance – the world must be painfully and laboriously constructed from isolated details. The journey in the dark is a journey through the unknown, connected by points of tactile clarity.

The only unifying experience is sound, which has the ability to reassure one with its continuity. In a way sound acts as light would, illuminating the space. In this way, sound is much closer to sight.

Touch is different. Because of its reliance on intimacy and proximity (with the exception of wind and similar things such as temperature) it mostly deals with a world which is static. Or rather, it likes the world to be static, because that is its only reassurance.

Solid objects have the role of signposts. If they change, because somebody moves them, one becomes disorientated because the constructed inner map becomes defunct. The map can only be verified by touch, but because touch is so slow in comparison to sight, there is no assurance that in the time it takes to check, all will be different again.

If one tries to describe colour to somebody who has been blind since birth they must do it through tactile impressions or through sound or smell. But if one tries to describe the experience of being blind in visual terms one must show it as if it were a hand touching the image. Such shots should always be close-ups (with the exception of imagined, dreamed sequences) and this should move along the creases and corners of objects, across its textures and corners of objects, across its textures in the most tactile way.

Appendix VII

Conspirators of Pleasure selected feedback

Subject A

I've been through a night of dreams since I saw it, and I watched the short piece *Food* afterwards, but here are some responses to your questions, off the top.

1. The food preparation, perhaps since it's something I do so often.
2. Many scenes made me uncomfortable, mostly when I feared violation of a body, or a body was violated.
3. Pleasure came when realizing the humour involved, that what was happening wasn't going to hurt somebody.
4. Of course, too many to recount--preparing food, watching the news, making something with clay and papier mâché, the landscape the first character went to with abandoned structures...going into the closet suggested the Narnia tales.
5. I'd have to say the most striking was my experience afterwards, when every touch became amplified. Though I could identify with the post-woman's rolling of bread; when I was little, I rubbed my fingers over creases in fabric.
6. Visual close-ups of haptic events, giving them significance and suggesting haptic intimacy; the obsessive touch of the characters themselves; lack of words; the loud sounds; the rich film medium (I assume it was not shot in video).
7. Yes, most of the time, and occasionally I wondered if the sound had been manufactured for the effect rather than being naturalistically produced.

The sound bit is something I've considered for a long time--amplifying the sound of people touching my sculpture--but haven't acted upon. At a conference a neuroscientist amplified the sounds of touching sandpaper and other things, and the difference in haptic feeling was striking.

Afterward watching it I sensed a personal significance in the things I chose to do haptically--realizing they gave me pleasure of some sort. Behaviour driven by haptic desire.

I'll have to watch it again with your questions in mind. Thanks!

Subject B

1. Which scene/scenes were the most evocative for you in terms of touch and why?
The scenes with the guy who builds all these strange objects out of rubber, fur, bits of metal...
I think it's because I "know" how these materials feel like. When I see them on screen the memories of those feelings are retrieved from my brain. Additionally it's the mixture of the materials that stimulates something. You automatically start imaging how it would feel like if you had something rubbery and furry touching your skin simultaneously. Contrasting feelings make your brain work. I think the powerful soundtrack adds to all those sensorial feelings that are triggered.
2. Was there any scene that made you feel uncomfortable and can you describe why?
Not particularly. Maybe we are not so used to seeing naked elderly people (without makeup) on screen. I didn't like watching his feet for instance.
3. Was there any scene that made you feel pleasure and can you describe why?
Not really. I had a lot of pleasure watching the film though.
But I think it's not "that" kind of pleasure. What touches me more than the actual

sensual side is the humour and the drama that's in the film

4. Did any of the scenes evoke in you memories or associations and, if yes, can you describe them?

Not sure. Maybe my answers to question 1 cover that partially?

5. Were there instances in the film which produced direct tactile sensations or responses and, if yes, can you describe them?

See question 1

6. Are you able to identify any of the methods or strategies that Švankmajer uses to embody the tactile and generate tactile responses in his film? Please mention them if you can.

