

EVOKING INTIMACY:
TOUCH AND THE THOUGHTFUL BODY
IN SCULPTURAL CERAMICS

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ABSTRACT

This PhD by Project, 'Evoking Intimacy: Touch and the Thoughtful Body in Sculptural Ceramics', challenges the existing cultural hegemony of vision, argues that there are experiential benefits to more fully engaging the body's sense of touch within art, and proposes that humankind's long historical intimacy with fired clay objects makes ceramics an appropriate medium within which to investigate these assertions.

The key developments of this research are the establishment of a knowledge base of touch and perception, an understanding of the relationship between maker and created object, and an articulation of the experience of the embrace. These were investigated through neurophysiology (the biological mechanisms of touch), philosophy (Merleau-Ponty and Nishida), and feminist theory (Irigaray), and an experience and knowledge of *chanoyu* (Japanese tea ceremony). Concepts from anthropology, psychology, and sociology also influenced the development of the project.

Within the research a concatenated or linked methodology evolved that interwove theory and practice. Issues that arose from theory prompted questions that were addressed within practice, resulting in issues arising within practice being addressed theoretically. The methodology is iterative, in that each research question reflects and revisits the work that went before, and emergent, in that the results are not calculated or fully anticipated. This allowed for both systematic and serendipitous development.

Using techniques that incorporated my own bodily embrace, practical investigations led to the creation of sculptural objects in fired clay that aimed to more fully engage the body's sense of touch through a progressive experience of grounded sensuality: seeing → touching → grasping → lifting → holding → caressing → embracing. In the studio the physical experience of the hug and the embrace was captured in soft plaster. The resulting plaster casts were used to create textured, non-figurative ceramic works to be caressed and embraced. Viewers become touchers, moving away from sight alone and its required distance, to the intimacy of bodily contact.

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CHAPTER ONE

A SENSE OF TOUCH – AN INTRODUCTION

TOWARDS A BEGINNING

A gallery setting. A woman sits and lifts the sculptural ceramic object, placing it on her lap. She moves it until it settles comfortably across her thighs, then she begins to explore the surface with her hands, both the shape of the piece and its texture. She turns it over and lifting the piece holds it against her torso. Her arms cradle it.

Touch is the act of contact between two objects. Tactility is the quality of the touched surface. The body is the medium through which touch and tactility come together. The objectives of this PhD by Project were to bring these three understandings of touch together in the making of practical sculptural ceramic objects, to theorize pertinent aspects of touch, and to explore the bodily experience of the objects. The aim in the creation of the sculptural artworks was to more fully engage the body's sense of touch through physical interaction, resulting in an experience that I have referred to as 'grounded sensuality'. This moment of centredness is created by the consonance of heightened physical and emotional self-awareness, an engagement of what I have called 'the thoughtful body'. The intention of this research project was to create this moment of engagement with the artwork through evoking a physically sensual response of emotional safety, security, and comfort. The physical engagement has the potential to provide the viewer/toucher with a range of experiences from pleasureable to therapeutic. This is achieved through exploiting the sense of the familiar at the same time as enticing with new shapes and textures through both touch and sight. What is not intended is to shock or disturb the viewer/toucher

or to evoke the uncanny as an enticement. It is precipitated through a progressive bodily experience: seeing → touching → grasping → lifting → holding → caressing → embracing.

The outcomes of the project include a body of work consisting of textured objects in fired clay, six exhibitions, five published and/or delivered papers, one continuing collaborative study, and a written thesis.

The written thesis presents a narrative of the research project that describes the progression from a pre-specified, research-question orientation to a less predeterminate and more emergent approach. Having started by employing a traditional scientific method, the project moved away from this towards a more appropriate research model of concatenated theory and practice. This allowed for the amalgamation of knowledge and ideas from many fields, including physiology, anthropology, philosophy, cultural studies, feminist theory, Zen Buddhism, and concepts and experiences of *chanoyu*, Japanese tea ceremony.

The project started with questions about the medium of clay before moving on to a physiological approach to touch that centred mainly on the experience of touching with the hand. From this came understandings about touch as a bodily experience. From the hand to the body led from stroking and handling to holding and embracing.

Accepting an evolving methodology and methods, where the direction and motivation of the research emerged from within both the theoretical and practical threads of the work, meant accepting that there were no definitive answers and that the resolutions of the research remain malleable and open-ended. Therefore, this research presents one exploration, my personal journey, into the key issues of touch, tactility, and the experience of the body and the embrace, and the wider issues around touch within art.

Aims and Objectives

For the purposes of this PhD by Project 'aims' were defined as the goals for the research itself. 'Objectives' were defined as the wider ranging goals the research engendered or influenced.

AIMS

- To create a body of work in fired clay that invited the individual to more fully engage the body's sense of touch, offering an experience of grounded sensuality.
- To investigate the theoretical precepts that motivated the practical development of the project, including the exploration of what makes us want to engage with a ceramic artwork through touch and handling, and how and why the body responds as it does to the intimacy of this exchange.
- To develop an applied arts research methodology that gave structure and clarity to the relationship between practice and theory within the project around issues of touch and tactility.

OBJECTIVES

- To challenge the dominance of vision by creating a body of work that offered a physical, sensual experience for the viewer/toucher/engager.
- To guide people towards valuing touch more in their experience of the qualities of sculptural ceramics, and to contribute to a developing tactile appreciation within the visual arts.
- To contribute to the culture of applied arts research through the development of a methodology that fully integrated practice and theory.
- To encourage the extension of the existing gallery culture to include tactile engagement with ceramic sculptural objects.

The Thesis

The thesis for this PhD by Project is twofold: a body of work in fired clay within which is embedded the theoretical positions developed during the course of the research, and this written thesis documenting both the developments of the practical work and the theoretical explorations that were borne from that practical work. My aim was to maintain an equal balance between practice and theory throughout all aspects of the project.

THE PRACTICAL WORK

This written thesis documents twenty-five practical explorations, of which twenty-one detail the production of ceramic objects and four document exhibitions of these objects. Documentation can never replace experience, especially in considerations of touch, tactility, and engaging the body. At best it can only invoke imagined or remembered touch, a very different experience from direct bodily experience; ultimately, the work must be touched and handled, not reduced to language or visual representations. The documentation serves as a prompt for tactile memory and also to elucidate the interwoven relationship of the practical and theoretical work.

At the outset of the project an attempt was made to understand the quality of the touched surface. This work was about engaging the hand in exploration. This was followed by the production of small pieces made to be held in the hand and run across the body and textured based on the knowledge that we have different levels of touch sensitivities across our skin. A discussion with an anthropologist led to the production of larger pieces to fit the bodyⁱ. These pieces were again textured according to touch sensitivities across the body. In the final phase of making, pieces were created by casting 'hugs' in plaster, then using those casts in various ways to produce forms in fired clay.

ⁱ *Personal communication, Dr. Nigel Barley (British Museum), 2002.*

These pieces reflect the development of a concept of bodily experience, the embrace being found to be an appropriate way in which to generate a strong bodily sense of self through a blurring of the subject/object divide. This leads the toucher to a self-aware sensuality. The embrace is, above all, a centring action, one of comfort, security, and intimacy.

THE WRITTEN WORK

The structure of the written component of the PhD opens with this introduction, situating the research within a broad cultural context and explaining the background of the project. In Chapter Two the methods and methodologies used in the research are described and challenged. Chapter Three considers issues of physiology and how the body interacts with external objects. Methods and methodology are further evaluated and established within this chapter. Chapters Three, Four, and Five are separated into three distinct parts: a Conceptual Exploration, documentation of the Practical Explorations, and a discussion of the issues raised in that chapter, called the Reflections.

The content of Chapter Four concentrates on the experience of making, exploring my relationship to objects and materials. Chapter Five investigates the progressive experience that the viewer/toucher has with the finished artwork.

The Conceptual Explorations of Chapters Three, Four, and Five are not intended to be read as critical commentary or learned treatises on the subjects they consider, but rather as the articulation of my encounter with specific topics as they apply to the project, and vice versa. Each one details a search for a theoretical concept that resonates with the practical work of that stage of the project. The challenges that the concept engendered are also considered, as is my thinking surrounding both the studio work and the conceptual stance. As each area of theoretical research is different from any other, each chapter uses a different approach to the writing, the writing itself having become both practice and theory and as such, serving as a bridge between the two. As the

methodology moves from an empirical approach to a more emergent model, my changing position as researcher is reflected in the changing point of view, i.e., from the neutral and distanced voice to the personal 'I'.

Each Practical Exploration documents the studio investigation of an issue that arose either from an earlier Practical Exploration, such as the investigation of types of texture, or from a theoretical enquiry, as in making work to fit the body. They include my immediate responses to the artwork and critical analyses of the specific results.

It is within the Reflections that the theoretical and practical work are brought together and the move forward within the project is articulated. Wider critical analyses of the issues are applied within the Reflections, which serve as discussions and draw conclusions for each chapter. The project covered many different areas of contextualization and, except in Chapter Two where contextualization is considered as part of the Conceptual Exploration, it appears in the Reflections of the appropriate chapters. These include: Chapter Two, the contexts of art-based research; Chapter Three, ceramic artists; Chapter Four, artists who use their own bodies in the making of their work; and Chapter Five, artists who engage the sense of touch in the experience of their work. In some areas, such as installation art, many artists have used various approaches to engage with tactility. Because of the experiential emphasis of this research project, as far as possible, I have included works I have personally seen or encountered and which have been meaningful to me as an artist. I have also chosen to discuss only artists who have worked from the late twentieth century to the present day. In addition, I am a ceramist with a ceramics background, and this has greatly influenced the contextualization I have chosen to include.

Chapter Six draws together the various areas of exploration, discusses both the conceptual and practical research issues that have arisen from the project as a whole, draws conclusions, and suggests further research possibilities.

Finally, within the Appendices are the raw data from the Practical Explorations, a short essay that develops a pertinent concept in ceramics, and abstracts of papers that were written as a result of the research.

The work done on this project was broadly sequential and is represented here as such. However, although research can be represented as linear it often drifts in and out of focus in relation to the investigation being followed. I tried to remain open to these drifts, especially to those that crossed the thresholds of the practice/theory divide. After initial investigations, questions sometimes arose during subsequent explorations (either theoretical or practical). In most cases these further studies were incorporated retrospectively within the initial findings. This gives the narrative of the project coherence but does not reflect the jumps, bumps, and false starts that were inherent in the investigations.

Background

My position within this project is not solely as an artist, nor solely as a researcher, but as an artist-researcher, which, as we are in the early stage of the development of art-based research, remains an emergent position. Artist-research involves the creation of artwork based on and developed through defined and articulated theoretical concepts, and is usually situated within an academic context. Many artists have used theoretical precepts to underpin their artwork. Indeed, the role of artist-researcher has its roots in such art production. Artist-researchers, however, are simultaneously constrained and propelled by the necessity for the research to be academically rigorous, well-documented, well-analyzed, and articulated.

An artist-researcher acknowledges his or her position in relation to the research, for instance, that there can be no true objectivityⁱⁱ, and that the research must always be seen within the context of the culture which accommodates it

ⁱⁱ *This type of practice-based research has arisen within a postmodern world and reflects postmodernist values. See Conceptual Exploration, Chapter Two, p. 24– 25.*

and the circumstances of the individual researcher. As an artist-researcher I do not come to a project as a blank slate, but rather as an individual with a background and values that influence the outcomes of that project. My own position is as a ceramic practitioner, having spent ten years in the studio producing sculptural objects based mainly on the abstracted figure and more traditional vessel forms, which were all concerned with issues of touch and tactility.

I also trained in *chanoyu*, Japanese tea ceremony, in Kyoto and London. *Chanoyu* is a highly developed and complex art form involving all the senses, but ultimately centres on the preparation and drinking of thick green tea. The tea is served in a ceramic bowl, the tactile qualities of which are integral to its appreciation. The handling of the bowl creates an intimacy between host, bowl, and guest, inducing a self-aware calmness. This moment of drinking tea from what is often an irregular and sometimes rough-surfaced bowl has been the impetus for my work throughout my professional career and now through this research project. However, although the influence of *chanoyu* can be seen within the research, it was never my intention to reproduce the tea ceremony experience, but rather to incorporate experiential and theoretical elements from it within the artwork.

There are many reasons for choosing to investigate touch through the medium of ceramics. Ceramic objects have a long history of handling, from containers to lamps to ritual figures. However, in this research project it is the materiality of clay that is shared with this tradition, rather than ceramics' history of function. The physical properties of fired clay are particularly suitable for tactile exploration. It is hard, yet can feel responsive to our touch, partly because of its ability to react to thermal change. It can be rough or smooth or both. Its heaviness can be perceived as both comforting and threatening. It is a material that enticingly embraces contrast, and provides many opportunities for positive human tactile response. In addition, it never loses the echo of its making; it is a frozen moment that embodies the act of its creation, creating a

link between maker and viewer/toucher, and reinforcing a sense of the humanness of the material and the making.

Although the progression of this project took the artwork away from traditional ceramics and placed it on the blurred edge between fine art ceramics and sculpture, it took with it our long history of the production and appreciation of functional tactile ceramic ware. As both makers and users we have an innate and intimate familiarity and sensitivity to fired clay, and this provides us with a strong basis on which to create an aesthetic that more fully engages the body's sense of touch, even within an art world that has many taboos about touching.

Body awareness and concepts around the body feature strongly in this research. As a young woman I trained in dance in New York City. This training and the sense of body awareness gained from it have been consistent aesthetic influences throughout my life. Dance and *chanoyu* are body-oriented art forms, engaging the body through both inner self-awareness and as the object of another's gaze.

This is not a feminist treatise. However, my reading of feminist theorists such as Luce Irigaray and Elizabeth Grosz, together with my observations of gender differences among people interacting with my artwork, and my own experience as a woman, have informed this research. I never intended the artworks to be aimed at women alone and I found that even though most of the pieces were created against my own female body, both men and women have had rewarding experiences by engaging with them. However, studies show biological and gender/cultural differences between men's and women's experiences of touch [1], and this has been taken into account.

Another significant aspect of my background is cultural. For over twenty years I have experienced, contemplated, and sought to find a comfortable position for myself as an American living in Britain. There are significant cultural differences between the two countries and issues of touch, tactility, and the individual's tactile relationship both to others and the physical world, for

instance, in levels of intimacy, have always been in the forefront of my experience of those differences. However, this was neither a research project in sociology, nor an autobiography. My position as someone living away from her home country informed the study; it did not determine it.

These were the manifest personal influences carried through this research project, i.e., the 'touchstone[s] of [my] own experience' [2] that served both to initiate and motivate the research. Caroline Broadhead says:

The reinterpretation of past work is interesting; there are always different connections between old pieces in light of present work. It is reassuring and exciting to understand that there is a thread, a consistency... There's a realisation that the same ideas keep recurring but, like trying to make yourself understood, you're saying it over and over in a different way, trying to make it clear. [3]

As in reading old personal journals, you find that the issues that make you who you are recur, but with different stories and different answers. Touch, tactility, and the body are thematic threads of my experience. This PhD has given me the opportunity to increase the understanding of these issues through challenging pre-conceptions, and to move forward by providing new tactile experiences.

TOUCH IN OUR WORLD

Touch has come to be less valued than sight. Within Northern European-American Christian heritage, sensuality has often been associated with sin and, in addition, there has been a determined pre-occupation with intellectual achievement among our middle-class oligarchy.

The denigration of touch has a long history in the West and can be seen at least partly in the conceptual separation of body and soul/mind and the aggrandizement of the latter. As Anne Davenport states in reference to Aristotle's writings, 'The highest rank among terrestrial animals is occupied...by the rational animal, human being, in whom a new and final principle, the rational soul, is added to the sensory soul, making him the most 'perfect' terrestrial nature.' [4] She continues, 'While touch, to Aristotle, is the most *basic* sense, the sense without which no sensitivity and intelligence are possible, sight is heralded as the *supreme* sense, yielding the 'purest' pleasure, paradigmatic of the ultimate perfection of sensoriality.' [5]

Augustine of Hippo articulated these demarcations. '[T]he objects that we touch, taste, and smell are less like truth than the things we see and hear.' [6] In Genesis, man is given dominion over animalsⁱⁱⁱ [7], creating a conceptual separation that remains with us today. It is intellect and language that reinforces the metaphor that we are somehow better-than-animal. If light/sight (associated

ⁱⁱⁱ 'God said, 'Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth.' [Gen 1:28 from *The Old Testament of the Jerusalem Bible*. Alexander Jones, ed., New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966, p. 16.] And so God put man above the animals, and what set man apart from the animals was his ability to think, his intellect.

with rational knowledge) is good, then the natural correlation is that darkness (associated with the body and the senses of touch, taste, and smell) must represent that which is not good. Sight becomes associated with intellect and understanding, touch with 'mere' sensation. The linkage that conflates vision, spirit, and intellect has stayed with us throughout mainstream Western history, the Enlightenment with its emphasis on rationality and science continuing the onslaught against touch. 'The sense of touch, like the body in general, has been positioned in opposition to the intellect, and assumed to be merely the subject of mindless pleasures and pains.' [8]

Dr. Tiffany Field, a noted developmental psychologist and founder of the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami Medical School, goes further, saying that we now equate touch with wrong-doing. '...[I]t is interesting to note that a decade ago, touch was most often associated with sexuality, but today, in our litigious society, it is more associated with criminality in increasingly frequent court cases on sexual harassment and sexual abuse.'^{iv} [9]

It was in the 1960s that the privileging of intellect to the exclusion of sensation began to be challenged in a significant way. Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the threat of atomic annihilation made people begin to fear the reign of science and Rationalism, which was held responsible for the developments of the Eugenics Movement, the Final Solution, and the creation of weapons such as nerve gas. This challenge contributed significantly to the development of European and American philosophy. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's great treatise *The Phenomenology of Perception* was first published in 1945, but the English translation by Colin Smith was not published until 1962 [10]. It has become a significant work in that aspect of the art world that considers issues of perception and the body. Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenologist and early existentialist, put forward ideas of an embodied consciousness and the

^{iv} In addition, Field suggests that we have further complicated touch by conflating it with love, sex, and affection.

underlying supposition that all knowledge is experienced bodily. This profoundly challenged the Cartesian duality of mind/body, subject/object, and intellectualism/sensualism, and exemplified the move away from Rationalism.

Later in the twentieth century, French philosophers continued to address the issue of touch. Emmanuel Levinas^v, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari^{vi}, Jean-Luc Nancy^{vii}, Jacques Derrida^{viii}, and Luce Irigaray^{ix} all considered issues of touch in their writings. Concepts on touch from these contemporary theorists have fed directly into contemporary feminist criticism, to which Irigaray is an important contributor. The critical concept that we live in a 'phallogocentric' world (phallus=male, logos=rationality, ocular=sight) comes from within this feminist perspective.

Late twentieth century philosophy needs to be seen within the context of postmodernism. Paul Rodaway puts forward Scott Lash's^x views as clearly expressing the influence of postmodernism on our concepts of touch. 'Lash (1988) argues that (in the cultural realm) modernism is discursive and textual, whilst postmodernism is figural and sensory. The first is about meaning, the second is about experience. The humanistic perspective and, specifically, the phenomenological approach to perception (Merleau-Ponty 1962) asserts a unity of experience and meaning, that is sense(s) is (are) both sensation and meaning.'

[11]

^vSee Emmanuel Levinas. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, Richard A. Cohen (trans.) Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985.

^{vi} See Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi (trans.) London : Continuum Books, 1987/2004.

^{vii} See Jean-Luc Nancy. *The Birth to Presence*, B. Holmes et al (trans.) Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.

^{viii} See Jacques Derrida. *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, Christine Irizarry (trans.) Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

^{ix} See Luce Irigaray. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (trans.) London: Continuum, 1993.

^x Professor of Sociology and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths University.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TOUCH

Touch is our most direct, least intellectualized, sense. It is the grounding sense, the sense of tangibility that places us in the world. As the full proverb states, 'Seeing is believing, but feeling is the truth.'^{xi} Yet within our western culture a hegemony of vision erodes our tactile sensitivities. This hegemony, however, is now being challenged across many fields, including philosophy^{xii}, feminist criticism^{xiii}, psychology^{xiv}, anthropology^{xv}, and in the art world^{xvi}.

In 2000 Dr. Tiffany Field of the Touch Research Institute published a book simply entitled *Touch* [12]. She stated that within our western culture many of us are touch deprived, and she refers to this as 'touch hunger' [13]. A quick survey of popular culture illustrates how we are searching for new ways to incorporate touch in our lives. Product design, especially in the specialized field of gadgetry, provides many touch-engaging examples^{xvii}. There are massage chairs, belts, and pillows. Health spas provide access to saunas and Jacuzzis, and every high street chemist offers a range of scrubbing sponges, mitts, and loofah straps to stimulate the skin. These things can be seen as ways of increasing touch stimulation in our tactile hungry society. This commercialization of touch can be seen as further evidence that our culture is touch starved.

In the world of fine art in the twentieth century, partly as a backlash against movements such as Formalism (from Russian Formalism through to Abstract Expressionism), with its preoccupation with the visual aspects of colour, form, line, and composition [14], artists such as those working within the Arte Povera movement led the way to more fully engaging our senses through

^{xi} Attributed to Thomas Fuller, British clergyman and author (1608 – 1661).

^{xii} For example, see Derrida, Irigaray, Deleuze and Guattari, as above.

^{xiii} For example, see Irigaray as above.

^{xiv} For example, see Tiffany Field, *Touch*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001.

^{xv} For example, see David Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, September, 2003.

^{xvi} For example, Ernesto Neto's *Follicle Ovoid (Nicky)* (1998), and Cristina Iglesias' *Untitled (Vegetation Room X)* (2002).

^{xvii} Brookstone, a well-known supplier of expensive personal and household items, has no fewer than six electronically controlled massage chairs on offer as well as numerous other touch-oriented products. See http://www.brookstone.com/store/thumbnail.asp?wid=12&cid=1206&sid=120609&search_type=subcategory&prod_index=5.

their use of non-traditional materials, often mundane materials with which we interact daily [15]. This type of work began to challenge the taboos against touching within the museum or gallery, and curators and gallery owners have been grappling with practical as well as conceptual issues of touching artwork [16]. Recently galleries and museums have mounted exhibitions aimed at engaging touch. The Victoria and Albert Museum's exhibition entitled '*Touch Me: Design and Sensation*' [17] in June 2005 included work by international applied artists specifically set out to challenge the touch taboo. The Otter Gallery at the University of Chichester mounted an exhibition in March 2007 entitled TACTILE, which showed the work of about fifty applied and fine artists, all of whose work was touchable [18]. Blind Art is a charitable organization that aims to draw the visually impaired into the world of visual arts [19]. It has mounted two successful exhibitions (2005 and 2006), which were not about ghettoizing art for the blind but about inclusivity. Given the range of experiences available, it is not surprising that the exhibitions also drew large numbers of sighted visitors. Individual artists whose work engages the audience's sense of touch will be considered in each Reflection in later chapters of this thesis.

Touch and the body can be seen as an academic area of interest that crosses many boundaries. Susan Stewart, Professor in English at the University of Pennsylvania, wrote about touch in *Material Memories* [20], a book that has influenced many fine and applied artists. Stewart's challenging essay provided an important cultural history of touch and articulated touch issues such as the body/mind duality and the lower status of touch. CONSERT (The Concordia Sensoria Research Team) is a Concordia University academic unit investigating the anthropology of the senses across many areas of human life [21]. Alexandra Howson's book, *Embodying Gender*, is a useful investigation of how touch and the body can bring together areas such as sociology, philosophy, and feminist theory [22].

TOUCH AND VISION

A pertinent example of how damaging it can be to rely too heavily on vision, and how imagined touch does not fulfil our physical need for bodily contact, is expressed by Constance Classen in the forcefully-worded foreword of *The Book of Touch*.

We live in a society of the image, a markedly visual culture, in which, while there may be many representations of touch, there is often nothing actually there to feel. The attractions of advertising, television, or the Internet, are designed to be consumed by the eyes and the ears. The endless appeal to the sense of touch one finds in contemporary visual imagery, unaccompanied as it is by actual tactile gratification, may have helped make touch the hungriest sense of postmodernity. The inability to touch the subject matter of the images that surround us, even though these have a tremendous impact on our lives, produces a sense of alienation, the feeling of being out of touch with one's society, one's environment and one's cosmos – an isolated fragment in an indifferent world. [23]

She goes on to link a vision-dominated world to one also dominated by the intellect.^{xviii}

...academics are supposed to view their subject matter from an objective distance. Rather than grasping an issue, academics shed light on it. Rather than taking a stand, they have a point of view. The use of such visual metaphors for the pursuit of knowledge discourages an active involvement with the subject matter and promotes a science-based model of detached observation. [24]

Practice-based PhDs offer one way to explore topics that enter into realms beyond the visual and intellectual, and touch is an under-developed and potentially fruitful area of exploration within both applied and fine art.

^{xviii} This highlights a relevant problem in terms of the academic research of a PhD, and adds weight to the value of creating new and non-traditional research methods and methodologies.

Within this research project there was a positive tension between touch and vision. My intention was never to make work that disregarded vision. Through both theoretical and practical research I realized that our senses are interdependent and overlapping, and to negate the visual aspects of an artwork was to lessen its tactile potential. For this reason I decided, for example, not to show the artwork in a totally dark space. However, I feel it important to acknowledge my belief that as a culture and as individuals we do privilege sight over touch. Even in an art form such as ceramics, in which tactility is acknowledged, the feel of an object is perceived as secondary to its visual aspects, and the tactile experience of a finished piece is often reduced to mimicking that of the experience of the maker. ^{xix}

TOUCH AND THE EMBRACE

Touch is the first sense to appear in the developing foetus and the last sense to leave [25]. As soon as the foetus is large enough the embrace of the womb is one of the first touches it experiences. After birth, infants who are not touched and embraced suffer many disturbing and debilitating conditions, including stunted growth and aggressive behaviour^{xx} [26]. Studies done in the West have shown that adults as well as children need significant touch experiences in their lives [27] and that regular hugging can help people have healthier hearts, especially women [28].

How much touch we need, how we perceive touch, whether we find it pleasant or distasteful, and how we react to it, vary from person to person. It is influenced by factors such as our genetic make-up, experiences as foetus, baby,

^{xix} *In Reflection, Chapter Four, p. 110, I relate a conversation with Betty Blandino that supports this view.*

^{xx} *Harry Harlow's controversial experiments with rhesus monkeys in the 1950s and 1960s clearly demonstrated the fundamental need for touch among primates. The monkeys that Harlow took from their mothers were offered surrogate mothers, some made of wire and some of terrycloth. The babies clung to the terrycloth 'mother' whether or not it provided food. The babies went to the wire 'mothers' only for food. [See Harlow, Harry. "The Nature of Love", address to the 66th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Washington, D. C., 31 August 1958.]*

child, and adult, our gender, the attitudes and mores of our society, our personal circumstances, and our emotional and physical state at any one time.

Touch is an utterly intimate and individual experience.

Within this research project the embrace, the sharing of physical intimacy that uses the body to enfold, was explored as an appropriate experience of bodily engagement with the sculptural ceramic artworks. We can embrace and be embraced throughout our lives, from the time we are in the womb to our last breath, and the embrace is clearly seen as a positive and appropriate experience. The Free Hugs Movement video [29], which shows a man on the street and in shopping malls giving hugs, still circulates on the internet and as recently as March 2007 someone was seen in Cambridge giving free hugs. Cuddle Parties have recently been reported in the media [30]. Having originated in New York these hugging parties are now being enacted across the world, including London. A cross-over with health, well-being, and religious issues can be seen in the phenomenon that is Mata Amritanandamayi.^{xxi}

They came by the thousands, from the city and from all over the country, just looking for a hug. But Mata Amritanandamayi – known to her devotees as Amma – is no ordinary hugger. The 50-year-old woman from India, who wears a white sari and a diamond-studded nose ring, is nicknamed the Hugging Saint for the embraces that have earned her a worldwide following. By early yesterday morning, more than 2,000 people had packed the hall at the Manhattan Center on W. 34th St., eager for a moment in the arms of the spiritual guru... [31]

Extensive field research and the use of methods such as focus groups have given major advertisers an edge on knowing what the public wants. A notable recent campaign advertising Orange mobile telephones uses scenes of young people hugging. If an international company as large as Orange is using the hug as a marketing image, then they have clearly identified it to be of relevance to their young adult target audience.

^{xxi} *The laying-on of hands is a common religious activity, especially within some Christian sects. What distinguishes Amma from other spiritual healers is her specific use of the embrace.*

Age, however, does not seem to deter the need for the embrace. Rose Hacker, a 101-year-old newspaper columnist, recently wrote, 'Being hugged is the fulfilment of the dream. My parents never touched us – we had a peck on the cheek at most. When my father died, however, he held out his arms from the bed and cried 'Rosie darling.' That was the only time he ever hugged me, and I remember thinking: 'I've been wanting this all my life.' [32]

Issues raised within this Introduction are explored in the Conceptual and Practical Explorations of the following chapters, beginning with a narrative of the development of a methodology appropriate to the investigation of touch, the body, and fired clay.

CHAPTER TWO

FEELING ONE'S WAY – THE ENCOUNTER OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

CONCEPTUAL EXPLORATION

methods and methodology

a sense of place in art-based research

a narrative

TOWARDS METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The methodology underpinning this PhD evolved from within the research itself into an interlinking and interweaving of theory and practice where issues that arose from theory prompted questions that were addressed within practice. This resulted in issues arising within that practice being addressed theoretically. The resulting methodology is iterative, in that each research question reflects and revisits the work that went before and emergent, in that the results were not calculated or fully anticipated. This allowed for both systematic and serendipitous development.

The research model echoes and gives form and further understanding to an existing approach in studio practice where artists' practices are influenced by informal investigations into many areas outside their fields. However, in studio practice, especially within ceramics, the highest value and final judgement is often reserved for the end product, the art object itself. In contrast, the methodological model presented here details an approach that gives equal weight to theory and practice. It is research through art and art through research.

PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH IN CERAMICS

It is given that all research should be systematic, critical, and rigorous. In ceramics, being a materials-based art form, there is a long history of informal research through practical investigation, though much of this work is undocumented and uncontextualized. This history meant that when art-based research degrees were first introduced ceramics was in a strong position. Not surprisingly, the first research degrees were technical in nature, often materials or technique-based.ⁱ They employed an empirical approach that aimed to find the 'right' solution to a specific problem and often applied 'scientific methods' of investigation. This type of project still comprises much of ceramic researchⁱⁱ, and still appropriately uses empirical methodologies. When seeking the optimum glaze recipe and firing cycle that will produce the largest crystals within a crystalline glaze, the researcher needs to feel that there is, at the very least, an 'objective knowledge' about crystal formation. However, within the postmodern world of the past decades, 'objective knowledge' has been challenged on almost every level. We can see how strongly postmodernism might influence research if we consider Terry Eagleton's irreverent definition:

By 'postmodern', I mean roughly speaking, the contemporary movement of thought which rejects totalities, universal values, grand historical narratives, solid foundations to human existence and the possibility of objective knowledge. Postmodernism is sceptical of truth, unity and progress, opposes what it sees as elitism in culture, tends towards cultural relativism, and celebrates pluralism, discontinuity and heterogeneity. [33]

This postmodern outlook soon spawned non-empirical methodologies. These were first seen in areas such as social science and education, where

ⁱ For example, see J. Malins. 'The Monitoring and Control of Specialist Ceramic Kiln Atmospheres and Emissions', unpublished PhD thesis, The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, 1993.

ⁱⁱ For example, see S. Thampirak. 'Macro Crystalline Glaze Production in an Industrial Context', abstract from PhD (in preparation), Royal College of Art, London, from http://www.rca.ac.uk/pages/research/skarl_thampirak_1278.html. (Accessed 25 January 2007).

qualitative, rather than quantitative, evaluations and critical assessments were needed.

Research in fine art soon followed suit as theories of a universal aesthetic and objectivity collapsed. Artists embraced the uncertainties and open-endedness of a postmodern approach to research. In her paper '(Re)inventing Artists' Research: Constructing Living Forms of Theory', Robyn Stewart from the University of Southern Queensland took her starting point to be the researcher as practitioner, not as theorist. As a postmodernist she sees practice in the arts as socially constructed, implying that there is no absolute or unchanging aesthetic or understanding. She states that art practice 'can be impulsive, unpredictable, intuitive, not always logical, and is usually difficult to analyse, interpret and describe.' [34] As she says, art research must reflect these qualities. This means that research is no longer bound to objective criteria and pre-determined approaches. Ideally, each art-based research project should be as individual as each researcher, and should reflect the researcher's own personal knowledge base, experiences, skills, goals, and expectations. This may mean adhering strictly to scientific method or developing a less structured and more personal (though no less rigorous) exploration of a research topic.

In ceramics the abiding legacy of objective material investigations and technical knowledge development meant that an empirical methodological approach has continued to be the dominant research model. In Felicity Aylieff's MPhil project *The Elusive Body* (1995) [35], for example, we begin to see where the 'fit' of an empirical approach begins to chafe. Within her research she employed a rating system taken from scientific methodology, yet her basic research goals included 'to explore more fluid...forms' and 'to create exciting visual textures' [36], aims that are not quantifiable. The written thesis resulting from this approach is presented in objective and scientific terms which do not fully reflect the subjectivity of her enquiry. The fact that Aylieff undertook research into a topic that is so difficult to define (the development of a ceramic body that had unspecifiable visual and tactile qualities) marks an important step

towards later research in ceramics, and reflects Robyn Stewart's view that we are at 'a meridian era of evolution' [37], a cusp in the development of art-based research. In Natasha Mayo's PhD, which looks at rendering flesh in ceramics [38], she does not attempt to employ any kind of empirical rating system. She looks to philosophy, Maurice Merleau-Ponty in particular, for background theorization of her work.

Longstanding issues and concerns within ceramics have been carried into the development of this new kind of research, offering a firm foundation on which to build, and challenging us to move issues forward. Pamela Johnson in her provocative and insightful conference paper 'Can Theory Damage Your Practice?' talks about the influence of our craft legacy on research when she says:

Craft practitioners tend to produce concrete, three-dimensional objects. Craft is grounded in materials, processes, technique; a way of working and thinking which involves the whole person: body and mind. A bodily intelligence. Craft, also, cannot easily be detached from its past. It is not surprising, then, that the crafts remained a theory-free zone during the 1980s. [39]

Johnson's words highlight the importance of being aware of the inherent qualities of applied art as we move ahead in research.

TOWARDS THE EMBRACE: ENGAGING THE BODY

It is within this framework that my own research was situated. This PhD continued to develop this area of ceramic research, that which is non-empirical in its approach and employs emergent methodologies. The research amalgamated both source material and research techniques from fields including physiology, anthropology and other social sciences, philosophy,

cultural studies, feminist criticism, as well as the study of art forms from outside our western cultureⁱⁱⁱ.

For both the practical and theoretical threads of this project, 'research methods' were defined as the tools of research. The methods of practice included making, testing, exhibiting, observing, reflecting, analysing, and documenting. Theoretical methods were comprised of literature review in the form of exhibitions and exhibition catalogues, images, and texts, and focused literary research, interviews, discussion, note-taking, and analyzing 'data'. During the course of the research writing became a creative tool for both theory and practice. Within this project 'methodology' was defined as both the underlying structure of the research and the critical approach or understanding that drove the research forward.

The research methodology evolved to become both an intertwining structure and a support of practice and theory. The steps of the research can be represented on a practice to theory spectrum, each research investigation falling somewhere on that spectrum, the tension and dialogue between each motivating the other, yet keeping each area focussed.

Critical assessment was carried out throughout all stages of the research, as was contextual analysis. In the investigation of theoretical questions, theories were sought, examined in relationship to my work and discarded or adapted as appropriate to their possible integration within the study. Throughout the making process (Practical Explorations) a continuous evaluation and assessment of each piece occurred, covering tactile quality, visual quality, the body's reaction to encountering the work, as well as its form, colour, texture, scale, and weight. These findings were carried forward to later studies. Notes were taken throughout both the theoretical and practical threads of possible avenues and research questions. The transition from practical issues to theoretical issues and vice versa was sometimes smooth and seamless. At other times a new research question surfaced as an interjection that demanded attention.

ⁱⁱⁱ See *Bibliography*, pp. 312–333.

The Narrative of Practice and Theory

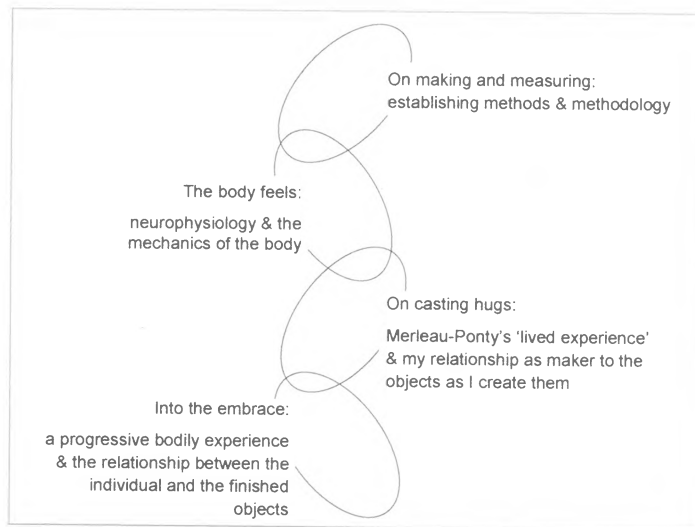


Figure 1. Diagram of Concatenated Methodology

ON MAKING AND MEASURING

To begin the project a broad research question was constructed. This was: In what ways can touch and tactility be developed and articulated as an aesthetic quality in ceramic objects? I started the research with practical investigation into the workability of clay with the aim of providing information that could be used in later practical projects and to help establish a testing procedure. A specific practical research question was asked: Which clay bodies have good workability or plasticity, indicating which will be appropriate for use in a variety of building techniques? I tested this by making small pinch pots, which I rated on a numeric scale^{iv}.

Following these tests I decided to try to establish a scale for the inherent tactile qualities of different fired clays. Two research questions were constructed for this second project: Which clays, when fired, exhibit suitable tactile qualities?

^{iv} See *Practical Exploration 1*, p. 36.

What firing temperatures give the best tactile results? I produced small identically textured tiles in multiple clays which I informally attempted to rate for tactile quality.^v When I found it difficult to make decisions about the individual tiles I asked other students to evaluate them. They too had difficulties deciding which clays and firing temperatures they preferred. On repeating my evaluations I rated the same tiles differently. Clearly there was a problem inherent in the project. After consideration I realized that although a large amount of information could be produced, that information was unreliable because tactility cannot be considered separately from form, scale, textured surfaces, or other surface treatments. Therefore, in effect, only one texture on one form (a small flat tile) was being tested. In addition, further reading led me to understand that our sense of touch is influenced by factors such as ambient temperature, other sensory perceptions accrued from the immediate environment, and our moods. Continuing these tests, I decided, would not bring significant benefit to the project.

These early tests raised relevant questions about the suitability of the methods of testing and the underlying methodology of the project, and I wondered if I was closing off possible fecund areas of investigation through my approach.

It seemed important to broaden the project by asking more fundamental questions such as: What is touch? How do we touch? These were addressed initially through theoretical research into the neurophysiology of touch, i.e., the body's biological response to touch.^{vi} I spent time in a medical school library and talked to neurologists and psychologists about touch, and came to understand the mechanics of the body's system of tactile perception and the differences in touch sensitivity across the body.

^v See *Practical Exploration 2*, pp. 37–38.

^{vi} See *Chapter Three, Conceptual Exploration*, pp. 40–47.

UNDERSTANDING GROUNDED THEORY

Understanding the differences in bodily sensitivities led to the practical research question: Can the spatial differentiation of the body's ability to perceive be exploited to increase the tactile experience of ceramic work? Previous studio test results prompted me to ask how this could be addressed. I had established several reference points that needed to be applied to subsequent studies. The first of these was that the tactility of an object comprises form as well as surface, that there is no 'neutral' form, and that tactility can only be considered within the register of whatever form the object takes. Secondly, I decided that my approach needed to be more open-ended, both in the making and the evaluation. With this in mind I searched for more appropriate research methods. A social scientist suggested I look at Grounded Theory, a methodology that does not rely on quantification. This fit in well with my judgement that in evaluating the objects produced, numeric rating scales such as the one I had used earlier were inappropriate.

Grounded Theory was developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss [40] and is used extensively in the social sciences. The thrust of this research strategy is that theories are generated from the data itself rather than hypothesized and then tested. Grounded Theory employs a set of specific techniques aimed at interpreting results or data that are produced mostly by questionnaire responses. These results are gathered and common threads sought. Theories can then be constructed through open analysis of the data itself. This research approach allows for incidental discoveries and open-ended investigations and acknowledges the researcher's position in relation to the research, yet it is both rigorous and systematic. If the objects I made in the practical studies served as the 'questionnaires' and recorded interactions with and reactions to those objects served as the raw data, I felt that by exploring multiple forms and textures within the works of any one study, common threads would appear regarding issues such as shape, weight, texture, clay

body, and scale. Although I did not employ the specific techniques of Grounded Theory, I did incorporate these basic principles into the project.

Having abandoned quantification at this point I acknowledged and accepted that there was no universal aesthetic to be discovered for touch, and that ultimately the success of the practical work would have to be evaluated by myself alone, after consideration of the opinions of others to whom the sense of touch was also pleasurable, grounding, and important. I realized that I could not make work to fit someone else's evaluations but rather must believe that there would be others who would find resonance in the work I chose to make.

ENGAGING THE BODY

Returning to the research question: Can the spatial differentiation of the body's perception be exploited to increase the tactile experience of ceramic work? I made a series of small textured ceramic objects intended to be run across various parts of the body. The results of the bodily experience of the objects produced were significant.

The exploration of physiology led me to challenge how I interacted with ceramic objects and my inhibitions about touch. In particular it highlighted the fact that the entire body, not just the hands, has tactile experience, and that there are other forms of touch that can be engaged beyond shape and texture discrimination.

It was significant that people responded positively to lifting and handling the small pieces from the early studies and I wanted to keep the scale of the next pieces within the limits of being liftable. In my earlier search for knowledge about how we as humans interact tactilely with ceramics I had come across the work of Nigel Barley, an anthropologist at the British Museum. His specialism is African culture and he is the author of *Smashing Pots: Works of Clay from Africa*, a book that accompanied an exhibition of African pots of the same

name at the Museum of Mankind [41]. In this book Barley talks of women potters and their role in African society. In an informal interview he had mentioned that women potters made pots that fit their own bodies so they would be easier to carry^{vii}. This proved to be a useful starting point for this investigation. I had a plaster body cast made of my body and used it to build the first of the larger works, which also explored the way our bodies perceive touch differently across the body.