Question 1 again?

7. Were you ever aware of the role of sound in helping to produce tactile impressions and, if yes, how was it achieved and when?

The sound effects are not entirely realistic, if I remember well. They are exaggerated. On the one hand this amplifies what you see on screen but it also adds a tactile sensation in its own right. For instance when the one guy glues the magazine snippets onto the clay chicken.

8. Is there any other observation regarding the tactile you would like to add?

I used this book for my dissertation. I can't recall though if he talks about "touch" in particular. But maybe...

"The reality of illusion: an ecological approach to cognitive film theory" by Joseph D. Anderson (they have it in the library)

Appendix VIII

Jan Švankmajer and his treatment of objects in his film *A Game with Stones*, 1965.

Tereza Stehlíková

I chose this film because it is less known and although very tactile it doesn't carry any obvious sexual connotations, at least not at first glance.

Yet very quickly one realises, in this film stones are more than just stones. They become charged with an organic energy, which lends them extra quality, not normally associated with stones. From stones they are transformed to eggs. This resemblance to eggs is not just accidental but intentional.

Imbued with extra layer of meaning, stones become symbols of fertility, gaining a strong sexual charge, becoming laden with procreative energy. In the case of the film, this effect seems to be further amplified by stones pushing through a narrow birth canal of a pipe, struggling to force their way out.

The stones drop, forced by their weight, into a pot below the open tap. Their weight is organic, it is the weight of fertility, of pregnancy, rather than dead matter, and is therefore charged with sexual energy. In fact this sequence reminded me of *The Story of the Eye* by Georges Bataille.

Weight of objects is very important in Švankmajer's work, and it constantly reminds us of the heaviness of our own bodies, their presence and materiality. The stones assemble and dance together - becoming primitive figures whose sexual organs hang heavily, forced by gravity towards the earth. They fall and crack like eggs, they rub each other, move together rhythmically, penetrate each other, mesh with each other and finally merge to create new configurations.

The sexualisation of objects in Švankmajer's films is not, I believe, a primary goal of his work, but a result of the objects' transformation from non-living to living matter. By going through this metamorphosis, objects stop being passive but become active, and therefore capable of reproduction. Reproduction is not only latently present in their form, but it is often the narrative drive of the whole film. Švankmajer's sexualisation of objects comes from a creative and procreative energy, which the objects are bursting with, and which literally animates them.

Appendix IX

Wallis Eats

tactile script by Tereza Steblíková

A Meal of 5 Acts (script)

Wallis arrives into the shot. Takes her coat off and sits down (lowers herself into the shot).

Tucks in her serviette.

Looks around.

1st starter

normal

food: leaf of salad, tomato

utensils: normal

napkin - normal

Intermission

Wallis takes off her serviette and adjusts her make-up: powders her face, applies lipstick, brushes her hair

Tucks her serviette back.

2nd starter

manicure

food: boiled egg, ketchup, mussels/or prawns

utensils: tweezers, scissors, green file

napkin - towel

Intermission

Wallis takes off her serviette and adjusts her make-up: powders her face, applies lipstick, brushes her hair

Tucks her serviette back.

3rd starter

sewing (juxtaposition of materials)

food: olives and peas, peppers (to be threaded and eaten off the necklace), + passion fruit (scoop up with a thimble)

utensils: needle, thread, pins, thimble

napkin - cloth

Intermission

Wallis takes off her serviette and adjusts her make-up: powders her face, applies lipstick, brushes her hair

Tucks her serviette back.