The next pieces were made at Kyoto Geidai (Kyoto City University of the Arts) while I was an exchange student there in autumn 2004. My time in Japan was spent furthering my understanding of the tactile experiences of *chanoyu* (tea ceremony), interviewing working fine and applied artists about touch and their art, producing my own studio work, and attending PhD seminars on Nishida Kitarō, a noted and influential twentieth century Japanese philosopher, led by the noted Japanese painter, Usami Keiji.

In Japan I did not have a plaster body cast so worked directly on my own body, producing three pieces for exhibition in central Kyoto. Involving my own body in the experience of making and the resulting sense of intimacy marked a significant step in the research as it challenged my understanding of the relationship between myself and the objects I was creating.

The tactile experience of the making, specifically the experience of pressing the clay against my bare skin, evoked thoughts about myself as a subject and my relationship to the works as objects. In pursuing this I found that Maurice Merleau-Ponty supplied some useful ways to challenge the subject/object and mind/body divides. Engaging an emergent writing style for a piece that interwove my thinking about Merleau-Ponty's writings and my experience of making^{viii} helped this part of the work coalesce.

Building on the plaster body cast produced work that was 'controlled' in the making and used the body simply as a tool. That and the later experience of

^{vii} *Personal communication 2002.*

^{viii} *See Chapter Four, Conceptual Exploration, pp. 84–90.*

pressing clay onto my body (and the resistance of the material) prompted me to seek other ways of making. I decided to employ the emergent style described above that I had used in the writing to the studio practice. I made shapes by hugging large plaster-filled balloons against my body, thereby setting the parameters of making rather than controlling every step of the building process. I then made moulds of the pieces onto which I press-moulded the final forms. Surface textures were either applied after building or produced through the making.

Understanding how the finished work was touched and handled became the next challenge. I determined this to be a progressive bodily experience: seeing → touching → grasping → lifting → holding → caressing → embracing. I analyzed each step of this progression, using an emergent writing style to express my thinking.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF PRACTICE AND THEORY

In this narrative I set out the interdependent connection between practice and theory. In addition to the interwoven structure of their relationship, the outcomes of the investigations also reflect their reciprocity. Throughout the project the objects in the practical investigations were not intended as illustrations of theory. Nor was the theory intended to serve simply as an explanation of the practice. Rather, both threads reflect the understanding of the other and move the project forward equally.

Thus the structure of the methodology was established and then articulated: the explorations in theory led to practical questions, which in turn led back to theoretical questions and so on in a concatenated progression of investigation. However, practice and theory did not remain entirely discrete, as each specific research thread complemented an earlier area of study from which

it emerged. This allowed for new sources of investigation, such as physiology and philosophy, to be woven into the underlying warp and weft of theory and practice.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATIONS

clays and textures

challenging methodologies

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 1

Clay Workability

See Appendix 1, pages 195 - 197, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

In this initial investigation a variety of clays were tested to give information that could be used in later practical projects and to help to establish the testing procedure.

This test examined the workability of specific clays through the making of small pinched bowls. Workability was assessed on a three-point rating scale at two stages of clay consistency, at soft leatherhard and hard leatherhard. A tendency to crack was also noted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Some generalisations were drawn from the results about these and other similar clays. Cracking, although assumed in the testing to have been a deficit, may in some circumstances be seen as beneficial. The test examined only the pinching technique, so shed little light on other building methods. It did, however, give some indication of the clays' abilities to stretch and retain shape.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 2

Clays and Firing Temperatures

See Appendix 1, pages 198 – 199, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

This investigation was intended to explore the inherent tactile qualities of specific fired clays, and to create a short-list of possible clays and firing temperatures to be used in later investigations. Identically textured test tiles were made in various clays and fired to different temperatures. An attempt was made to rate the tiles using a numeric rating in terms of their tactile quality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It was not possible to establish a suitable scale for rating the tactile qualities of the tiles. Each person who felt the tiles expressed different experiences and the use of a numeric scale was unworkable from the outset of evaluation. It appeared that **there was no universal to be discovered concerning tactile experience**. Some of those testing the tiles were unable to assign a rating and made comments instead such as, 'This one feels like a hedgehog' or 'This one's just icky'. In addition, the tiles were perceived as having different qualities when rated at different times.

After producing ninety-six test tiles it became evident that as with the clay workability test, the data created would not easily lead to extrapolation. This was because the test did not take account of form, scale, other textured surfaces, or other surface treatments. It became clear that **fired clay quality could not be separated from the quality of the texture.** Therefore, in effect, only one texture was being tested. After some consideration I decided that continuing these tests would bring only limited benefit to the project.

However, the tests did raise useful questions about the suitability of the methods of testing and the underlying methodology of the project. The tests were not continued.



*Figure 2. A few test tiles from
Practical Exploration 2.*



Figure 3. Detail

CHAPTER THREE

TOUCHING THE BODY – PHYSIOLOGY, TOUCH, AND CERAMICS

CONCEPTUAL EXPLORATION

what is touch?

how does the body touch?

THE BODY FEELS

In physiology 'sensation' is defined as the stimulation of the body's sensory cells that leads to 'perception', which is the mental processing of those stimuli [42]. Convention asserts that humans have five senses – vision, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. More recent understanding has added three more categories – kinaesthetic (proprioception, or awareness of our bodies in space), vestibular (balance), and organic (awareness of the internal organs and their processes) [43]. A taxonomy of the senses, however, can lead us to a false understanding of perception as, in actuality, our senses are neither independent nor singular but, rather, are complex integrations of many different kinds of perceptionⁱ [44]. Rosenfeld states that sensory stimulation is best thought of as layers or networks of sensation, which once they reach the brain are formed into a single perception [45]. Spence, for example, has demonstrated an interrelationship between touch and vision in his experimental work [46]. He has shown that although vision tends to dominate our perceptions, different textures can influence this. Very rough textures lead to vision dominating whereas a fine texture will allow touch to be the dominant sense. A change in sound can also change the perception of a texture. For instance, the sound of

ⁱ This should not be confused with *synaesthesia*, a term which in the art world is used to express the joining of more than one sense modality in an artwork or to refer to work created by *synaesthetes*, such as Kandinsky. Physiologically, *synaesthesia* is believed to be due to an uncommon brain structure that causes an overlapping of perception between some senses. Some *synaesthetes*, for instance, perceive specific colours whenever they read or hear the words for the days of the week.

sandpaper being scraped causes most people to assess a texture as rougher than he or she would judge if the rasping sound was not present. These examples indicate that the senses are interdependent and that a perceptual experience will invariably be a multi-sensory experience.

The many components of the sense of touch include the ability to perceive and discriminate pressure, texture, vibration, hot, cold, pain (which includes itch and tickle), and a light touchⁱⁱ [47]. All of the components of the sense of touch together are referred to as the 'somatic senses' [48].

Throughout the body we have a diversity of neurons (nerve cells) and also different densities of those neurons. This results in differing levels and qualities of touch perception across the body [49]. These receptor cells for skin sensitivity are close to the skin's surface. When these receptors are activated through touch, mechanotransduction channelsⁱⁱⁱ on the surface of the receptor cells distort. This distortion 'tugs' on microtubules that run into the cell, causing ions^{iv} to flow into the cell and deionising it [50]. This is cell stimulation. The resulting electrical impulses are then transmitted from the cell to neighbouring neurons. The nerves of the peripheral nervous system run to the spinal cord and brain, some making connections to other nerve cells in the spinal cord that relay the impulse [51]. In most cases a signal is sent up the spinal cord to different, and sometimes various, areas of the brain. There, the signal is decoded or assembled into perception [52].

ⁱⁱ See 'The Lover's Touch is Special', *BBC News*, 29 July 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/2158489.stm>. (Accessed: 11 March 2006).

ⁱⁱⁱ *Mechanotransduction is the conversion of mechanical stimuli into chemical activity.*

^{iv} *An ion is an atom that is electrically charged due to the loss or gain of electrons.*

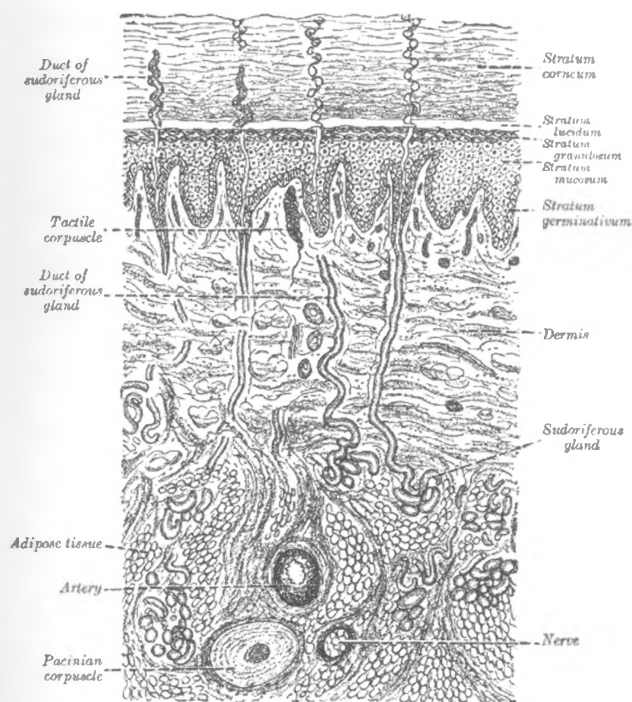


Figure 4. Dermis and epidermis [53]

There are several different types of receptor cells that can be found in varying densities in the three types of human skin: glabrous (hairless skin), hairy skin, and mucocutaneous skin (skin bordering the entrances to the body) [54]. In addition, the skin has two layers: the epidermis, which is the layer on the surface that contains the nerve cells for discriminatory touch, and dermis, which is below the epidermis and where the cells for sensations such as pressure are found [55].

These various physiological components mean that we perceive tactile qualities differently across the body. For instance, our fingertips are best able to distinguish pattern and fine textures, good for gripping and object recognition, whereas our backs and abdomens perceive pressure more readily, good for determining the space around ourselves. Sensation occurs across different kinds of cells. For instance, corpuscles known as Meissner's corpuscles^v sense texture and a light touch, whereas Pacinian corpuscles^{vi} are located deep in the skin and react to pressure and vibration [56].

To determine touch sensitivity levels across the body neurologists use the two-point discrimination test. In this test subjects close their eyes, then a pointed calliper-like instrument is pressed against the skin at different parts of the body, both points being applied simultaneously. The subjects then indicate

^v Named after German anatomist Georg Meissner.

^{vi} Named after Italian anatomist Filippo Pacini.

whether or not they perceive the contact as one single point or two distinct points. The distance between the two points is made larger and smaller over the touchings until a 'threshold' is determined, that is, the widest measurement at which the two points are still perceived as one. Below is a diagram showing typical two-point discrimination thresholds, based on data published by Sherrington around 1900 [57].

The diagram shows that the differences across the body are extreme. For example, on the fingertip two points placed simultaneously on the skin are perceived as one point at 2.3 millimetres apart, whereas on the upper thigh, the two points register as one when they are as much as 67 millimetres apart. In light of these findings, I had my own two-point discrimination thresholds tested, the results of which follow.

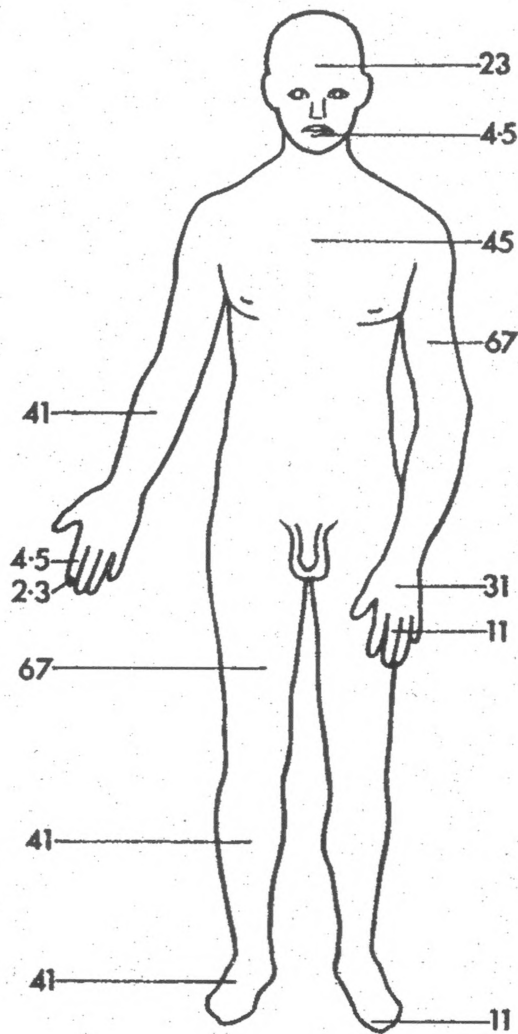


Figure 5. Two-point discrimination thresholds [58]

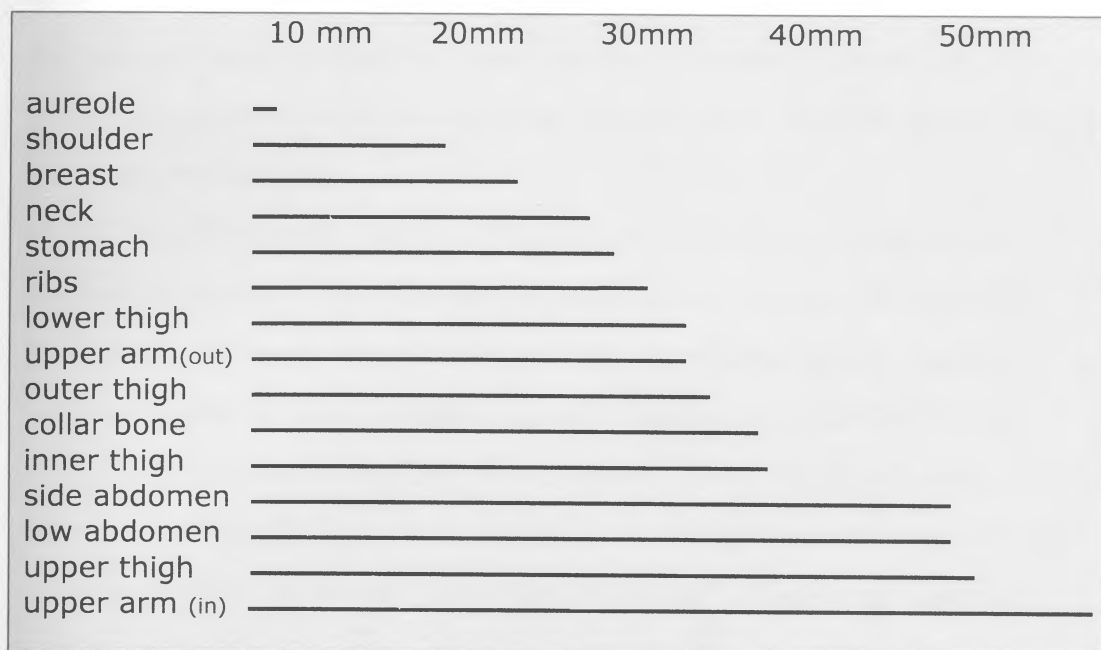


Figure 6. Two-point discrimination thresholds of the author

THE FUNCTIONS OF TOUCH

We touch with our whole bodies. With our hands and arms and to a lesser degree our legs and feet, we touch to explore and manipulate the world around us. We also touch through the use of tools. Tools can relay actual sensation through the tool itself, such as a gardening implement or the pencil held in the hand. Increasingly, however, we must also consider virtual sensation, such as that being developed around the world for robotics and other applications^{vii}, which are often referred to as haptic technology. Another aspect of touch is imagined or remembered touch, which allows us to re-experience in our minds the pleasure of sitting cuddled on a parent's lap, keeps us from touching a hot stove more than once, and makes sense of the use of words such as 'tactile' when referring to a film. Imagined touch can be seen as passive, touching with the hands or other parts of the body and through the use of tools

^{vii} For example, see *Tacitus Project*, <http://www.eca.ac.uk/tacitus/index.htm>.

as active. Another way to understand passive and active touch is in the acts of touching and being touched. To touch voluntarily requires an act of trust. You must believe that whatever you are going to touch, either object or person, will not hurt or threaten you.

Touch has many functions. Physiologically, it gives us a mechanism whereby we receive warnings of danger, as in the case of pain from injury. It also guides us through the actions of our days. External perception (contact with the outside environment) makes us seek shade when we feel the hot sun on our skin or makes us step onto the pavement to avoid the stones under our bare feet. A sense of fullness that keeps us from having that second piece of cake is due to 'organic', or internal, perception. We verify through touch what we have seen and also discover and explore what cannot be seen. It enables us to instantly assess the weight, texture, and structure of objects, directing the handling of objects through gripping, lifting, and other manipulations.

Touch also gives us untold, and often unremarked, moments of pure pleasure – the feel of cashmere over your face as you pull on a sweater, a soft breeze ruffling your hair, the swish of water against your bare skin as you swim. It provides us with a form of communication for almost every emotion. We touch in anger as in a slap and with love as in an embrace, and touch can communicate many emotions in between. It is a medium for sexual expression and interaction at every stage of sexual activity from the tentative touch on the arm to signal interest, to a post-coital couple curled around each other in deep familiarity. On the level of evolutionary biology the pleasure of touch may be partly understood as an independent by-product (epiphenomenon) of bonding behaviour.

Touch serves a more existential role too. Touch gives us a place in the world; it grounds us in our environment. Through touch we gain a sense of the corporeality of the objects around us – the hard marble floors of a building tell us we are in a public space and we act accordingly, a deep feather-cushioned chair signals that we may relax and let go of some social restraint.

Although the structures of the mechanisms of touch are universal, touch is ultimately intimate and personal. How we perceive is influenced by many factors. Cultural and social differences, including the familial and sub-cultural, play a prominent part as do individual factors, such as gender, sexuality, age, the involvement of our other senses, personality, and our personal histories. Touch is also sometimes capricious. Outside factors, such as temperature, can influence touch perception, and internally, our physiological state at any one moment can make us perceive the qualities of the same object differently at different times.

All these aspects of touch provide us with many opportunities to explore touch in relationship to art objects, which I begin in the practical studies that follow.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATIONS

textures across the skin

forms to fit the body

experiences in Japan

the work in exhibition

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 3

SMALL HAND-HELD FORMS

See Appendix 2, pages 201 – 203, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Results from tests reported in the previous chapter led me to several realizations. Although obvious, the first was that the tactility of an object comprises form as well as surface and the former can only be considered within the register of the latter, or vice versa. This led me to abandon the tile form used in Practical Investigation 2. Secondly, I decided a more open-ended approach would yield more applicable results, and I sought a way to set parameters rather than the particulars of the objects to be made. I opted to investigate many aspects, such as shape, weight, texture, clay body, and scale, within each piece. My aim was to employ a more emergent testing procedure and use principles gleaned from Grounded Theory to evaluate the results. **Quality, not quantification, became the issue at stake.**

The exploration into aspects of physiology led me to challenge my own assumptions about how I interact with ceramic objects; in particular it highlighted the fact that **the entire body has tactile experience, not just the**

hands. I knew that the experience I was seeking to create was one that could be described as reflective. Because the hands discriminate so well we perceive with the hands instantaneously, so I therefore decided to attempt to slow down the experience and nurture this reflective state by engaging other areas of the body where our perceptual processing skills and discriminatory abilities are not as well defined.

In this, as in later investigations, part of my aim was to make decisions in creating the work based solely on tactile qualities. As a maker and experiencer of ceramic work, the visual aspects of ceramic work undoubtedly already informed my tacit making skills and knowledge. To maximize the tactile, I needed to try to dampen down this visual orientation.

Ten small, lightweight hand-held pieces were made by modelling or pinching. After forming, the pieces were textured by impressing, incising, and sprigging^{viii}. Each piece was then 'experienced' by me personally by placing it on or running it across different parts of my body, and notes were taken of my immediate, personal responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The open approach of not limiting the variables was successful in that experiencing the small hand-held pieces produced conceptual as well as practical results, both positive and negative. These were the threads or themes that I tried to remain open to when interacting with the pieces. For instance, in evaluating the work, I realized that the tactile experience was not just about the textural qualities of the form and surface but also about engaging other senses of touch in the feel of the work in the hand or on the body. In other words, **it was about handling the work.** This raised questions for later investigations.

^{viii} *Impressing is pressing a textured tool into the surface of the clay. Incising is cutting into the clay. Sprigging is applying an additional piece of clay that has been formed in a mould.*

I looked for oddities as well as commonalities that might have an impact on my thinking. One specific and technical finding was that unless the texture is very rough, causing pressure points on the body, texture is not generally distinguishable without some movement of the piece across the skin. Further reading confirmed this: the principle of vibrotactility states that certain types of discriminatory touch require movement between the person perceiving the object and the object itself [59]. This principle informed later research questions.



Figure 7. Hand-held piece for the body



Figure 8. Hand-held piece for the body



Figure 9. Hand-held piece for the body



Figure 10. Hand-held piece for the body

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 4

FURTHER HAND-HELD FORMS

See Appendix 2, pages 204 - 205, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

In this practical investigation I continued to challenge my pre-conceived ideas of how to interact with ceramic objects by further employing the results of my own two-point discrimination threshold tests. To do this I made work with specific parts of the body in mind, such as my big toe, which is fairly sensitive to two-point discrimination. I made some textures with the same density as the threshold measurements to see if I could predict a sensory response. In consideration of the results of the previous tests I also decided to invoke the concept of vibrotactility in the work by consciously thinking about how the pieces could be moved across the body. Furthermore, I used a different clay body to enlarge my working knowledge of clay workability and final tactile qualities.