Main

Secretarial work (playfulness, the uncanny)

food: potatoes, crumpet + basil sauce, stone

poussin

utensils: paper, scissors, hole puncher (makes her own knife and fork from cardboard)

napkin – writing paper

Intermission

Wallis takes off her serviette but doesn't adjust anything.
Instead she:

Dessert

Free (hands)

Wallis draws her own plate on the table

food: jelly, half a kiwi fruit, physalis, lychee

utensils: hands

napkin – no

End: takes off her serviette

Body: breathing, yawning, stretching, feet wriggling

Appendix X

Sensory Strata

Landscape and Embodied Memory

Text from an online catalogue

Pages of Hackney gallery, November, 2010

Summary:

Images that are tracing the outlines of landscapes that are both external and interior, while attempting to capture the patterns as well as shifts in scale between far and close. The visual language is informed by my research into the tactile sense, sense which primarily relies on the exploration of contrasts. In order to get closer to the authentic multi-sensory experience of standing inside a landscape, I combine in my images whole host of impressions, so that while looking at the pattern of distant trees or hills one can also be reminded of the feel of bark or grass in one's hands or under one's bare feet.

The Seamless Landscape

The crucial elements of my exploration of landscape is the disappearance of the division between the inner and the outer, so that the external landscape can be read as a map of the psyche, and the interior world of the psyche understood in the context of the exterior landscape.

Submergence of the Senses

By submerging myself in the landscape, not just through sight, but also hearing, touch and smell, another knowledge is gathered by the body, and this knowledge of the body can inform even purely visual work. When I create an image of distant hills, I want to be able to capture not only the distance and the space, which is the domain of sight, but also want involve other senses. I want the viewer to be able to imagine the feel of grass under her bare feet, the feel of bark touched a moment ago, I want her to sense the changing temperature of wind on the skin, the quickening of the heartbeat as she climbs to the top of the distant horizon.

Layering of Impressions

My images are created of layers. These layers are in a dialogue with each other in the same way our senses are. A forest is both the sight of trees, rising towards the sky like columns in a cathedral, and the texture of moss and pine needles in my fingers. It is the smell of pitch and the sound of birds in trees and branches cracking under one's feet. No impression can be isolated, no impression is taken in, in its "purity". What we perceive is informed by all the senses, by what happened just before, by what is about to happen next.

Scale

Exploration of the changing perception of scale is crucial in my work. I am interested in the juxtaposition between the wider landscape and the equally fascinating micro-cosmos revealed in a tuft of moss. There are parallels between the patterns of the very large and the very small.

Near and Far

The juxtaposition between near and far is like the juxtaposition between touch and sight: Where the latter is based on distance and a single point of view, the former on proximity and dispersed point of view.

Texture and Memory

The surface of a landscape, the various imprints of time, the marks on trees, rocks and forest paths, made by human or animal touch or by weathering can all be read as memory maps, or as pages inscribed with stories...

Spaces of Vagueness

At the moment of perfect balance between the transformation of one image into the next, a door into another space opens up. This space is new, not part of an existing story. It is vague in the sense that it is not yet fixed in its form, but instead is fictional, waiting to be inhabited and transformed by the imagination.

Matter

In one of his writings Jung says that matter is spirit as seen from without.

By studying and observing the external makings of an object, landscape, even a distant planet one is somehow getting closer to that which is deemed interior and therefore intangible. Or rather, the material becomes the gateway to the spiritual, the outer a reflection of the inner.

Appendix XI

Tactile memories from childhood

The house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits. After twenty years, in spite of all the other anonymous stairways, we would recapture the reflexes of the “first stairway,” we would not stumble on that rather high step. The house’s entire being would open up, faithfully to our own being. We would push the door that creaks with the same gesture, we would find our way in the dark to the distant attic. The feel of the tiniest latch has remained in our hands. (Bachelard, 1994 pp.14/15)