As earlier, small lightweight hand-held pieces were made with specific areas of the body in mind, by modelling or pinching, then textured. Each piece was then 'experienced' by moving it across different parts of my body, or moving parts of

my body across it, and I noted my personal responses. Others were asked to do the same and their responses were incorporated into the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As in the earlier study, I found that this method of investigation yielded significant and open-ended results. Specifics were tested, such as the use of textural density based on my two-point discrimination thresholds, but new ideas and concepts were also allowed to surface.

This study made me realize that the research project needed to focus on the experience of the work, rather than other aspects of the finished objects. **Experience, not artefact, became the abiding principle.**

In testing other areas of the body I found that engaging my big toe did little to engage the sense of touch with the object. Running a piece over my buttocks or stomach created a much more intense sensory experience, evoking subtle memory shadows of other sensual and sexual experiences. Therefore vibrotactility was shown to be an important aspect in experiencing these pieces.

Employing specific measurements based on two-point discrimination thresholds in creating the textures resulted in textures that were too scant to register. Further reading [60] revealed that we can discriminate texture density to a greater degree than the two points of the test. From this observation I decided that it would be better to create a list of the different sensitivities of my body from least to most discriminating. When texturing the artworks, I would then heavily texture the areas that rest against the less discriminatory areas of the body and finely texture the areas that would be explored with the hand, which is highly discriminating.



Figure 11. Hand-held piece to be run across the arm



Figure 12. Small hand-held piece for the nipple



Figure 13. Small hand-held piece for the thumb



Figure 14. Small hand-held piece for the big toe

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 5

Forms to Fit the Body (1)

See Appendix 2, pages 206 - 211, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Although in previous studies people had interacted with the ceramic pieces by running them across their bodies, they did so only with verbal instruction. At this point I decided to see whether it was possible to make works that would 'cue' people to handle the work without being told they could.

People's engagement with the work had been rapid, both in the speed of their actions and in the length of time they took exploring the pieces. I felt this was not leading to a positive reflective experience. Although smaller pieces encouraged lifting, larger works might both increase the length of time people took with each piece and slow down their responses. Wanting to retain people's willingness to lift and handle the work, I decided to keep the scale (size and weight) of the pieces within the limits of being liftable. However, I had no theoretical basis on which to decide on the shapes of the new pieces. Unlike my work as a practitioner I felt that this decision could not be made arbitrarily, because, although it would further my studio practice, it would not help the development of the research topic. A more theoretically supported approach was needed. Reflection led me back to research done early in the project when I was reading widely, trying to find appropriate avenues for exploration. I

recalled the work of anthropologist Nigel Barley, which I had come across while searching for knowledge about how we as humans interact tactilely with ceramics. His work on potters in Africa, specifically on how women potters made pots to fit their bodies, prompted the decision to make sculptural work to fit the body.

First, I had a plaster body cast made of the front of my torso in a seated position, which I used as the mould for one side of each piece. The other side was coiled and shaped until the form was closed. The parts of the forms not touching the cast were made with curves and bulges that echoed parts of the body, such as shoulders and thighs, which I felt would fit the hand well. As long as these curves were not consciously perceived as human parts (figuration), I felt they would encourage touch as we are all familiar with the feel of the human body, both our own and others'. The areas that had been touching the body cast were textured with a wider texture than the areas that would be held with the hands. The pieces were evaluated as in the last studies – I set aside a specific time and place and noted my reactions, then those of others experiencing the work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In general, the sizes and weights of these pieces did slow down interaction. However, people still did not necessarily lift and handle the work without first being told that they could. Also, some clay body colours were too 'fleshy', giving a 'too human' connotation. The textures, I felt, needed more consideration and justification.

At this stage I felt strongly that I was still 'training' my tactile perceptions and sensitivities and trying to establish a tactile aesthetic, and that this should be fundamental to the investigation. Therefore, I tried as much as possible to disregard the visuality of the work during the *making*, in the understanding that

the visuality would inevitably be addressed in later studies. However, in *analyzing* the work I did consider its visual qualities. I saw the works as tending towards figuration, which was problematic since the work is not about the figure, which is about representing the body, but about the body itself and its experience^{ix}. **I began to see the work more and more as body extensions rather than as separate objects.**

These works were conceived on the basis of fitting the body, in particular, my body. However, clay shrinkage in drying and firing meant that the works no longer fit as well as when they were originally formed. In addition, they did not fit others as well as they had fit me. This, in particular, raised the important and relevant question of subjectivity. What was the significance of 'the remove', the separation between the artist making the object and the person later experiencing that object? Would the work fit other people? Did I want it to? Was I making the work as a way of expressing myself? Was it some kind of self-portraiture? Would the work be perceived as for women only? Or was I hoping to find some universal 'fit'?



Figure 15. To fit the body (from body cast)



Figure 16. To fit the body (from body cast)

^{ix} See *Reflection*, Chapter Four, p. 113, on the body and the figure.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 6

Made in Japan

See Appendix 2, pages 212 - 215, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

As mentioned in Chapter One, in the early 1980s I spent six months in Japan studying *chanoyu*, Japanese tea ceremony, a time that was key to the development of my ceramic aesthetic. In autumn 2004 I returned to Japan as an exchange student from the Royal College of Art to Kyoto Geidai (Kyoto City University of the Arts). I spent much of the term developing an understanding of the cultural background that gave rise to the tactile aesthetic of intimacy in *chanoyu* ceramics. I also looked at whether that aesthetic was experienced in other Japanese ceramics. I interviewed working artists, both in ceramics and in fine art about touch and their art, produced work in the studio, and attended PhD seminars on Nishida Kitarō^x with Usami Keiji^{xi}.

During my stay I made three pieces for exhibition. As before these were made to fit my body. In previous studies my body was used for making a cast on which I built the ceramic works. As I did not have a plaster cast in Japan, I worked

^x *Nishida (1870-1945) is thought by many to be the most influential Japanese philosopher of the twentieth century. [See Maraldo, John. 'Kitaro Nishida', Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nishida-kitaro/>. (Accessed: 15 December 2006)]. He trained in philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University, where he encountered the works of English and German philosophers such as Hume, Kant, and Hegel. His philosophy, which developed into the Kyoto School of philosophy, brought together Eastern and Western strands of thinking, and influenced both significantly.*

^{xi} *Usami Keiji is a noted contemporary Japanese painter whose work has challenged traditional Japanese concepts of art.*

directly on my own body. However, the living body is not as rigid, still, or absorbent as plaster and I was using clays that I did not know, so there were technical difficulties to overcome. I was working in my living space which was Japanese style with floor cushions (*zabuton*) and a low table, so I made the pieces seated traditionally, with my knees folded under myself as I worked. Even though I had been used to sitting this way during my *chanoyu* training, I found that being out of practice the position was painful, limiting the work to twenty minute sittings.

Three pieces were created by moulding pieces of soft clay onto my body and then closing it into hollow forms. When leatherhard, they were smoothed, then textured by impressing. The textures investigated inversion (the reverse of the texture also being applied), application density, and depth of texture. The experience of the finished artworks is documented in Practical Exploration 7. The pieces were reduction fired in a gas kiln and the subsequent warm colours were very enticing and an improvement on the fleshy colours of the previous work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Working in Japan was a significant experience, leading me to question my role as maker. I began to wonder if the significance of this was in the act/action of creating^{xii} or in the direct use of my body. It seemed that the relevance was in my sensory experience of creation, rather than in the finished product. This led to issues surrounding concepts such as of the subject/object, immediacy of experience, and intimacy with materials and self.

^{xii} As in *Abstract Expressionism's action painting*. [See Rosenberg, Harold. 'The American Action Painters', *The London Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 4, July 1961, pp. 45-56. Reprinted in *Poetrymagazines.org.uk*. Poetry Library, <http://www.poetrymagazines.org.uk/magazine/record.asp?id=9798>. (Accessed: 11 September 2007).]

EXTRACT FROM NOTES ON THE EXPERIENCE OF BUILDING
DIRECTLY ON MY BODY:

Clay is cool but warms quickly.

Feels snug, contained, comfortable – caressed?

Strong sense of immediacy and intimacy.

A single perspective – an inner perspective of tactile experience.

Until I lift it away from my body it exists solely as part of me.

This piece is an object to me (the subject), but why doesn't it feel like that?

Nishida's 'pure experience' – perception without analysis?

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 7

Kyoto Exhibition

See Appendix 2, pages 216 - 218, for details of this study.

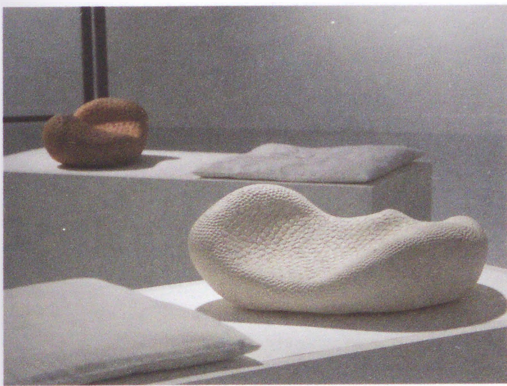


Figure 17. Kyoto exhibition

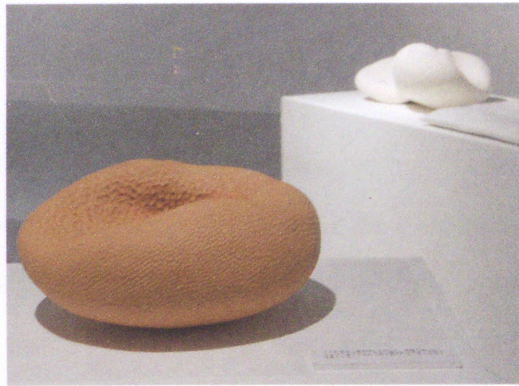


Figure 18. Kyoto exhibition

BACKGROUND

In December 2004 Kyoto Geidai mounted an exhibition of work made by their foreign university students at the Kyoto Art Center, a public art gallery in downtown Kyoto. All three pieces discussed in the last Practical Exploration were included in this show. They were situated in the centre of the gallery, surrounded by other artwork. Each ceramic piece was exhibited on one end of a bench-like plinth. On the other end was a *zabuton*, Japanese cushion, as an invitation to visitors to sit. There was a small sign on one plinth in Japanese saying that visitors were allowed to handle the work but warning them that the work was heavy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most people touched the work without hesitation. Men and women, Japanese and non-Japanese, also willingly picked up the work and held it against their bodies. Younger and older people were seen to explore the work. However, those younger seemed to be more adventurous in their explorations. One woman looked away from the work as she explored it. This was noteworthy as it removed her visual perception of the piece and therefore may have heightened her tactile perception. Could this be encouraged in the setting and in the work itself?

Some people became intensely engaged with the work. Because my body moved and was soft in the making (as opposed to the plaster cast used in Practical Exploration 5), the forms I created were a 'looser' fit than the earlier pieces. This meant that shrinkage was not a problem and that they fit other people better than the earlier works.

Visitors did sit on the cushions and most then touched the work, reaching over with one hand to stroke the top surface. Some men straddled the plinth/bench and then used both hands, sometimes turning a hand over and running the back of the arm over the surface of the work or trying to fit their arms into depressions in the forms. Some fit the pads of their fingertips into the indentations created by the textures.

With the piece 6.1 (*Figure 19*) **people 'tried it on' in many ways, not just in the way that it was made against my body.** This was a significant observation and challenged my position as an artist to the viewer/toucher. The aperture in this piece became a black-hole that held people's attention to the exclusion of the rest of the piece. People peered into the hole, put their fingers into it, put their

ears up to listen to it, and blew into it, even though many reported that the opening implied sexuality. This suggested to me that this opening did not represent a human orifice too directly, as one would expect to see more hesitation if the opening were explicitly representative^{xiii}. One British visitor commented that handling the work made him feel 'a little guilty or naughty'. Was it the opening that elicited this comment? In addition, the hole made the form into a vessel, rooting it in ceramics and I was not sure that this would encourage bodily engagement. Further, the aperture creates a top and a bottom, strongly 'suggesting' a specific orientation and therefore restricting bodily interaction.

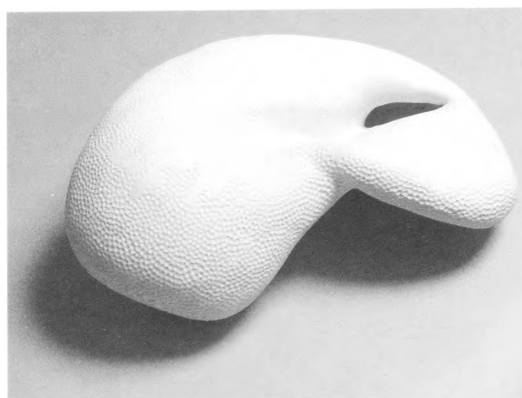


Figure 19. Made in Japan (6.1)

With the piece 6.2 (*Figure 20*) people put it on their shoulders and knees, and one tried it on his head. They put its indentation facing up on their laps and tried resting an elbow and arm in it. One person spun it as it rested on its rounded bottom. Its symmetry led one person to run his hands down both sides simultaneously.

^{xiii} See Appendix 5, 'The Aperture in Ceramics', p. 278 - 281.

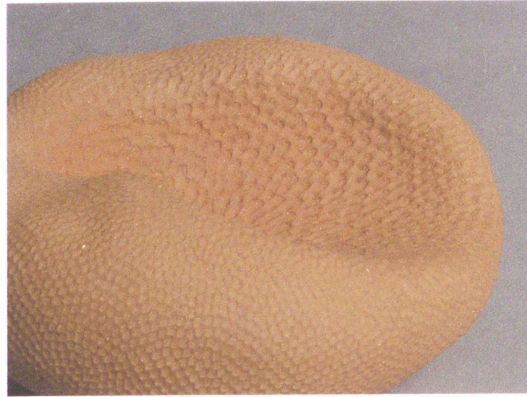


Figure 20. Made in Japan (6.2)

The third piece, 6.3 (*Figure 21*), more than the other two, more fully engaged the hand because touchers' fingertips fit into the texture. People put it on top and under their thighs. Some had the scoop facing up and rested their arms in it. One person tried it on her waist.

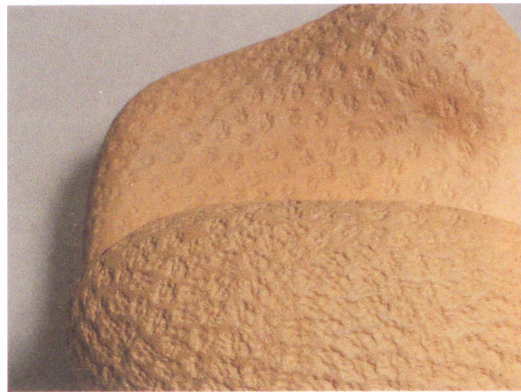


Figure 21. Made in Japan (6.3)

Taboo has a role to play in how people interact with a work as well as in the initial touching. I had been concerned that the taboo against touching artwork would be too great to overcome, even in Japan, but this did not seem to be the case.

Although many people interacted with the work, the variety of differences in their reactions was marked and suggests there is a strong individualistic quality to tactile experience.

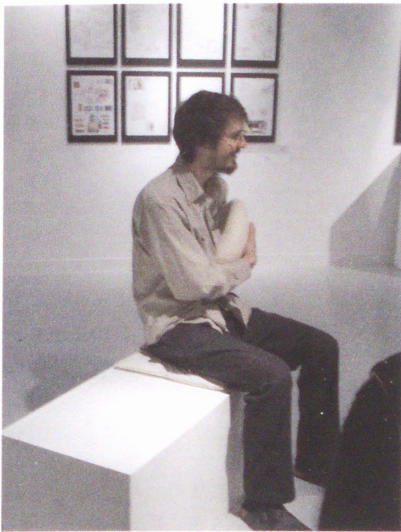


Figure 22. Images of visitors interacting with the artwork at the Kyoto exhibition.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 8

Forms to Fit the Body (2)

See Appendix 2, pages 219 - 223, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Seeing how people interacted with the work in Japan made me realize that I wanted people to do more than merely touch or handle the work. In this study I attempted to create work that would in itself encourage **not only touching and handling but also reaching out, lifting, and holding.**

Five closed forms (without apertures) were coil-built using the plaster body cast made in Practical Exploration 5 to form the shape of the area to be held against the body. Red earthenware was mixed into the clay of some pieces in an attempt to soften and warm the fired colour and to get away from the fleshy or harsh whites of some of the clay bodies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This investigation helped to set parameters about the scale and shape of the objects. Within the five pieces one form definitely made me want to pick it up, whereas another definitely did not. The former fit comfortably in several different places on the body and could fit different people. This supported one of the goals of the research, to 'invite the individual to more fully engage the

body's sense of touch' through the artwork. The texture felt engaging, soft and smooth, but active.

The textures of the work were based on my two-point discrimination thresholds, yet it was unrealistic to expect anyone else to experience the work against their naked skin. Did this matter?

In some of the pieces in this study, I used an overall uniform texture. I decided that experiencing the same texture with different parts of the body would result in a variety of experiences, whereas mirroring the differences in the body's two-point discrimination thresholds might create sensations that were too similar across the body.

Strikingly, I found it difficult to decide whether a piece was the 'right' weight as my perception of weight changed with re-evaluation of the work. This, I believe, was due to personal factors such as familiarity and tiredness. I decided it was important to keep this in mind, and that repeated evaluation would be necessary in future studies by both myself and, where possible, others.



Figure 23. *Body form (8.4)*



Figure 24. *Body form (8.4)*

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 9

Forms to Fit the Body (3)

See Appendix 2, pages 224 - 228, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

The previous study yielded one particularly successful piece (Practical Exploration 8.4), since it seemed to entice the viewer into lifting and holding it without much verbal or visual prompting. Part of its success was because the shape was ambiguous. It had little reference to pregnancy, babies, or any other figurative objects, unlike some of the earlier pieces which I felt excluded some people from engaging with the work because of their associations. Also, this piece did not rest flat on the surface; its curves invited the hands to easily grip and lift it. Its weight and size were pleasing and its texture satisfying both visually and tactilely. These specifics needed to be broadened into ranges: how large or small could a piece comfortably be, for instance?

Since, significantly, the works from previous studies did not necessarily fit people in the same way they had fit my body in the making, in this study I made work using other parts of the body to create a different range of shapes. Also, to avoid the figurative, I decided to make casts that were less well-defined. Finally, as I worked on the pieces in the previous body pieces, I actively suppressed my critical visual working assessment. In other words, I tried to

allow the materials, techniques, and specific circumstances to guide my tactile sense, rather than trying to impose a pre-conceived idea on the work. I opted to apply a more conscious 'designerly' and visual approach to the making of the forms this time. As in other studies, I also sought to further define parameters for weight and shape of the work.

Two new body casts were made in plaster using a casting technique that involved stretching a latex sheet on a frame, which was then pressed down onto my upper back and shoulder, and in the second cast, my hip, thigh, and calf. Plaster was poured and then piled as it set onto the latex. This technique resulted in softer, less defined casts.

Five closed forms were coil-built using the new body casts, ranging in size from 20 x 8 x 10 cms to 48 x 32 x 8 cms. More consideration was put into the visuality of the work as it was being made. A black earthenware clay was used in some pieces in the search for a non-fleshy fired colour.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The pieces from this study did indeed suggest some limits in size, shape, and weight (albeit those limits remain open to challenge). The smallest piece was successful when put against the body and was small enough to be tried at several different parts of the body. However, being small it also meant it did not 'suggest' body interaction as it was too much on the scale of functional tableware. The largest piece was too large, heavy, and flat to be considered successful. In terms of shape, none of the oblong pieces made thus far were successful. I think a sense of fullness (volume) does more to entice us into lifting a work.

Being more conscious of design in the process of making was not successful. Although design includes consideration of the tactile, my training and experience as a practitioner meant that when using visual criteria in the making I allowed the visual aspects of a design concept to become dominant, as it was too difficult to prevent the odd 'flourish' or 'gesture' from creeping in. Some of the pieces were visually engaging, but were not successful either tactilely or in interaction with the body.



Figure 25. Body Forms

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 10

Work in Progress Show 2005

See Appendix 2, pages 229, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND

Each year the Department of Ceramics and Glass has a Work in Progress Show of the work of about twenty second-year MA students and continuing research students. In the 2005 Work in Progress Show I showed three pieces on three low plinths with cushions, much as I had done in Kyoto. A poster explaining the PhD project was on the wall and small notices were on the plinths explaining that the pieces could be handled.

I requested permission from the College Research Ethics Committee to record visitors on digital video so I could later analyze their responses. I proposed using a digital camera, stopping if visitors showed any hesitation or discomfort at being filmed, then speaking to each person, showing them the film on the camera and asking them for written permission to use it for research purposes and/or to illustrate the research. If they did not want the film to be used I proposed deleting it from the camera in their presence. The Ethics Committee denied permission and suggested instead that there be a separate viewing event made up of volunteers who would have signed consent forms prior to the filming. Having observed people's self-consciousness in Japan when I asked them if I could film, I decided that any film record in these circumstances would

not reflect people's natural interaction with the work. I therefore observed visitors over several days without filming.