- Swimming in a pond in Mirosovice, and all the green plants sticking to me.
- Leeches stuck to my legs when pushing a boat through shallow waters.
- Sticking my finger into a bread roll.
- Peeling walnuts, cracking their shells and peeling the soft wet skin, my hands becoming brown.
- Stroking the hair of an ear of corn in a field
- My hands dirty from digging earth, earth under fingernails, on Kampa island.
- A ladybird crawling over my hand, the smell of earth and ladybird, standing on a path on Petrin.
- Looking for violets on the Petrin hillside.
- The feel of straw mat as it imprints its pattern into my skin of my knees in my little room.
- Stroking Misa, my grandma’s poodle, and her curly, felt-like hair, which left my palm feeling slightly greasy.
- Felt that my granddad worked with, making little monkeys and dandelions from.
- Crumbling walls of Prague houses, poking them with my finger, making them crumble more.
- It was winter and so cold my feet hurt, we got home and put our feet on the radiator and it was bliss.
- The sticky milk coming out of dandelions, when we picked them on Petrin hill.
- Touching the cross on Charles Bridge, to make a wish.
- Stroking the large toe of an Atlas in Nerudova Street, to make a wish.
- When I was less than 3, my brother bit me in my little finger in the back of a car. I remember showing the scab to my grandma later.
- When I was about 6, I had a little top, my favourite top of all times, it was very tactile, I thought of it as mouse’s coat, but it was more velvety and cool to touch, and lovely to stroke.
- The ritual of greening our knees: me and my brother would pick some linden leaves before a car journey from our summer cottage, and we would spend the way back rubbing the leaves into our legs, to make them green.
- Getting my bottom spanked by my dad, in the kitchen. It was the only time and it was only symbolic, but felt humiliating.
- Walking on my dad’s back – as a way of massaging him.
- Zofka, my favourite soft toy, a giraffe stuffed with grey material, which started to come out.
- As two-year-old child, kneeling in the bottom of my brother’s pram, the metal grid of the basket digging into my knees, feeling the combined pleasure of being taken on a ride, mixed with the pain of the discomfort.
- My grandma had a skin of a boar, spread on her living room floor, under her rocking chair. The fur of the boar was rough and spiky, and cool to touch.

Appendix XII

To Touch the House of Memory

I come into the fields and spacious palaces of my memory, where are treasures of countless images of things of every manner. St. Augustine, *Confessions*

It is so difficult to find the beginning. Or better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning. And not to try to go further back.
Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*

NOTES: Think about the establishing shot (viz Hiroshima Mon Amour), as it will set the atmosphere as well as the mode of the whole viewing! What is the crucial thing?! Maybe we see her running...hear her breathing. Very impressionistically shot. Also, good to have her mixed in with the shots of the textures of the walls etc. So that she is Prague and vice versa.

* Tactile camera methods (viz another document)

Part I - exterior

- We see a button rolling down a staircase.
- A figure walking, woman catching glimpses of herself in mirrors and glass (a shopping centre) She, Karla, tries to touch her own reflection, her fingers slipping across the shiny glass. (wearing a hood/or a hat, maybe sunglasses...)



Fig. 25 *Meshes of the Afternoon*, 1943, dir. by Maya Deren

- We now see her standing on a dark railway bridge, looking at a river, as if contemplating suicide. The water looks tempting to her. Her life feels empty and the cold water seems more enticing than anything here. She is leaning over the railing, and we are aware of a bracelet she is wearing on her right arm. A shopping bag by her feet.
- Just as she is about to pull herself over, she hears something dropping.

- She sees a button rolling across the paving stones. She pick is up and holds it between her fingers. It is red.
- She looks into the weir, holding the button tightly in her hand. Then, she throws it down into the stream, with the vigour she may have used to throw herself. Through this act she commits herself to a sequence of strange events.
- She turns away from the river, and disappears in a narrow street. Her way of walking has changed, she is more upright now.
- She is wandering through cobbled streets, past the crumbling walls...the city is transformed from the shiny surfaces of the initial shot, to tactile crumbling walls and cracked pavements. Karla takes pleasure running her hand across the walls, making the plaster crumble further.
- At one point she notices a little trickle of water on the pavement. She stops then continues her walk. The water widens.
- Karla follows the trickle and comes to a door of a building. The water seems to be seeping from there.
- She hesitates for a while, then opens the door slightly, putting her head inside. Next we see Karla taking her coat off, jumper, and finally her shoes. She dives inside the building.
- *After she swam through the current of time, Karla suddenly finds herself in the realm of childhood.*