DISCUSSION

Many visitors seemed to overlook the work on entering the gallery. I believe that there were several reasons for this. The gallery space was large and open-plan so the eye was drawn in many directions. The artwork was displayed on low plinths, and other work around it was displayed closer to eye level. It was unglazed and matte in finish, in quiet earth colours, therefore easy to miss. Other student work around it was more colourful and in the case of a large glass installation, light reflecting. There was an unrelated continuous loop video being projected and continuous sound intrusion from a nearby installation. The setting was near the centre of the exhibition and therefore exposed, providing no privacy for the visitors.

However, even with these exhibition setbacks, some people did gravitate towards the work, and interacted with it by lifting and handling. One piece was lighter than the others and some men held this piece away from their bodies, exploring it predominantly through sight. Some women, to greater and lesser degrees, hugged and fondled the work, holding it to their torsos and rubbing their cheeks against the textures.

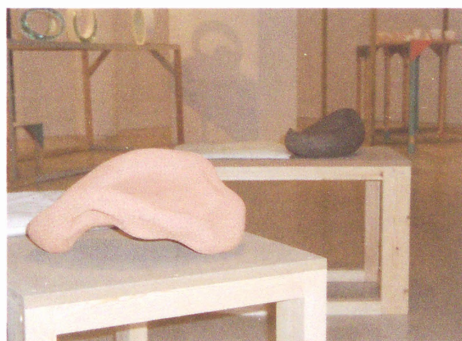


Figure 26. *Work in Progress Show 2005*

REFLECTION

physiology

understanding the methodology

touch in ceramics

FROM CELLS TO SENSATION

Physiology proved to be a fecund area of theoretical exploration. Understanding how touch is perceived, the discovery that tactile perceptions differ across the body, and that there is a way of determining these differences (the two-point discrimination test), provided a way forward in the practical explorations. I discovered the principle of vibrotactility (movement of either the body or the object being touched) in the practical explorations and later verified this through scientific literature. The creation of larger works meant they could no longer be brushed across the skin. However, I found that the texture could still be perceived as the work settled against the body, and then again when it was moved, or if I moved while holding it. In addition, the hands and arms were always able to move across a work, regardless of its placement.

Employing the Grounded Theory principles of open-ended data gathering^{xiv} led to unforeseen results and decisions being made about shape, weight, size, and texture, from which evaluation criteria emerged in terms of the experience of handling the artwork and enticing the visitor to interact with it. An example of this was the discovery that the hand followed only the smooth areas when smoothness and texture were used in the same piece. Also, an understanding of an aesthetic for the tactility of textural qualities began to develop, although I was still unable to articulate it.

Practical Exploration 9, in which I allowed myself to be more conscious of the works' visual design aspects, led me to challenge my building methods.

^{xiv} For example, nurturing an immediacy to the analysis of the practical work by noting thoughts as they occurred without censorship and then looking for common threads and unusual observations, rather than answering pre-formed and specific questions.

The work here appeared overworked and contrived, and the visual qualities of the pieces dominated the tactile. This forced me to ponder the relationship between vision and tactility in the artwork.

The issue of having an opening in the forms first arose during the Practical Exploration done in Japan. In the past I have often included openings in my work and did so as a matter of course in making this piece. However, observing how people interacted with it and their attention to the opening prompted me to look more analytically into the background issues of the 'opening'^{xv}. The opening served as a detriment to the tactile experience as it provided a visual focus that could not be ignored. For this reason I abandoned the opening. This had a knock-on effect of **moving the artworks from being traditional vessel forms to being sculptural objects.**

My observations of Practical Exploration 6.1 in exhibition and further thoughts about the opening led me to conclude that it serves as a distraction to the participant, keeping him/her from interacting tactilely with the work with more than just his or her hands.

I decided to try to echo the methodological principle of an open-ended approach as used in the theoretical work to the making and in evaluating the results. I began to search for a practical technique that was more emergent. The results of this can be seen in the following chapters.

Touch in Ceramics

In this chapter I consider the context of my artwork in relationship to work being produced elsewhere by contemporary ceramic practitioners, concentrating on those producing sculptural artwork who address the issue of tactility and how they understand this issue. The similarities between my work and other ceramic work occurs on several levels, including basic forms, textural

^{xv} Further analysis of the opening in ceramics can be found in Appendix 5, 'The Aperture in Ceramics', page 278 – 281.

surfaces, and ultimately, whether or not the ceramic works engender tactile engagement.

Visually, the work produced in this part of the project could be said to be similar to the bulges and protuberances of Jonathan Keep's sculptural work, particularly his two series *Earthly Bodies* (2004-2006) and *Lap Pots* (2001-2004). The forms of these series^{xvi}, although sometimes appearing to be enclosed, are open vessel forms. Keep seeks to create 'resonances with our own body shapes' in the work [61]. His use of a porcelain body with monochromatic glazes that range from satin to gloss gives smooth surfaces and bright hues. The smooth rounded forms motivate the audience to touch these pieces. The similarities between Keep's work and my forms are limited to the curved shapes and the impulse that the work engenders in people to touch it. However, the vessel forms in Keep's work do not engage touch beyond the hand. They do not induce us to pick them up, for instance. In one series, *Hand Held Pots* (2000-2003), he did produce a series of small, hand-held works, but these again do not engage our sense of touch beyond the hand.



Figure 27. Jonathan Keep, 'Listening ii' (2005),
'Earthly Bodies' Series [62]



Figure 28. Jonathan Keep, 'Listening iii' (2005),
'Earthly Bodies' Series [63]

^{xvi} Keep also makes tableware.



Figure 29. Jonathan Keep, 'Untitled' (2003),
'Lap Pots' Series [64]



Figure 30. Jonathan Keep, 'Untitled' (2001),
'Lap Pots' Series [65]

Deirdre McLoughlin says she seeks to find an inherent shape within the construction of each specific form she makes. In this way the works are about the exploration of shape itself. The end results are often tactile forms on a human scale that resonate with the human body in a figurative way. McLoughlin refers to this merging of the abstracted and figurative as a biomorphic shape [66]. With the natural clay finishes, the works entice you to touch them. However, they are heavily polished to a silky smooth finish that has been compared to the feel of granite or marble [67]. This discourages handling beyond touching with the hand as a smooth surface is slippery, deterring people from lifting and handling, even if allowed by the artist.

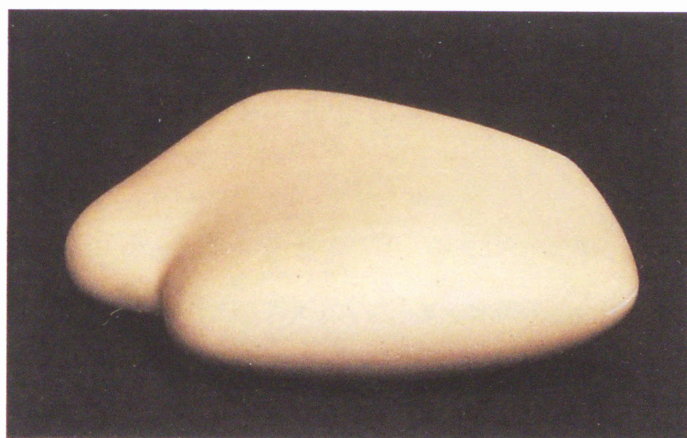


Figure 31. Deirdre McLoughlin 'Kiss-Silence' (1998) [68]

Tactility is a crucial issue in Julie Wood's work, which she says is 'intended to invite the viewer to touch and experience the shape' [69]. The works are within human scale, are smooth-finished, and of understated natural clay colours. They mostly address the naturally occurring circle form, like in pebbles or smoothed stones, with its connotations of eternity and perfection [70]. Some of Wood's underlying motivation is shared in my work. Wood states, 'The pieces are made as contemplative objects conveying universal, basic and eternal sensations.' [71] I suggest that her desire to create contemplative objects is the same as my desire to engender a quiet self-awareness through the work. Wood's work, however, has a monumental appearance that is heavy and immovable and therefore limited to exploration with the hand, whereas I seek further physical involvement of the viewer/toucher.



Figure 32. Julie Wood, *Heart of Hearts*
(1991) [72]



Figure 33. Julie Wood, *Heart of the Matter*
(1991) [73]

Felicity Aylieff directly addressed the issue of tactility in her large, highly polished sculptural works shown at her exhibition *Sense and Perception* at the Manchester Art Gallery in 2002 [74]. These works developed out of her MPhil at the Royal College of Art entitled *The Elusive Body* (1996) [75]. In this research project Aylieff sought two things – a tactile clay body and tactilely engaging shapes. The surfaces of the work were polished until they were smooth and hard. To achieve a sense of the monumental Aylieff decided that

the work needed to be large, using geometric and symmetrical forms with classical resonances. This removed the work from the sphere of the intimate, making it architectural in scale and scope. Their sheer size prompted a different interaction with the work than that of Wood's contemplative pieces. Aylieff reported that in some cases visitors saw the work as a physical challenge, climbing on it, hitting it, or even trying to push it over^{xvii}. The public gallery venue within which this work was presented also contributed to how visitors interacted with it. In more recent work (*White Gold*, Flow Gallery in London 2006) [76], Aylieff abandoned the highly-polished stone-like perfection of her earlier forms in favour of a more spontaneous investigation of the vessel form, which incorporates the heavy texture that arose from the method of making (coiling) and leaves a trace of the hand. Aylieff's pieces are large enough to invite tactile interaction with the body although some of that engagement may not be desirable. In my own work I also seek to engage the sense of touch beyond the hand, but my aim for this engagement is to encourage intimacy and self-awareness, which also raises connotations of privacy, whereas Aylieff's work gives a sense of the monumental and stresses its public setting.



Figure 34. Felicity Aylieff in
'Sense and Perception' [77]



Figure 35. Felicity Aylieff in
'White Gold' [78]

^{xvii} Personal communication 2003.

One significant aspect that arose in looking at the work of these artists was the importance of the textured surface. Barley [79] states that a textured surface provides a firm grip for handling, which is reason enough to carefully consider the role of texturing work to be handled. In D Wood's article on the American potter Michael Wisner, he refers to 'an overall ordered pattern with seamless beginning and end; a repeated motif that creates hypnotic lines around, across and down the vessel' [80]. The 'seamless beginning and end' and the 'hypnotic' lines both suggest a specific quality of visual experience. Wisner absorbed into his forms the textural aesthetic used by prehistoric Native Americans of the Southwest, in particular, the Anasazi and Salado peoples, which included 'corrugations' or impressed repeated patterns. Wisner follows Tibetan Buddhism and feels that the repetitive patterns on the surface of the pots 'draw attention inward', creating a mandala-like experience. Wisner feels that the complex patterns he creates also evoke the same hypnotic qualities in the tactile experience of the work.

Initially I was going after a visual effect that I have experienced many times in nature where you see an object that stops you and monopolises your senses for a few moments.... As for the hypnotic quality extending beyond the visual and hand...Yes I can only speak from my experience....It seems the mind has a great capacity to collect and focus upon an object and that can happen in an instant. We walk away from a moment like that feeling recharged/refreshed and sometimes inspired. ^{xviii}

This supports **the use of texture to invoke an inward-looking tactile experience.**

Wisner says, 'The more you look at it, the more layers you start to see....What I love is that I do so little towards the finished pattern. I make my marks but so much happens with secondary or tertiary patterns and negative space.' [81] This complexity of creation has also been my experience in texturing the pieces made for the investigations in this chapter.

^{xviii} *Personal communication 2007.*



Figure 36. Michael Wisner, 'Black Artichoke Weave' (2005) [82]

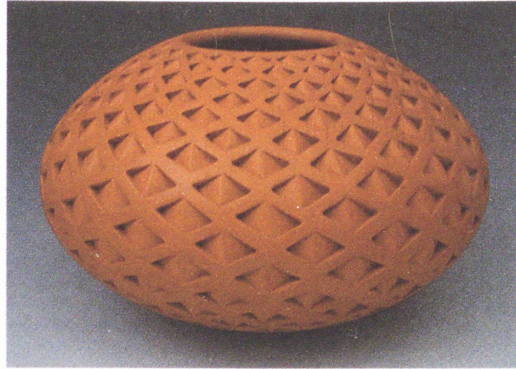


Figure 37. Michael Wisner, 'Red Expanded Metal Weave' (2005) [83]

The focus of my project centres on touch and tactility and it is useful to consider how other artists working with clay in similar ways have addressed these concerns. Investigating how differently they treat surface texture has led me to understand that one significant aspect of texture is that it not only aids grip but encourages grip. This is particularly relevant to my work because I seek for the forms to be lifted and held. Scale also contributes to the 'liftability' of work. It needs to be within the same range of size that is found in objects that we would commonly lift. For instance, Aylieff's work is simply too large to consider lifting. A further concern is whether the work 'appears' liftable because of its form. Wood's work, for instance, does not. It appears solid and settled, as does McLoughlin's. Keep's work is within a liftable scale but its smooth surfaces and apparent fragility discourage handling. The only work considered here that encourages handling is Wisner's but this is at least partly due to the fact that he uses classical pottery forms – forms that have evolved through use and handling. Perhaps the most important issue arising from these considerations is that of action and stillness. Except for Wisner's work, which echoes traditional functional ware, the work of all the artists considered here gives a sense of being static, securely fixed and immovable. Part of the strength of these works is indeed this stillness and solidity. None has sought to make lifting and handling a central part of the tactile experience of the work, which has been one of my main considerations. My aim has been to produce artworks that become

animated through human interaction, works that engage the sense of touch beyond the hand.

Considering the issues of touch and handling and my experience of making in the practical studies related in this chapter challenged my underlying assumptions about the relationship between myself and objects. The 'strong sense of immediacy and intimacy' that I experienced in putting the soft clay against my body caused a sense of blurring between it and me, and I realized that I was creating works that could be experienced as body extensions rather than as stand-alone objects. This raised questions in my mind about subject/object distinctions of the body. In addition, at this stage of the research I was unsure of the relationship between my experience as artist as opposed to the experience of the finished work by others. I decided that I needed to understand my own experience before I could understand this complex relationship. Therefore, in the next chapter I explore my own experience of the making both theoretically and practically.

CHAPTER FOUR

MAKING –
ENGAGING THE THOUGHTFUL BODY

CONCEPTUAL EXPLORATION

Merleau-Ponty's 'lived experience'

ON CASTING HUGS

*Sitting on the floor, holding a plaster-filled latex balloon
against my bare skin until it sets...*

Maurice Merleau-Ponty said, 'What is given is not the
thing on its own, but the experience of the thing...' [84]

*My ankle is pinned beneath the shifting mass that rests on
top of it, engulfed by the weight of the soft plaster as it
oozes around and over the hardness of bone. I centre it to
my torso, holding its confined fluidity in place with my legs
and arms.*

'...it is through my body that I go to the world,' wrote
Merleau-Ponty. This could not be more evident than now,
as I press my body around this moving, oozing weight. I
understand my perception of this mass in terms of
Merleau-Ponty's 'lived experience', an experience of and
through the body. But Merleau-Ponty's body is not
simply a collection of physiological assets; it is
inseparable from the mind, just as the mind cannot be
considered independently of the body. 'The perceiving
mind is an incarnated mind.' [85] Thought and
corporeality together are the whole. All I
perceive/feel/think is grounded in this, my conscious

body, the thoughtful body. It is 'the general instrument of my 'comprehension'.' [86]

I move my ankle and feel the unstable liquid roll slightly back and forth within its own weight. Squeezing my legs together, my right thigh presses into the heavy liquid, which is surprisingly resistant.

'...there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things.' [87]

I feel the heavy liquid move against my thigh and its resistance to the pressure I impose on it. The liquid mass is distorting, as much as moulding to my body, which dents, dimples, and alters under the weight. For me, this experience goes beyond Merleau-Ponty's description of an overlapping or encroachment. At this moment I and the embraced form exist only in relation to each other. We connect in an intimate and ever-shifting state of interaction and share influence on each other and presence in the world.

The squeeze of my legs moves the skin of my inner thigh across the smooth texture of the mass, an intimate contact that triggers my awareness of its slippery surface. My now-slippery thigh slides over its surface.

Now which is slippery? The form or my inner thigh? And where is the line between me and it? A viscous blur.

'It is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible, or as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand. And yet it is not possible that we blend into it, nor that it passes into us...' [88]

Merleau-Ponty's words refer to vision but I can extrapolate them to include touch. The viscous blur is the connection between me and the mass I perceive, an intimate and integral interface that joins me and it. Yet it is more than merely a shared boundary, a dividing membrane.

Shifting forward I press my left forearm into the top of the amorphous mass. It makes only a subtle impression. So I lock my right hand onto my left wrist and bear down again. My arm sinks into the firmness a little more.

My arm presses in, and in doing so, becomes both sensor and agent, 'the body as sensible and the body as sentient' [89]. It both feels and acts.

'...our body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them;...it unites these two properties within itself, and its double belongingness to the order of the 'object' and to the order of the 'subject' reveals to us quite unexpected relations between the two orders.' [90]

It is in these dual roles, within this double belongingness, that Merleau-Ponty explores the 'and' between sensible and sentient, subject and object, passive and active – two manifestations of the same body – one experience. As I try

to impress my body into the changing shape, I am aware of my double belongingness. I feel the mass's physical and independent presence, but I also feel my influence on its very existence.

Curling over its bulk I add the weight of my upper body to the squeeze. My breasts sink down. I feel the discomfort of their flattened distortion, yet they make only shallow valleys in the shifting mass.

My body is both touching and being touched by the mass I enfold. Awareness shifts from one to the other – toucher to touched, touched to toucher – with little control on my part. This shift is Merleau-Ponty's chiasm, the 'and'. It is 'the motion of perpetual dehiscence, in which perception is understood as a being in momentum.' [91] Enclosing this mass within the confines of my arms, legs, and torso leads me to understand that this dehiscence, which is defined as both a gaping and a bursting forth, can be seen as experience itself, a cusp of continuous and never-completed change.

'...the idea of *chiasm* [is] that...every relation with being is *simultaneously* a taking and a being taken, the hold is held, it is *inscribed* and inscribed in the same being that it takes hold of.' [92]

The chiasm isn't a mechanism, a switch to be thrown that will change one perspective to another. It is the experience of perception, 'the organic relationship between subject and world, the active transcendence of consciousness' [93].

I ease back slightly and immediately feel the rounded shape reform. I press again and this time the emerging form nudges downward. The bulge nudges against my pubic bone.

This sensual nudge evokes unstructured yet familiar sensations, not exactly memories, but feelings I associate with warmth, comfort, and an accompanying suggestion of arousal.

‘...every perception is a communication or a communion, the taking up or completion by us of some extraneous intention, or on the other hand, the complete expression outside ourselves of our perceptual powers and a coition, so to speak, of our body with things.’ [94]

I focus on maintaining this hug, my thighs squeezed together, my body curled over, and my arms and breasts forcefully pressing down into the thickening form of the hug.

Is this Merleau-Ponty’s communication/communion?

‘I am able to touch effectively only if the phenomenon finds an echo within me, if it accords with a certain nature of my consciousness, and if the organ which goes out to meet it is synchronized with it.’ [95]

There is an unspoken experience of synchronization, of communion, of finding the echo inside of me. I sit with this hug held within the circle of my body and feel the many echoes of experience – echoes of safety, of sexual

tension, of great joy, of maternal longing, of motherly love.
At this transient, ever-incomplete moment the thickening
form and my perception of it coalesce with/within me, my
own perception part of the conversation. Yet this is a
softly-defined completion, a fullness of uncertainty.

*The heavy form my body cradles is quickening and becomes
warm against my skin. Ironically, it quickens into solidity.
I shift slightly and the stiffening weight no longer follows
me. It no longer oozes around me and hugs me; its
movement is stilled. I must now press myself around it to
maintain the embrace. I become the one who moves.*

Another layer of the chiasm, being on the edge of one
thing, but continuously being and becoming its opposite,
being and becoming neither, the incompleteness. This
incompleteness has a depth that avows that there is no
purely physical sensation or purely mental reflection.

Each sensation/thought is embedded in a resonance
within me that creates the perception, encompassing all
that sensation is: spiritual, emotional, mental, physical...

*The gliding of my hand across the surface, the squeeze of
my thighs to hold it in place, the press of my breasts and
torso against the now well-defined form...*

...Perception is not passive; it is the 'lived experience', a
direct participation between me and the world.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATIONS

casting hugs

exploring the forms

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 11

Casting Hugs in Plaster

See Appendix 3, page 231, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Previous practical investigations had indicated that I needed to find ways of making that were freer and more interactive to better reflect the aim of the project to engage the body's sense of touch. In the last group of objects, my pre-PhD experience informed the making too directly, resulting in objects that were conceptually over-worked and over-controlled. When I worked directly on my body instead of using the plaster cast, such as in Japan, the work had not had this self-consciousness. The process of making raised fundamental questions about my own role in the making process, such as the relationship between subject (the body) and object (the clay and the finished objects) and my relationship as maker to the viewer/toucher of the finished objects. Since my project is about a sensory interaction between the body and the objects, it seemed useful to think more consciously about ways of working more directly with my body. However, because of the technical limitations of working with clay, I broadened my investigation to include plaster because it can be easily moulded around an object, then sets quickly. To this end plaster casts were made by firmly 'hugging' plaster-filled balloons between my arms, torso, and legs until the plaster had set.



Figure 38. Casting plaster hugs

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this new process, which was both technical and performative, I was able to 'let go' of the making process rather than controlling each movement of creation. This proved to be a significant turning point, allowing me to produce forms that were freer (less designerly) and less self-conscious, both in the making process and in the final forms. It produced different qualities of shape and a workable range of scale.

Touch is about physical intimacy and this method of making created an intimacy between me and the work that I felt was necessary to move the project forward by bringing concept and practice together. Although my principle aim was to create work that 'stands alone', that other people can experience without regard to its making, I think the intimacy of the making may be communicated across 'the remove' that exists between me and the audience. Thus, **the intimate sensory experience of making the work became integral to the project as a whole.**

The results of this method of making challenged my assumption that an actively textured surface would best encourage touching and handling. The perfectly smooth surfaces created by the latex balloons proved intriguing and sensual to the touch of the hand, and any irregularities in the surfaces offered unique contrasts to the smoothness. This raised the question of how I could translate this into clay.

There were several possible methods that could use the plaster forms. They could be used to make moulds for press-moulding or slip-casting, they could be used indirectly, as models, for building new pieces, or the surface of the plaster could be reworked to change the forms.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 12

Slip-casting

See Appendix 3, page 232, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

After considering how I might use the plaster casts created in Practical Exploration 11, I investigated mould-making as a possible way forward. I chose one cast that had a particularly appealing and strong form, that fitted well against the body, and had a surface of smooth and rough areas. I made a three-piece mould in plaster that would be suitable for both press-moulding and slip-casting. I slip-cast two forms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I found this was not a suitable working technique as I was not physically strong enough to handle the slip-filled mould by myself and felt that my direct involvement in the creation of the work was integral to the project. In addition, problems with casting meant that the forms did not come out intact. However, it was possible from what was produced to deduce that the specific advantages gained from slip-casting did not outweigh its detractions.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 13

Forms from Mould (1)

See Appendix 3, pages 233 - 235, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

As slip-casting did not prove successful I decided that press-moulding might be a workable alternative. I made three pieces with the same mould that was used for Practical Exploration 12, using different techniques to press the clay into the mould.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Despite technical problems, press-moulding produced sufficiently successful results to continue with this technique, though at this stage I was still unsure how 'fresh' (not overworked, not over-designed, not overly self-conscious) the work could be when finished.

The visual impact of this form impinged on my tactile appreciation of it. I found that its sleek lines, which one might call 'cool', tended to invite the hand to touch rather than lift. In looking at the work I felt that I wanted to touch it to verify the quality of its surface, rather than investigate that surface as an experience in itself.

Since I had cast all the plaster forms against my body, I assumed that they would all 'fit' and provide a positive tactile experience. Therefore, this form was chosen on the basis of its visual qualities. In fact, the three pieces did not seem to fit me or others well and the 'freedom' of building that occurred in the plaster cast did not translate well into clay.

As noted in Practical Exploration 13.3ⁱ, for the first time I was aware of engaging senses other than the visual and tactile. When I ran my hand over the object an unpleasant sound was produced. Perhaps my perception was too informed by my knowledge of ceramics as the sound was clearly indicative to me of it being underfired. Even so, it raised the possibility of engaging our other senses, which I concluded was beyond the scope of this project.



Figure 39. Form from mould (13.3)

ⁱ See p. 235.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 14

Forms from Mould (2)

See Appendix 3, pages 236 - 240, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

As the pieces from Practical Exploration 13 seemed 'sleek' in appearance and therefore deterred handling, I turned to a cast that was less obviously 'elegant' and smaller in scale, conscious of the need to retain the freshness of the original plaster casts in the ceramic forms. Also, in comparison with the elegant smoothness of the balloon forms, the textured surface of earlier works (Practical Explorations 8 and 9) seemed contrived and arbitrary. One way of resolving this was to apply the same successful approach I had used in building the form (controlling the parameters, not each movement of making) to creating the textured surfaces.

I reworked parts of the plaster cast piece (Practical Exploration 11), removing the 'navel' made by the constricted neck of the balloon and other rough areas to create an overall, unmarked form. To avoid arbitrary pattern-making I created textures by treating the surface of the moulds with various materials rather than the pieces themselves. To heighten the freshness, on some pieces I left the mould seams; on others I disguised them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The size of these forms was acceptable and not baby-like, and overall the form was pleasing and engaging both tactilely and visually. The application of materials to create textures on the finished piece worked only when the texture was applied all over. This perhaps indicated a sympathetic integration of form and texture. Some textured surfaces worked better tactilely and some better visually. Only the overall finely textured surface created by using coffee grounds worked both visually and tactilely. The retention of the seams did nothing to enhance the form either visually or tactilely and did not add freshness. I found having multiple copies of the same form to be a quick and manageable way to see the effects of different texturing techniques. However, I felt that if people realized that the shape was repeated, this might discourage handling of the multiples of the forms, as they might decide that they had already explored that shape.



*Figure 40. Form from mould (14.6)
after treatment with terra sigillata*



*Figure 41. Form from mould (14.3)
after treatment with terra sigillata*

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 15

Composite Forms

See Appendix 3, pages 241 - 243, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Practical Exploration 14 made me question the benefit of producing several pieces of the same shape, yet using the moulds was an efficient technique and one which I felt I should continue. However, I also wanted to further challenge scale and the underlying principle that the work should be liftable. Additionally, I decided I should more fully investigate the tactility of smoothness.

Five casts were press-moulded, using the two existing moulds. At leatherhard, I cut the casts into pieces and fitted them together to create three different works. All three pieces were finished to a lightly burnished surface.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

These pieces did not engender a desire to interact with them tactilely for several reasons. They were too large to be picked up and handled. The forms were complicated, which engaged the eye but not the hand. What tactile exploration there was, was restricted to the hand as it was not possible to engage the body in such complex and lumpy forms. The integrity of each individual piece was

adversely affected by cutting and reassembling. Finally, although some people experiencing the work felt differently, I found that the smooth surface did not translate well into clay and was not an inducement to lifting or even touching the work.



*Figure 42. Composite form (15.1)
after treatment with terra sigillata*



Figure 43. Detail of 15.1



*Figure 44. Composite form (15.2)
after treatment with terra sigillata*

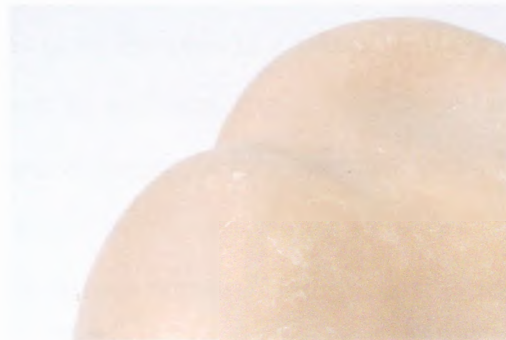


Figure 45. Detail of 15.2

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 16

Forms from Mould (3)

See Appendix 3, pages 244 - 246, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

All forms made prior to Practical Exploration 15 had been made as a single piece moulded to the body or a body cast. This gave the objects a sense of integrity that was lost in the later composite shapes. In addition, the composite shapes did not entice the viewer into handling and engaging bodily with the work. In light of this I returned to making single mould forms, continuing to be hesitant about texturing the works after forming the shapes because I felt this introduced an arbitrary process. Even so, I knew I wanted some kind of active texture, i.e., not a smooth surface.

A mould was made of another larger cast and three pieces press-moulded using slightly thinner slabs than previously to allow for the increase in size without affecting the weight.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although this form was a little too large to encourage easy lifting, once lifted it was successful at engaging the body's sense of touch. It rested well on the lap

and against the torso, but also was light enough to be shifted to other parts of the body, such as over the shoulder. Its curves fit various parts of the body but it still had raised curves that fit the palm well. This piece was successful tactilely, but visually its scale made it too reminiscent of monumental sculpture, which we do not lift and handle. The tension between visuality and tactility had been a recurrent concern throughout the project, but here it surfaced in an overt manner, and I recognized that it needed to be addressed.



Figure 46. Form from mould (16.1)

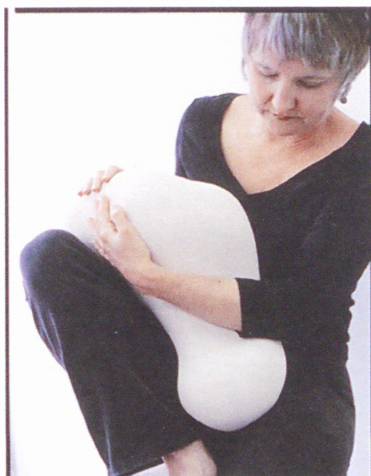


Figure 47. Form from mould (16.1)

REFLECTION

the 'lived experience'

on writing

issues in ceramics

touch and vision

surfaces and textures

the rough and the smooth

the artist's body

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

At the end of the last chapter it was evident that I was striving to develop an understanding of the relationships set up by the objects – whether to myself as the creator or to the viewer/toucher. The making of the objects gave rise to a new awareness of the role of the body, the thoughtful body. Looking back this should have been no surprise as my dance training as a young woman had given me a strong awareness of the physicality of my own body.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concepts of 'lived experience' – especially his view that there is no experience (sensation or thought) that is not experienced through the body, the recognition of the ever-flowing merging and shifting between touching and being touched, and the blurring of the boundary between the body and the object it holds – led me to try to close the distance between myself and the materials of making, resulting in a fuller integration of my body into the making process. My practical work was beginning to resonate with my understanding of some of these ideas, leading me to look at resonance between the theoretical work and the understanding gained in my practical work. This drawing together, finding a manifest bond for the theory and practice, was critical to the development of the project. I decided that writing was one link, as it went from being documentation to becoming part of both methods and methodology. In writing the paper 'On Casting Hugs' I applied the emergent methodological style that I had established in the critical analysis of the previous chapter. The resultant paper serves as a creative bridge between the theoretical and practical investigations of the project.

'On Casting Hugs' also exemplifies how I came to utilize the project's theoretical strands of investigation. While not seeking to address the broader

subject of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, I did feel I needed to have a significant understanding of his writing as a whole and the context within which it sits. Seeking resonance and challenge, I read *The Phenomenology of Perception* [96] and *The Visible and the Invisible* [97] and critical commentary on Merleau-Pontyⁱⁱ. This reading identified key concepts of the body/mind as unified and the fluidity of the subject/object construct that I felt related to my work. This led me to seek ways of absorbing those conceptual insights into the practical and theoretical understanding of the project.

In addition, the Practical Explorations in this chapter raised questions about the development of a genre of ceramic work that has left the everyday world of functional craft and entered the fine arts arena. Martin Smith's highly refined architectural pieces, for instance, put ceramics metaphorically and literally onto the plinth and into the 'Do Not Touch' category of the fine art gallery, as did Ewen Henderson's craggy vessels and Richard Slee's whimsical ceramic illustrations. Edmund de Waal's recent exhibition at Kettle's Yard in Cambridgeⁱⁱⁱ, a much respected public art gallery, used the traditional vessel form to respond to the venue in ways that self-consciously place the work within the sphere of fine art.



Figure 48. Martin Smith (c.1985) [98]



Figure 49. Ewen Henderson (c.1985) [99]

ⁱⁱ For example: (1) Cathryn Vasseleu. *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty*, London: Routledge, 1998; (2) Elizabeth Grosz. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994; (3) Martin Jay. *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

ⁱⁱⁱ Edmund de Waal at Kettle's Yard, 2007. See <http://www.kettlesyard.co.uk/exhibitions/archive/dewaal.html>.



Figure 50. Richard Slee 'Leaf' (1989) [100]



Figure 51. Edmund deWaal, 'A line around a shadow' (2005) & 'Predella' (2007) [101]

Emmanuel Cooper refers to this genre of ceramics as 'work to be dusted, not to be washed' [102]. Partly, this development can be seen as a reaction against the craft 'peasant potter' notion often associated with much of the twentieth century.^{iv} This strand of ceramics has an underlying conceptual basis for the work that is often absent in 'craft' ceramics. Displaying the work in such a way (moving it off the table and onto the plinth or making it part of an installation) increases its perceived value, making it more 'precious' and therefore even more untouchable. Having no 'function', it blurs the boundary between craft and fine art. Fragility can also be an issue. People do not touch work they fear they may break, even functional ware. Functional work that is handled daily has always been seen in our society as having a lower status than that which is kept safely put away in a cupboard or a display case. In the instance of the work considered above, the plinth serves as the new glass-fronted china cabinet.

In the Practical Explorations of this chapter the issue of visuality as opposed to tactility arose when considering scale. Smaller works encouraged touch and even lifting, but larger works were more suitable for holding and

^{iv} This notion is dramatically over-simplified. Bernard Leach himself produced work for both table and plinth.

caressing and therefore tactilely engaged more of the body. However, larger works often appeared monumental (a visual quality), which also discouraged lifting. It was evident that the relationship between the visual and tactile aspects of my work was becoming intriguingly complex, and that a single solution was unlikely. My earlier question of how to make viewers into touchers did not go far enough. Ideally, I needed to find a way for vision to support the tactile experience, rather than the reverse, which was the more common experience in ceramics. Although it was necessary to have a strong visual aspect to the work to entice viewers into becoming touchers, I had to find ways of making the visual aspects sufficiently low-key or the tactile aspects strong enough to allow an individual's sense of touch to dominate when interacting with the work.

Underlying understandings about surface texture of the work and its impact of both the visual and tactile moved forward in these practical studies. Research provided support for incorporating a textured surface. Nigel Barley [103] says that a textured surface aids grip, and Michael Wisner in Wood's article in *Ceramics: Art and Perception* [104] put forward a strong argument about the hypnotic effects of patterning. However, I was repeatedly challenged by individuals who said that they preferred a smooth surface, which they thought was like touching skin. The feel of smooth skin has become symbolic in our society for all that is pleasant, sexual, and sensual. Advertisements provide ample evidence of this. Beauty products have been sold by showing the stroking of bare skin, as were products like Häagen Dazs ice cream. Clearly a smooth surface needed further investigation.

Although smoothness could provide a sensual experience, it became evident it discouraged people from lifting the work. My experience was also that work with an all-over smoothness felt unresponsive or 'dead'. The inclusion of some areas of smoothness within a textured object worked visually but detracted from the tactile exploration of it since people tended to explore the smooth areas as if they represented some kind of maze to be solved. In rethinking the symbolism of smooth skin, I concluded that, in reality, skin does

not remain smooth under our touch. It gives and bends; it responds. Perhaps the smooth skin symbolism is best considered to be image-based. I decided that feeling a rough/smooth surface was more like feeling skin. The pieces that were most effective had an all-over texture which, when stroked, gave a sense of a 'rough smoothness', or a 'smooth roughness'. The rough/smooth surface was one that had a texture, usually a fine texture, that could be considered rough, but which when felt all over could be sensed as being smooth. A useful example of this quality can be seen in the film *Amelie* (2001) [105] when Amelie expresses her sensual pleasure in the tactile experience of pressing her hand into a bag of beans. Textural support for using the rough/smooth terminology, which sounds like an oxymoron, was found in John Maraldo's article on Kitarō Nishida, where he says, 'Nishida was fond of calling this type of unity, which holds together differences without sublating them, a "self-identity of absolute contradictories." ' [106] This concept, that seemingly conflicting qualities can be constituted within the same object, experience, concept, or perception, was to gain larger significance throughout the project as I became aware of other 'absolute contradictories'.

A further aspect of visuality is the understanding of the term 'texture'. Summarized, the pertinent definitions of texture include: a rough or grainy surface quality; the tactile quality of a surface; the visual quality of a surface; the essence or characteristic quality of something; and an object's physical structure [107]. However, these definitions isolate the senses too specifically. When seeing something, we do far more than simply 'see' the texture – we experience its tactile quality, even if we cannot touch it^v.

Each human being has an almost unlimited memory store of textural experiences. The sense of touch is the first to develop in the womb and in many cases the last to leave us [108]. Our first visions occur within an already present tactile experience and we learn to associate certain physical sensations with particular visual stimuli. Many artists use this secondary sense of touch

^v See *imagined touch in Reflection, Chapter Three, p. 45.*

(imagined or remembered touch) in their work. Ayumi Shigematsu, the Japanese ceramist^{vi}, says that it is important that viewers of her work have a sense of what it would feel like if they touched it. She does not, however, actually want them to touch the work^{vii}. Incorporating this kind of remembered tactility was important in this research project, although I was conscious to not allow it to override the physical tactile experience. Imagining a loved one's hug, after all, is not the same experience as feeling his or her embrace.

The practical work that was defined by this series of investigations gave rise to considerations that might be called 'style'. For a piece to be successful visually it needs a certain freshness. Some pieces from these studies appeared self-conscious, over-worked, and over-designed, as in the too smooth, too 'cool' pieces of Practical Explorations 8 and 9. Techniques that ensure that the work retains a kind of vigour were explored and exploited in later works. 'Letting go' became a consistent theme within the work described in this chapter and was applied to both theoretical and practical investigations.

My role as maker became important during the investigations of this chapter. The sensory interaction between my body (as understood in Merleau-Ponty's 'subject-body'), the materials, and the making became crucial. When asked during a telephone interview in 2002 if she considered her pots to be tactile, Betty Blandino replied, 'Of course they are tactile. Every inch has been pinched by me.'^{viii} This is indicative of one accepted view of the role of the tactile experience of a pot, that of replicating the potter's experience of the making. I myself felt the awe of this kind of experience in a visit to the British Museum when I was able to fit my fingers into the maker's finger marks in a Jomon pot that dated back to 10,000 BC. While deeply resonant as human activity, it was not the experience I was trying to evoke in viewer/touchers with my work. What I felt I *may* transmit to them, rather than my finger marks or even the impressions taken from my body, is the sense of intimacy that arose in the

^{vi} See 'Ayumi Shigematsu', <http://wwol.inre.asu.edu/shigematsu.html>.

^{vii} Personal communication, 2004.

^{viii} Personal communication, 2002.

making. **This intimacy nurtures the feeling of a caress or an embrace, and can lead to that state of quiet self-awareness that I seek to evoke.**

Creating the artwork in such a physically immediate and intimate way prompted me to consider the relationship between me (my body) and those engaging physically with the artwork. What was the role of *my* body in *their* experience? Did the engagers have a sense of 'handling' my body when handling the work? Although made against my own naked skin, my aim was not to provide engagers with a replication of my experience or to provide them with a 'maquette' that fit my body. Certainly it was not to give them some kind of sexual or sensual 'prop' that was in any way linked to me. To avoid this kind of development I intentionally chose casts that had ambiguous shapes and used textures that were not normally associated with skin, reducing the potential for this, or at least converting it to a subconscious level.

The Use of the Artist's Body in Art

Using one's own body in the marking of art engages a state of intimacy. Artists have used their bodies in various and overlapping ways: serving as a model for the artwork or as a tool; becoming the material of the artwork itself (i.e., some installations); and as the medium, canvas, or activator of expression (i.e., body art). In this chapter contextualization centres on the making or process, and I have considered late twentieth/early twenty-first century artists who have produced art objects through the use of their own bodies.

There is a clear comparison to be made between my work and that of Giuseppe Penone's, in particular his piece *Soffio 6 (1978)*, where he takes a cast of the front of his body in clay. The connections to what I have done within this research are in working with the 'negative space' of the body (exploiting the space immediately adjacent to the skin) and our use of our own bodies in the creation of the work.



Figure 52. Giuseppe Penone, 'Soffio 6' (1978) [109]



Figure 53. Antony Gormley 'Sense' (1991) [110]

Antony Gormley also does this in his piece *Sense* (1991) where concrete blocks contain a void made from his body.



Figure 54. Teja van Hoften, from 'Oevers' (2001)
[111]



Figure 55. Teja van Hoften, from 'Oevers' (2001)
[112]

Teja van Hoften, a Dutch artist, has used the body as a template for positive casts. In the work documented in her book *Oevers (Shore)* she produced small but intimate clay objects by squeezing the clay against her body with her hand [113].

Although Penone, Gormley, and van Hoften, have used the body in making, as have I, our start and finish points diverge. In Penone's work he represents the body, i.e., the piece is *figurative*, albeit in the negative. Gormley's piece, on the other hand, represents the *idea* of the body, the body-void which is enclosed within the concrete block being barely visible. Clearly, one of the intentions of Gormley's and Penone's sculptures was to represent their *own* bodies in various ways, whereas my intention was to create work that engaged the *viewer/toucher's* body. In fact, the piece Practical Exploration 8.5^{ix}, which was made using the breast area of the body cast, was too explicit in representing the breasts; it did not invite touch. Van Hoften's piece feels much closer in spirit to what I was trying to accomplish, although I doubt she expected her audience to put the finished work against their bodies.

The issue of figuration, in particular the relationship between the figure and the body, was significant within this project. Few artists make a distinction between them, and if they do, simply define the 'body' as animate or living (and subject) and the 'figure' as inanimate and non-living (and object)^x. Yet this oversimplifies the many layered meanings and nuances that we invest in these terms. For instance, to limit oneself to these definitions is to deny the objectification of the body, which feminist critics have been considering extensively for the past decade or more^{xi}. If someone uses his/her body as a form of expression, as for instance a dancer might in sculpting his/her body through training and dieting, or as Stelarc does through mutilating his skin and sinews [114], the body becomes both subject and object. In this work I chose to relate to the *body* in terms of a personal sensory experience, and define the *figure* as an outward representation of a body. **A figurative form engages the viewer's**

^{ix} See Appendix 2, page 223.