Part II – Interior

- Young Karla is standing at the bottom of a spiral staircase. She is soaked, dripping with water. In her hand she is clasping a button, too large for her hand. We recognize her by the bracelet on her right hand.
- She hears steps, and looks up the spiral.
- She decides to ascend the stairs. On the first landing she meets an old lady cleaning the stairs. There is bucket next to her, and in it flowers. The lady turns around and offers Karla the three iris flowers. Karla opens her hand and in return offers her red button to the lady. The lady nods and impresses the flowers into Karla's hands.
- Karla is skipping up the steps, holding the irises. She notices a white ribbon on the steps, and some rose petals scattered. (maybe falling down like snow?)
- Suddenly a door opens. A young bride appears. She is wearing a long dress and has white flowers in her hair. Her hands are dressed in white gloves. She beckons to Karla, who runs towards her, they hug each other and Karla presents the bride with the flowers. The bride is happy. She takes a red ribbon off her neck with a key on it off and gives it to Karla, before kissing her goodbye. Karla keeps walking up.
- Karla is at the top of the staircase now, still clasping the key. She hears a door banging. She walks towards the banister, grasps its edge and peeks over. She hears steps. Finally, a young woman in a winter coat appears, carrying a baby

wrapped in white swaddling. She sings a Czech lullaby. “Hou hou kravy jdou, nesou mlíko pod vodou.” She sees Karla and waves to her. Karla stretches out her arm, and waves as if she was stroking the air... The baby starts to cry. Behind Karla, the door is opening with a squeak. A hand taps on her shoulder, she turns but there is nobody there.

- *With the opening of the door Karla sinks even deeper in time, and her perception is transformed into that of a very young child, making sense of things.*

Part III

This section is to be shot in an impressionistic manner, emulating the idea of the living presence mixed with memory and associations, selective (subjective) attention, and play with scale (how things appear different to a child). It is filmed from an extremely subjective point of view.

Employs most directly the tactile approaches listed on the *Tactile Methods List*:



Fig. 26 *Daisies*, 1966, dir. by Vera Chytilova

- **view partially obscured**
- **Extreme close-ups.**
- **Contrasts**

We see glimpses of young Karla (just details like her hair, a hand...), (maybe of the bride, mother, old lady?)

Red filter at times, yellow filter...for certain atmospheric moments

- At last we see an adult's hand grasping the handle of a door. The door is locked. She takes the chain of her neck and unlocks the room. She(camera) enters the room.
- On the bed, she (camera) sees her Karla, as if asleep. (reference to *Ophelia* painting?)
- She(camera) walks closer to the bed and observes attentively her other self, sleeping. The only differences are the red (instead of white) buttons on the sleeping one's shirt.

- With her hand (wearing the green bracelet) the waking Karla **touches her own sleeping hand**. The gesture mirrors the early scenes in the shopping centre, only this time she actually touches the real self. At the same time she remembers the song she heard on the staircase. She begins to sing: Hou hou kravy jdou...
- The sound of the weir outside grows stronger.
- The sleeping Karla opens her eyes and sees herself. (**The camera view swaps now so that it is the subjective view of the 'just woken up one'.**)
- She sees her mirror image.
- The shot of the two Karlas looking at each other.
- A close up of the lying down Karla's shirt. One of the buttons starts to wriggle, then drops off.
- Now we see the button rolling down the stairs.



Fig. 27 *Ophelia*, 1851-52, John Everett Millais (Tate, London)

END.

Notes to myself:

Each scene needs to be ushered by a tactile prompt!

Threshold/ Prab/Praba

button, on clothes, but also a button to press to activate something.

It is also a symbol of connecting.

In Czech it is a symbol of luck.