^x For instance, when asked at The *Fragmented Figure* conference in Cardiff in 2005 how he saw the distinction between the two, Doug Jeck from the University of Washington pointed to his body and said, 'body', then to an image of his work and said, 'figure'.

^{xi} For example, see Susan Bordo. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

awareness of an object as separate from him/herself, whereas engaging the body shifts the viewer/toucher's focus to an internal self-awareness.

Through the investigation of the relationship between subject and object, I was drawn to look at artwork that conceptualizes body extensions. In Rebecca Horn's *Finger Gloves* (1972) long finger extensions served as tools as she explored the space around herself. In *The Feathered Prison Fan* (1978) two large fans of feathers open and close, enveloping the performer as she stands between them. However, in both cases the performer became the artwork, the object, even though she may have perceived the extensions as part of herself, part of the subject. When viewed by the audience the extensions and the performer become one object, and can be perceived only as object. I also produced what could be considered body extensions, but they were not extensions to be seen on me by the audience. Instead, the intention was for the person interacting with the work to perceive them as part of themselves, part of the subject.



Figure 56. Rebecca Horn
'Finger Gloves' (1972) [115]



Figure 57. Rebecca Horn 'The Feathered Prison Fan'
(1978) [116]

The issue of 'the remove', or the distance between the artist making the object and someone else's experiences of that object, also arose when

considering Horn's work^{xii}. Horn's own experience of the work clearly had a high sensory impact on her. Do we have a similar sensory experience of her work to what she had, by identifying with her through our experience of imagined or remembered touch?

At this point in the research I needed to think beyond my experience of the making of the artwork to how others experienced the finished artefacts. Investigations into Nishida's writings about 'pure experience' that I began during these practical studies, and the articulation of my own experiences of *chanoyu* (Japanese tea ceremony) which resonated with tactile experiences of these works, formed the basis for later exploration.

^{xii} See *Practical Exploration 11*, p. 93.

CHAPTER FIVE

EXPERIENCING - INTO THE EMBRACE

CONCEPTUAL EXPLORATION

A bodily progression:

seeing → touching → grasping →
lifting → holding → caressing → embracing

FROM SEEING TO THE EMBRACE

In Chapter Three I sought to understand the mechanics of how we sense our bodies and the world around us. In Chapter Four I explored the experience of making the sculptural forms. In this chapter I will explore the experience of the finished work.

People who interacted with the 'Cast Hugs' made statements such as 'I want to protect it; it needs a cuddle' and 'It feels...satisfying.' These types of comments and my own reflections led me to understand the experience as a moment occurring in the everyday but which suspends the mundane, offering the participant a moment of private reflection through self-awareness.

I made the sculptural objects explored in this chapter with the intention of looking at ways in which participants were moved away from sight alone and its required distance, to the intimacy of physical contact. They were made with the idea of more fully engaging the body's sense of touch, the experience being defined as a progression: seeing → touching → grasping → lifting → holding → caressing → embracing. This Exploration follows the course of the toucher's experience, from seeing to embracing, with each stage giving rise to new thoughts and explorations.

Seeing...

The lure the draw-in the come-on. From the corner of your eye an oddly shaped ceramic object catches your attention, turns your head, demands full frontal viewing. It beckons, calling you towards it. What you see changes as it fills more of your vision-framed world. Curves and bulges move one into the

other; rounded edges disappear below and beyond your sight. Its detail begins to emerge, marks on the surface, marks of texture, marks of making. It draws your hand. Movement of the hand towards it, as the artist has moved her hand in the making.

Touching...

First one fingertip, then all, touch the surface of the ceramic object. Searching, questing, questioning, exploring, discovering. Does it feel like you expect it to feel? It is familiar – echoes of the earth, of hard-packed soil. It is hard, but the pads of your fingers feel soft against it and the minute undulations they encounter soften the hardness. Smooth but rough, your fingers discern a rhythm in the textured surface that follows the larger rhythm of curves and bulges. Impossible to ignore, the sensations prompt a response – engaging, urging. You fill your cupped hand and move it over and around the curves, establishing a third rhythm with your movements. You palm the surface, over an elusory shoulder here, a rounded belly there. Familiar yet not familiar.

I wanted so much to reach through the bars and touch him,
to press my fingers against his skin, because it seemed only
by touch that I could be sure all this was actually
happening.... [117]

'Seeing is believing, but feeling is the truth.'¹ But feeling, sensation, is not just verification of the truth. It is something in its own right. An active sensation overrides the intellectual occupations that clutter our minds. It switches off those recurring moments of criticism and self-censorship, of ourselves and the world around us. Kitarō Nishida says:

To experience means to know events precisely as they
are. It means to cast away completely one's attitude of
discriminative reflection, and to know in accordance with
the events. [118]

¹ *Attributed to Thomas Fuller (1608-1661), British Clergyman and author.*

This is what he calls 'pure experience', a 'direct' experience prior to the separation of subject and object [119], a moment of pre-intellectualization.

In pure experience, our thinking, feeling, and willing are still undivided; there is a single activity, with no opposition between subject and object. Such opposition arises from the demands of thinking, so it is not a fact of direct experience. In direct experience there is only an independent, self-sufficient event, with neither a subject that sees nor an object that is seen. [120]

Yet this does not preclude the possibility of the individual. Pure experience contains each individual's past and each individual's consciousness, yet it is the 'self-actualization of the universal.' [121] The individual and the experience are interdependent and exist one because of the other. 'It is not that there is experience because there is an individual, but that there is an individual because there is experience.' [122]

A pure experience is one that is fully focussed, one where the experience and the experiencer are indistinguishable. '[A]n unconscious unifying power...guides attention.' [123] Yet this attention is not a fixed moment; it flows.

That focus, that indistinguishability –

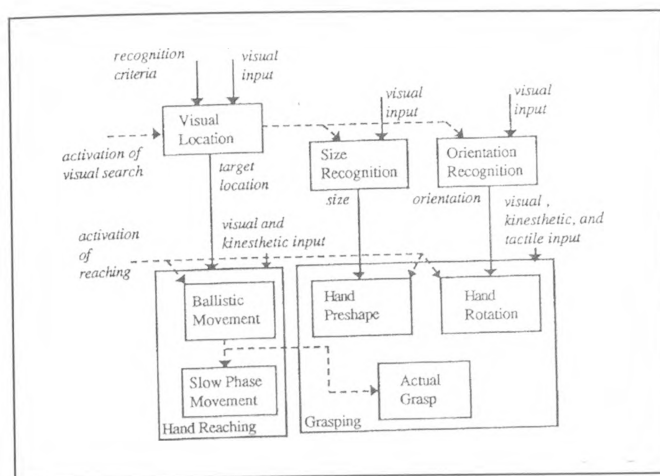
...and when we touch
we enter touch entirely... [124]

Grasping...

The scientists M. A. Arbib and B. Hoff describe the 'reach to grasp movement' and the subsequent grip in this equation [125]:

$$J_0(x_0) = E \left\{ (x_N - x_G) | x_0 \right\}^T Q_N E \left\{ (x_N - x_G) | x_0 \right\} + E \left\{ (x_N - x_G)^T V_N (x_N - x_G) | x_0 \right\} + E \left\{ \sum_{k=0}^{N-1} u_k^T R u_k | x_0 \right\}$$

Arbib goes on to describe it diagrammatically like this:



Arbib's Coordinated Control Program (CCP) for reach and grasp. [126]

Neuroscientist M. Jeannerod offers this as an explanation of reach to grasp:

...grasping is driven by internal representations about objects. Thus, the initial stage of the grasp (the preshape that occurs during the reach), is a transitional stage where the hand posture and movements express the representation that the subject has formed about the object. Fingers shape in anticipation to object size and shape, and the wrist rotates in anticipation of object orientation to give optimal stability to the grasp. In addition, during this stage, forces are generated which will be applied immediately at the time of contact, in order to grasp (grip force) and lift (load force) the object. These forces are largely adjusted on the basis of visual cues about whether the object is deformable, slippery, heavy, etc. [127]

How complicated it seems to reach forward and grasp an object. How difficult it seems to go from seeing to touching to grasping. Yet how easily it is accomplished. Like grasping an idea, making it your own, absorbing it into yourself.

Your hands settle into a grip on either side of the ceramic object. Sliding slightly they adjust to fit a curve here or there more comfortably, more securely.

They press inwards towards the object's centre. You lean forward slightly to draw your centre closer to the object's. The fine muscles of your hands now engaged, your arms tense in anticipation....

Lifting...

In the small Japanese tearoom you quietly sit with your legs folded under you. The contained space of the tearoom folds around you; its human proportions make you feel secure, safe, placed. The calm dimness rests your eyes and makes the muted natural ambers and browns of the walls, *tatami* mats, and wooden ceiling glow.

The host places two scoops of powdered green tea into the teabowl, lightly tapping the spoon on the bowl's edge. Dipping a ladleful of almost-boiling water from the kettle, he holds it precisely above the teabowl and slowly rotates his wrist, allowing just enough hot water to run out of the ladle for one bowl of tea. Leaning forward he rapidly whisks the tea with a bamboo whisk until the tea becomes frothy, then slows his movement. Finally, inscribing a spiral in the tea, he lifts the whisk clear of the pale green foam. He picks up the teabowl, turns it, and places it closer to you.

You bring the teabowl back to your place and settle yourself on the *tatami* as the quiet of the tearoom again pervades. Using your right hand, your thumb on the rim, your other fingers secure at its foot, you bring the teabowl closer, then exchange a bow with the host. You breathe. Then you lift the teabowl, placing it in your left hand and feeling the warmth of the tea spread through the ceramic bowl to fill your open palm. Moulding the palm of your other hand around the side of the teabowl, you cradle the bowl that cradles the tea. You raise it slightly and bow almost imperceptibly. Turning the teabowl two quarter turns, you slowly but smoothly lift it and place its smooth edge against your lips.

Lifting is not just a function in the tea ceremony. It is deliberate, considered, imbued with consciousness, self-awareness, and shared action.

In the gallery your hands cup the curves of the artwork as you steady it and lift it. Your movements and the sensations evoked resonate with the cupping and lifting of the teabowl, as you feel its size, its shape, and its texture.

Holding...

Meditating you cannot hold a thought. It skitters or simply vanishes. You bring it back but cannot anchor it. This time it flows through and out of your mind like hot sand through your fingers.

But if Merleau-Ponty is right and your body is both sentient and sensible [128], your body and mind different sides of the same leaf [129], and your mind an 'incarnated mind' [130] (a thought produced through the body), then how might you anchor it?

You feel the smoothness of this paper sliding between your fingers as you read. As long as you keep gripping the page, you can hold the sensation. It does not skitter or fade or vanish.

You pause. And even in the pause you continue to feel the paper's smoothness in your mind.

This materiality, this sensation, is an anchor. So...you sit holding the ceramic object. You feel its weight, the pressures it creates as you move it, adjust it, turn it over. The pressure points of weight vary, some large and barely perceptible; some small and sharper. As you hold the object, your mind remains focussed, attentive.

Caressing...

The French philosopher and feminist thinker, Luce Irigaray, says that the caress is '...an invitation to rest, to relax, to perceive, to think and to be in a different way: one which is more quiet, more contemplative, less utilitarian.'

[131] Rabbi Ouaknin, author and director of the Center for Research and Jewish Studies in Paris, elaborates:

The caressing hand characteristically remains open, never tightening into a grip, never getting hold of; it touches without pressing, it moves obeying the shape of the caressed body. [132]

The caress is not a possessive action but rather an act of exploration, an exploration of the difference between you as your conscious body and the other.

As Irigaray says:

It is an homage of the evening, of the feast, of the spring to what I have perceived, sensed and experienced of you during the day, the week, the winter, during daily life clothed in grey of ordinary demands...[133]

Touching, stroking, fondling are the physical actions of the caress, actions which can be committed without the agreement of the one touched. To be a caress, however, it must evoke a mental state of intimacy, that both encompasses and goes beyond this physical touch. In this way, the caress is always consensual, reciprocal in feeling and in expression. 'A *yes* from both should precede every caress.'ⁱⁱ [134] The caress is an opening, an invitation to lift the emotional veils we choose to wear in our everyday lives and reveal a glimpse into our private inner world. Through the caress we can overcome our physical inhibitions and engage our senses in a moment of revealed need and fulfilment of that need.

ⁱⁱ 'It is important that each has been able to assent freely before the other approaches and goes beyond the sphere of subjective integrity, an integrity which should be protected by a right. A *yes* from both should precede every caress.' [Irigaray, Luce. *To Be Two*, New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 26.]

The caress is a reawakening to the life of my body: to its skin, senses, muscles, nerves, and organs, most of the time inhibited, subjugated, dormant or enslaved to everyday activity, to the universe of needs, to the world of labor, to the imperatives or restrictions necessary for communal living. [135]

This opening extends both outward to others and inward towards ourselves, giving us a moment of self-reflexive contentment, for the caress reveals only that which is calm and whole within us.

Your hand slides over the textured surface of the artwork, a caress that is self-revealing.

[The caress] give[s] me back the borders of my body and call[s] me to the remembrance of the most profound intimacy. [136]

Embracing...

Hugging, the sharing of the physical intimacy of your body with another, is instinctual. A newborn baby will bring her arms together when she is startledⁱⁱⁱ. This clutching instinct fades by about six months, but for most the need and desire to embrace lasts a lifetime. As we grow through childhood the role of the embrace changes. Initially, it is strongly invested with a sense of safety, indeed it may provide refuge in dangerous circumstances. As older children we continue to hug for emotional support and consolation, not just for physical security. As parents and friends we hug to experience the joy of feeling protected by and of protecting those we love, and as an anchor of trust. We hug to communicate. We hug for the recognition and acceptance of another. We embrace as part of the sexual development of a relationship. In fact, there are health benefits to the embrace as well. A recent study shows that women, in

ⁱⁱⁱ The Moro Reflex, also known as the startle reflex, is a vestige of our primatehood. Startled by the sensation of falling or a loud noise, a newborn baby will throw its arms wide, then clutch them back together in an attempt to grab onto its mother. See 'Moro Reflex', University of Maryland Medical Center, <http://www.umm.edu/ency/article/003293.htm>. (Accessed 4 September 2007).

particular, benefit from being hugged and hugging.^{iv} Finally, we hug for the sheer sensual delight of it, for the simple surge of pure physical pleasure. The experience of the hug contains all this and more.

I hug my son and my focus is on him, on his needs, his comfort. I hug my partner and my awareness and focus is shared between his comfort and my own. I hug one of these sculptural works and my focus is reflected back on myself, centring down on what I alone am experiencing.

Embracing a tactile object can engender within me a sense of self through a continuous double-loop of emotional and proprioceptive^v introspection and a simultaneous awareness of the world. It is about me, but it is also about the object I hold against my body – the taking of the object into my sense of self – the closing or filling of the space between me and it. This is the moment of the embrace, a moment of pause in the everyday. '[This moment] is an opening of oneself to the immediacy of the ever-changing moment beyond distinctions and beyond the "this and that" world....[It is an] unfixed, dislocated sense of space or place...[and] affirms the fluid, moving "viewpoint" of direct experience—one which allows infinite variations, interchangeability, and the blurring of separate things.'^{vi} [137]

^{iv} University of North Carolina studies showed marked benefits for cardiac health, lowered blood pressure, and less pain in people who hug and are hugged. This was due to raised levels on oxytocin, known as the 'bonding' hormone. Women benefited more than men. See Karen M. Grewen et al. 'Effects of Partner Support on Resting Oxytocin, Cortisol, Norepinephrine, and Blood Pressure Before and After Warm Partner Contact', *Psychosomatic Medicine*, Issue 67, 2005, pp. 531-538.

^v Proprioception is the sensing of one's body in space and in relationship to objects.

^{vi} This space can be understood within the Japanese Zen concept of *ma*. *Ma* is sometimes translated as 'space', 'interval', or even 'place', but it is a more complex concept. Richard Pilgrim, an authority on Japanese culture and religion, says:

Ma is grounded in a particular kind of awareness and sensitivity in which the self is emptied into the immediacy of each passing moment, a moment including both the passing forms of things and the inarticulate depth perceived in, through, and in between them. The self thus rediscovers itself in direct relationship with the other, and not as set off against it; space and time are not distinct things either from each other or from the human participant, but are closely related to the events and experiences taking place in them. The philosopher Nishida Kitaro, in fact, closely associates the idea of place with both self-awareness and the conjunction of time. Place is a space-time continuum as immediately experienced. [Richard Pilgrim, 'Ma: A Cultural Paradigm,' *Chanoyu Quarterly*, no. 46, 1986, pp. 45.]

In this way the embrace can be both grounding and fluid, opening and resolving. Using Nishida's acceptance of 'absolute contradictories' [138] we can experience the changing and changeable nature of ourselves within the embrace.

The embrace has no aesthetic boundaries. There is no one to look over your shoulder, figuratively or literally, and judge your judgement; there need be no artistic censorship of your reactions to a tactile experience. It is your embrace, and yours alone.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATIONS

experiencing the artwork

surfaces

shapes

more Cast Hugs

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 17

Surface Treatment and Colour

See Appendix 4, pages 248 - 252, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

My anecdotal experience of the influence of colour on touch led me to think that soft and subtle, naturally occurring colours were the most tactilely enticing. Further, there was an issue of association. Many people have strong associations with specific colours. For instance, pastel colours symbolize babies for many, greys have associations with stones, browns with wood. I believe that in northern Europe bright colours are often seen as commercial.

With these thoughts in mind I had used only the natural colours of the clays. At this point, however, I thought it important to further consider colour and surface treatments and to determine if the use of colour, glaze, and other possible treatments might be beneficial in distinguishing issues of tactility and visuality.

Using existing work from previous Practical Explorations I investigated proprietary glazes (for reliability), rutile (an oxide I had used in my studio work to provide a warm colour range prior to undertaking this research project), and terra sigillata (a fine smooth clay slip).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

These studies indicated that a gloss surface detracted from the tactile experience I was trying to create, even when used in conjunction with uncovered areas on the surface. To my sense of touch the gloss glaze was unpleasant, discouraged handling because it appeared slippery, had strong associations with glossy tableware and sanitary fittings, and acted as a layer to cover both the clay itself and its inherent textural qualities.

The use of oxides left the surface of the clay well-exposed to the hand as opposed to the glazed areas of other pieces, but made the piece appear even drier than the bare fired clay. This was visually unappealing and therefore not a tactile enticement.

The use of terra sigillata was the most promising. Terra sigillata is fine clay in liquid form, which gives colour and smoothness. It was successful on one piece which had a bold texture but I was concerned that it might cover up a finer texture.

The earthy colour of the honey-coloured terra sigillata was acceptable, as was the naturally white terra sigillata. Many of the untreated low-fired colours of the clays were also pleasant. Light colours appear to reveal both the forms and the textures better because of increased shadowing.

The brightly coloured glazes used in this study were not effective tactilely or visually. They made the work more visual than tactile, focusing the eye on colour rather than on any other quality the pieces may have had. A semi-matt, satin glaze might be useable but such investigation would have introduced a new concept outside the scope of this project.

The neutral colours of a pebble, such as you might find on a beach, were brought to mind where these investigations produced quiet earth colours. The colours of coastal stones are generally muted, usually with subtle variations, and do not detract from their feel. They are not glossy unless they are wet. As you handle them you can experience a texture that is similar to the rough/smooth feel I was trying to create.

My strong tactilely aversive reaction to both the bright colours and the quality of gloss glaze in this study led me to conclude that quiet subtle shades of neutral colours were the most appropriate to pursue. I also felt strongly that any applied finish should be clay-based.



Figure 58. Glazed form (17.3)



Figure 59. Rutile form (17.5)



Figure 60. Glazed form (17.1)



Figure 61. Glazed form (17.2)

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 18

Solid Forms

See Appendix 4, pages 253 - 254, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Reflecting on works from the previous chapter it was clear that the shapes of the forms were being determined by three factors: my body, liquid plaster, the balloon. I wanted to see if I could capture the unpredetermined quality produced by the plaster casts by building up very soft clay directly on my body. Unlike the earlier studies of direct clay forms^{vii}, I wanted to try to eliminate the restrictions imposed by producing a hollow form. Two pieces were constructed in solid clay directly on the body and textured at leatherhard.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Only one of these forms was at all successful, but it was not as successful as previous pieces. Even with additives in the clay to make it lighter, the pieces were all too heavy. There appeared no particular benefits to pursuing this building technique.

^{vii} See Chapter Three, Practical Exploration 6, p. 58.