Koumponophobia – fear of buttons. People scared of buttons are more terrified and disgusted with plastic ones rather than metal ones, and those with four holes rather than just two. To find a button connect you the person who lost it (Gleaners and I).

Czech Lullaby:

Hou, hou, krávy dou,
nesou mlíko pod vodou,
nesou mlíka půl židlíka.

Kde je naše jalová?
U božího kostela.
Kostel se boří, stodola hoří.
Skoč, panenka, do vody,
máš tam zlaté koraly.

Nač bych já tam skákala,
sukýnky si máchala,
kde bych si je sušila?

U pastýře v koutku,
na zeleném proutku.

Hou, hou, the cows are on their way,
Bringing milk under water,
Bringing milk, half a jar.

Where is our barren one?
By the God's church.
The church is crumbling down,
the barn is burning
Jump, little maiden, into the water,
Your golden beads are there.

Why should I be jumping there,
Soaking my skirts,
Where would I be drying them?

At the shepherd's corner,
On a green rod.

Appendix XIII

Just Under the Surface – responses to video installation, from interviews with Claire Petitmengin, May 2011

Subject A

- “Room was made of this substance which was sort of flowing and running, or is like an animal, or is like...scattering around the room”
- “I thought the room was behaving in this way, the room was doing this, had this motion and that’s why I wanted to be in it, I wanted to sort of feel this motion around me, in order to be in it and be part of it, but my being part of it ruined it.”

Subject B

On walking in

- “like...being washed inside” as well as a sensation of lightness.

Subject D

- Elevated, feeling of being open, receptive, of something lifting slightly, physically it’s a feeling of expansion, coming outwards from my sternum, my breastbone, and an opening up of my shoulders
- particularly coming in through the curtains, I can see that that was already dissolving, as I moved, before I came in through the curtains, but that is..I was stepping into a different place in myself, um, which is open and receptive and curious, and, and...and not colored by...by that mood I was in previously.
- Anais’s spores: curiosity and my playfulness
- Scale: sensation of being “quite small”. “but there’s a feeling of...of being an explorer.....um.....very long pause.....yes, of, of magnification, of things magnified around me....um.....perhaps I ought to say that I do quite a lot of work where I take people on journeys into their bodies in their imagination, where and, and the way I do that is to suggest that they imagine their body’s very small so you’re walking between cells, so it’s very much that....”
- Feeling of awesomeness
- Boundaries: Um.....yes, it’s much more a whole body feeling because it’s my body in relation to the space around me....so it’s not, not nearly as specifically located as the other one. And I’m just trying to feel whether it’s actually limited to my body.....pause...yes, it doesn’t feel as though it has very fast, very firm boundaries, so I think it’s, it’s something to do with merging with the space around?.....Not completely.....
- J: Um.....but a softening of boundaries rather than a complete dissolving of boundaries.
- Space is “a lot larger than it is in reality.”
- Idea of first time, how it gets overlaid by fresh experience.

Subject E

- Breathing in, a wash, lightness, sense of immersion

Subject F

- ground and the walls so they merged, I felt quite transported – life had entered the Crypt, possibility, openness,
- difference between memory of space and its actuality (much larger)

- “feeling of going upward”, feeling of wonder
- it’s like one’s own boundaries [*rubs sides of torso*], like one’s outer body boundaries, skin boundaries, are no longer so...relevant, so one can expand [*bands make shape*] into the space, the mind can expand into the space [*nodes*].
- A breath in, tide
- Light made tombstones feel less solid, permanent. Tearful.
- Vulnerability/ and openness

Subject G

- A sense of fear reported by an older gentleman, an architect by profession. For him to enter the space was like plunging into a depth of water. He wanted to be accompanied. He said he felt “threatened”. He wanted to be accompanied. He also expressed an interesting idea, which I find worth noting here: that a sense of abandonment and trust is needed, a loss of control perhaps, that women are better at doing. Was it a coincidence I asked myself than, that the five main collaborators were women?

Subject H

- “I thought I was going to fall over when first entered the Crypt”

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