Figure 62. Solid form (18.3)

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 19

Casts in Cloth

See Appendix 4, page 255 - 256, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

One of the reasons the solid pieces were not successful was because of the resistance of the solid clay. I wanted to find another way to work in which I could use my body directly but not restrict the form to a pre-formed latex balloon. I decided to go back to plaster casting. However, knowing that the balloons were 'imposing' specific qualities (e.g., smooth and bulging) to the finished forms, I thought it appropriate to investigate other methods of casting. I made cloth sacks and used those to cast hugs, rather than the balloons.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The finished plaster casts did not fit the body, probably because of distortions caused by the fabric. 'Corners' and points also limited possible 'fits'. The pressure that was created in casting using the balloons was not duplicated in the fabric, causing the forms to be shapeless and lacking in subtlety. There was no advantage to working in fabric casing rather than latex, and I decided not to pursue it further.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 20

Body Builds

See Appendix 4, pages 257 - 259, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

I decided to revisit building hollow forms directly on the body. I thought that perhaps my improved building techniques and general knowledge about the forms might make these works more technically successful than earlier pieces. Using a coil and squeeze technique I formed the works around the curves of my torso. After doing the structural build, I allowed the clay to harden to leatherhard before working the forms for shape, then smoothing them and applying stamped textures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Further cracking was caused by the irregular thickness of the walls due to working at leatherhard when I could not determine the thickness and irregular drying, even when drying over many weeks. Only one of the four forms 'worked' visually, and none tactilely. I realized that one inducement to lift the work was missing in three of the pieces – **a curved side, or 'bottom', that visually lifts it from the surface on which it rests.**



Figure 63. Built on body (20.3)



Figure 64. Detail (20.3)

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 21

More Cast Hugs

See Appendix 4, page 260, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

After the limited success of studies investigating the techniques of building solid forms on the body, casting in cloth, and building hollow forms on the body, I re-investigated casting plaster in latex balloons, using sizes and shapes of balloons not previously used. Nine cast hugs were made using one 46 cm balloon and eight 92 cm balloons, three of which were heart-shaped. Casts were created across my torso as I lay on my side, another was held around my shoulder, and another as I reclined against a wall.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A significant number of casts were produced in a variety of shapes, providing ample choice for later development. The 92 cm balloons were able to hold plaster up to about 46 cm across before bursting, which proved to be a satisfying size to handle in the finished work.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 22

Work in Progress Show 2006

See Appendix 4, pages 261 - 264, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

The Work in Progress Show in December 2006 was my first opportunity to show the **new work made specifically from and for the embrace**. As in the previous year, it was a mixed student show of both ceramics and glass.

In light of observations made at earlier exhibitions, I created a private and separate space to provide a calm and quiet area for visitors, where the distractions of the exhibition were limited. The space isolated the pieces and provided a well-signalled invitation for visitors to handle the artworks.

A room was constructed within the gallery with a circular walking route through it. I painted the walls a quiet golden tan colour to make the room a bit darker (but not oppressively so) and to give a sense of warmth and comfort. Small uplights were used on the floor of three walls. In the centre was a low wide plinth on which were artworks and cushions for sitting. In one corner was a small square plinth low to the ground, with one piece resting on a cushion. There was also a narrow chest-high plinth, on which was a small cushion and a single piece. Various additions and changes to the setting were made during the exhibition and differences in audience responses were noted. More words about

touching and the embrace were gradually handwritten onto the walls, and finally a small image of me embracing one of the artworks was added.



Figure 65. Image on wall during exhibition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Creating an intimate space was successful although it did exclude those who, for one reason or another, did not wish to enter such a private space. The dim lighting and warm earth colours effectively created a quiet, contemplative atmosphere. At one point I realized that the space had the distinctive feel of a Japanese tearoom, partly because I had unconsciously chosen typical tearoom colours and lighting levels.

Observation showed that as many people interacted with the artwork as did not, although only a few 'embraced' the work. No one lifted the pieces that were on the lowest or the chest-high plinths.

There was a significant positive response and only a few negative comments although this is understandable as most people are hesitant to criticize an artist's work to the artist personally. Existing understandings were reinforced and new ones emerged among the written and verbal comments. These included: *general* comments such as 'Going towards a new way of feeling art --- very good. Seeing is not enough.'; comments about the *physical experience* such as 'The surface is good. It feels porous. If it were 'ceramic' [glazed], it wouldn't feel the same. It

would be too much like something on a shelf then.', 'It fits. I just want to wrap my arms around it.', 'Because it is ceramic I expected it to be hard and cold. And it was, as long as I was handling it. But as soon as I fit it to my body and found a place where it was comfortable, it didn't feel cold or hard anymore.'; and finally, comments that expressed *a state of self-reflection and awareness* such as 'It's so sensual. I feel it reconnects me with my sense of touch, makes me more aware.', 'The baby-like scale and weight makes me feel protective of it, but I think it's more protecting "the child within" than protecting some baby substitute.', 'It's so intimate and personal.'

This exhibition provided the first clear evidence that through the artwork itself and the setting in which it was displayed **people could be enticed into overcoming some of the common taboos against touching artwork**. However, it was significant that not many people were willing to engage beyond resting the artworks on their laps and touching them with their hands.

The most effective 'cue' to touch and handle the work was seeing someone else handle it, followed by seeing the small image of me handling it. The small size of this image was important in limiting the dominance of visuality. Did it, however, make it performance? Other questions arose as to whether the work had entered into the realm of installation art. These issues are discussed in the Reflection to this chapter.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 23

Using Casts as Models

See Appendix 4, pages 265 - 266, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

In considering the unpredetermined qualities of making the plaster casts I decided to investigate another way of building that would free me from using moulds, which I feared might be limiting the potential of the work. Pieces were coiled using the plaster casts from Practical Exploration 21 as models. They were finished with a variety of textures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This technique was not successful. By giving up the exact replication of the original shapes achieved by using moulds, the works no longer fit. Although by coiling I had hoped I would be able to make the walls thinner and therefore have more control over the weight of the final works, in reality, the opposite was true, as thinning the walls also resulted in a loss of the freshness and subtlety that the casts had.

I decided against pursuing this technique further.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 24

Press-moulded Forms

See Appendix 4, pages 267 - 271, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

In evaluating nine plaster cast 'hugs' made in Practical Exploration 21 in terms of their fit and feel against the body, I selected six that I felt could be made into ceramic works that would suitably engage the body's sense of touch. I then assessed those in terms of visuality. Three were chosen as the most intriguing visually. The pieces were press-moulded then uniformly sprigged^{viii} all over, each piece using a different design of my making. They were treated with terra sigillata^{ix}, a fine clay slip.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

These five pieces fulfilled many of the physical criteria that were established over the course of this research project, such as size, weight, shape, and texture. The terra sigillata surface was pleasant to handle and relatively resilient. Analysis of all five pieces appears in the next Exploration, which is about the Degree Show, in which all these pieces were included.

^{viii} A sprig is a small clay ornament made from a mould that is applied to the ceramic piece before firing.

^{ix} See Appendix 4, Practical Exploration 24, p. 267 for terra sigillata recipe.

Press-moulded form 24.1

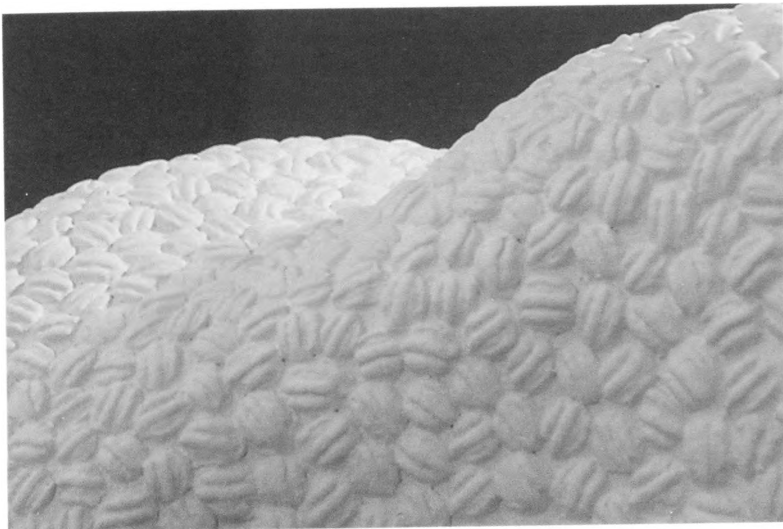
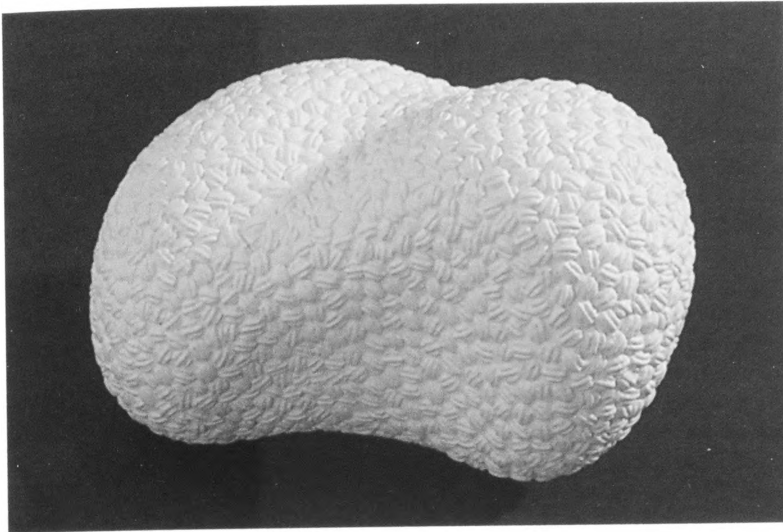


Figure 66.

Press-moulded form 24.2



Figure 67.

Press-moulded form 24.3

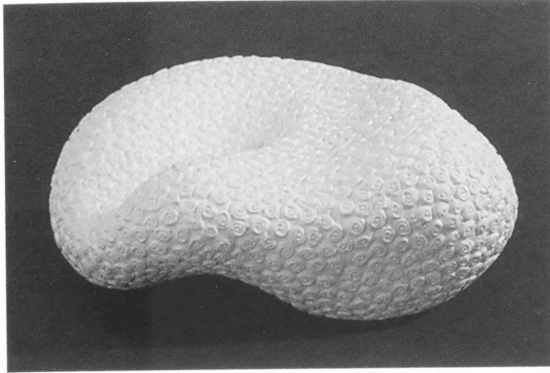


Figure 68.

Press-moulded form 24.4.

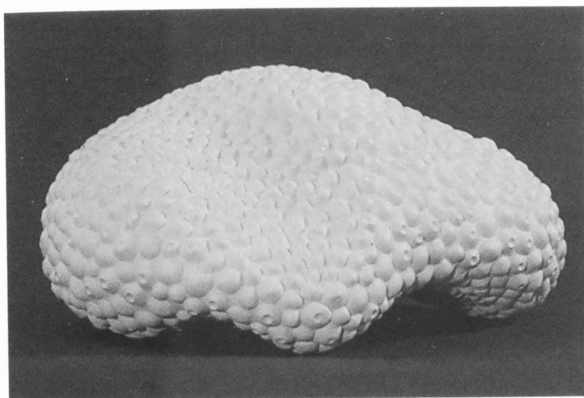


Figure 69.

Press-moulded form 24.5



Figure 70.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 25

Degree Show 2007

See Appendix 4, pages 272 - 277, for details of this study.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

In 2007 the Royal College of Art Degree Show, which is usually in two separate parts, was combined into one exhibition over a period of two weeks to celebrate the 150th anniversary of The Great Exhibition, the proceeds of which had funded the College. The Department of Ceramics and Glass showed in a large tent constructed in Hyde Park along with the design and the other applied art department. The School of Fine Art exhibited separately in the College galleries. The show was open 12:00 – 9:00 every day.

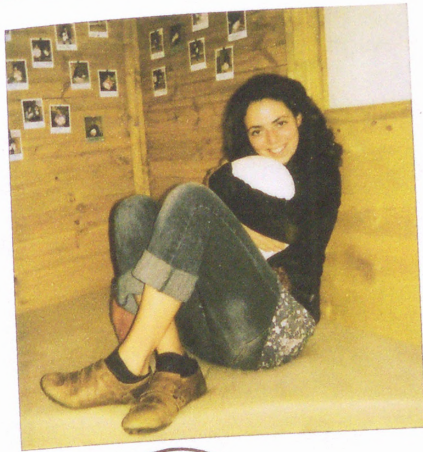
Within this context I had two primary aims. The first was to present the artwork to what was expected to be a large audience, using the opportunity to observe individuals' responses to and feelings about the artwork, both through observation and conversation. The second was to explore issues of setting.

From previous exhibitions it was clear that the setting in which the artwork was housed was crucial for encouraging physical engagement with the artwork. **Visitors needed to feel intrigued enough to want to touch and handle the work, and comfortable enough to overcome their taboos about touch and touching artwork.**

I asked the show designers^x for an enclosed space and was given a garden shed measuring 2.58 x 1.78 m, which I could adapt as long as I 'did not disguise the shedness of it'. Having decided that modifications needed to be made, I brought in the theatre designer John Clarke. We removed two-thirds of one long wall of the structure. Inside we constructed a large wooden triangular bench with a natural flax-covered foam seat, sufficiently low so that women seated on it could comfortably rest their feet flat on the floor. Across from the bench a shelf unit was constructed that housed nine of the cast ceramic hugs. The shelves were made small, more storage than display, and did not face the opening of the shed, so were not within easy sight of passers-by.

I was at the Show for most days for most of its two-week duration. Approximately 48,000 visitors passed through the tent. Although many chose the other route that missed Ceramics and Glass entirely, and others may not have been drawn into my space because of the shed or what they could see of the artwork, I still had hundreds of visitors. To help overcome the tactile apprehensions that many people have about touching artwork, and to promote a comfortable social atmosphere, I decided to speak directly with as many of them as possible. I explained that the intention was for the artwork to be picked up and described them as Cast Hugs, and often I placed a piece in their arms directly. I took Polaroid photos of people interacting with the work, which I asked them to sign and I then tacked to the inside wall of the shed. I decided against having any written 'instructions' about handling the work.

^x The show had two designers responsible for the overall design concept, and Ceramics and Glass was given a design brief of trestle tables with unfinished wooden tabletops.



Roxy Peder.



Jeremy Raphael

Figure 71. Polaroid images from Degree Show

COMMENTS FROM VISITORS

Visitor response was considered on two levels. First, I informally gauged the response from observation of individuals' willingness to handle the work, how they went about it, whether they brought back other visitors, their facial, body, and non-verbal aural expressions (for instance, ahhs and sighs), and secondly, their spoken or written comments.

I maintained a neutral stance as far as I was able, except where I felt that that stance would lead to stilted and therefore discomfoting conversation. However, the demands of an exhibition of this nature and size, and ethical constraints about recording visitors, meant that I could not avoid some bias in recording observations and verbal exchanges. I also recognized that visitors often interacted with me as much as with the artwork.

Comments were either written by visitors themselves or noted by me as accurately as possible after visitors left. After the Show, I analyzed the

comments, looking for common threads. I identified twelve themes that I felt were significant, which I broke down into categories and sub-categories as follows: (1) general responses, both positive and negative, enthusiastic and reflective; (2) comments about subjective feelings and associations, such as calmness and comfort, giving the objects personalities, the analogy to babies, and how the artworks elicited a self-reflective stance; and (3) comments about the physicality of the artwork, its hardness, heaviness, textural qualities, and temperature. Below is a selection of quotes from visitors:

GENERAL RESPONSES

General comments

- Great concept – huggable art! It's surprising. I've never hugged a work of art to my body before. What a great experience!
- So very sensual, fresh and definitely intimate.
- It's extraordinary really. Really seductive – and vaguely disturbing.
- It makes you want to lean into it.
- As sculptural objects these are beautiful, they are also visually very inviting. You want to touch and hold them.
- I love your work and want to sleep with it.
- Soft, hard, squashy, resilient – need to touch them!



Ginny Winstanley
Aislin Winstanley
Lyon Nunn
Jane Elliot
Niamh Winstanley



[Handwritten signature]

Figure 72.

Comments encompassing more than one aspect of the artwork

- It makes me feel sleepy. Maybe that's because I need something heavy on me to fall asleep. The weight feels safe and reassuring. It feels significant. Also, the texture is important. It feels right. Calming. It wouldn't work if they were soft. The hardness feels strong, safe.
- I...longed for my big heavy cat, who I miss profoundly. Comforting to my very painful back and shoulders. Extraordinary & deeply engaging.
- I am astonished by the way these rock-like works fit so lovingly around all the curves, the places of my body. They are cool to the touch, and appeal to the sensual, maternal aspects of my being. They are marvellously feminine, voluptuous and strangely comforting.
- Snuggling up next to an object that 'fits' with your body – quite intimate yet strange, as you are not the only person who 'fits' with that object...it's like sharing the same intimate moment – that is experienced by many others but at different times in different places – people with different associations, experiences and backgrounds.
- At first it feels cold, but very quickly you can feel it becoming warm. And as you move your hands over it, you can feel where you've been holding it. So you have a sense of how you are changing it as much as it is affecting you. It's responsive. And you feel responsible for it.



MB 14.6.2007



Jo-Anne

Figure 73.



Helen Lorraine Turnbull Holly Jackson



Holly Jackson

Figure 74.

Stories, ideas, and analogies

- At the Kobe earthquake museum, they give you forms [objects] to hold for comfort while you watch a video of a forest.
- I bet you've had lots of uptight English people. We crave intimacy but run a mile from it. I think these objects should be compulsory in schools in England.
- Reminds me of large stones in my village in Iran where women in labour press their bodies against the stone to take away the pain. Also, we have stones that we believe take our emotional pain away. We say then that the stone is crying.

Other uses for the artwork

- ...people in counselling or doing work with therapists may benefit from holding one of these as it is comforting and distracts from issues in your mind.
- The continuous texture is safe and let's you explore it to find new ways. An analogy for new patterns in life. Could be used in psychoanalysis.
- I feel I should be weeping, having a breakdown, like it's drawing it out of me.
- I felt like I could feel my heart rate slowing. It's so calming.
- I would use these in my practice as a marriage counsellor.
- You could use them in a nursing home for people with dementia.
- It would be good on a children's ward.
- Good for physiotherapy.
- Good for massage.
- Good for a sexual health clinic.
- Have you looked into bioenergetics? It's about releasing emotional blocks through releasing physical blocks.

COMMENTS ABOUT FEELINGS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Calmness and comfort

- A wonderful experience, so gentle.
- Great cuddling. I feel comforted now.
- It's a settling feeling – but somehow, not, at the same time.
- When you get it in the right place, it works. It rests on you, feels comfortable.
- Strangely comforting.
- Who would have thought that ceramics could be so comforting?
- It's so soothing. It sort of melts into your body.
- I don't think I'm going to give it back. I don't think I can let go of it.
- I love 'em. They're fantastic. Huggable. Make me feel kinda warm inside.
- Like holding a purring cat!
- It's a surprising experience. Intuitively you think it won't feel very nice because it's hard and heavy. But it feels good. It's soothing.

Hugs

- **So** comforting! Hugs are the most special thing in my life!
- I can see that they would fit anyone – after all, hugs fit everyone.
- I play the bassoon in an orchestra and this reminds me of that. During times when I'm not playing, I hug my instrument and run my fingers over the holes. The holes [indentations] feel like those.
- The hug is about a closeness, sharing an emotional charge. I feel like I am getting the charge from all the people who have hugged this before me. It's important that it's been hugged before – a shared hug. The hug gives you emotional energy.

Self-reflection

- Pressing the curvaceous shape into my body felt as if I was hugging an extension of myself.
- Feels like it's become part of me. I feel very possessive of it. [It's] MINE!
- It's like a missing part of me.
- It makes me feel slightly more important because now I have a purpose, I am looking after something important.
- [After leaving] I feel like I've still got it against me.
- It's a kind of self-discovery.
- It's about me but at the same time it's about this object.

Making animate what is inanimate

- Well, my friend [the artwork], we must part.
- Almost like your mother. Makes me feel comfortable. I've got, like...a bond with it now. When I'm not hugging it, it feels wrong.
- It wants to be held – it doesn't want to be put back in its box.
- I don't want to let go of it now.
- The big smooth one feels like you have to look after it. The others feel like they're looking after you.
- You feel much more attachment that you should to an inanimate object.
- Why do I feel protective of it?
- I feel that the textured ones reject me.
- They all have different personalities. Do they have names?

Babies

- What's our best experiences? Those of holding our babies – the warmth, the way they fit up against you, their preciousness. This evokes that.
- Tummies. It's a foetal moment.
- It's so like a baby. It's making me all broody.



C Mark Byrd



Beth
x

*clare - my
-x-
baby!*

Figure 75.

COMMENTS ABOUT THE PHYSICALITY OF THE ARTWORKS

About weight

- Amazing experience. It feels like it's breathing for you, like you've stopped breathing and it's doing it. It's the weight. The weight feels like it goes forward, not down. It's very therapeutic. I feel relaxed now. It really does work.
- It's good they're so heavy. Something lighter wouldn't press against your body.
- It's definitely the weight that does it. It wouldn't be the same if it was lighter. It's like when someone you love leans on you while you're watching TV or something. It's restful, and reassuring.



Sullivan



Kay Beaumont

Figure 76.

About texture

- The smooth ones have more potential for experience; the heavily textured ones make more of a statement and close off the experience for me.
- The texture reminds me of a recurrent nightmare I had as a child when I was feverish. The smooth blankets would suddenly become like a Hazelnut Cluster. [She went on to touch every artwork.]
- The textured ones are therapeutic because there's a lot to investigate. The smooth ones are more soothing.
- The bare ones [without terra sigillata] feel more natural and those textures do too. The textured ones feel more like they were designed.
- When I can't sleep at night, I stroke the edge of my pubic hair – not in a sexual way – and this reminds me of that.

About hardness

- At first it felt hard, then nice. And cold, then warm.
- The hardness of the ceramic is interesting – like a hug. A hug is soft but strong and firm too.
- Isn't it amazing that something so hard can feel so soft?
- Strangely comforting for something so hard.
- Irresistible! You were not here but I cuddled your forms anyway....As I very carefully mauled your 'barnacle' surface form I was reminded of the occasions when I wake and have the strange sensation that my pillow is rock hard!
- I like the way the hardness makes me move around and fit my body to it, rather than the other way around. It makes me aware of muscles and my body that I'm not normally aware of. It's good.

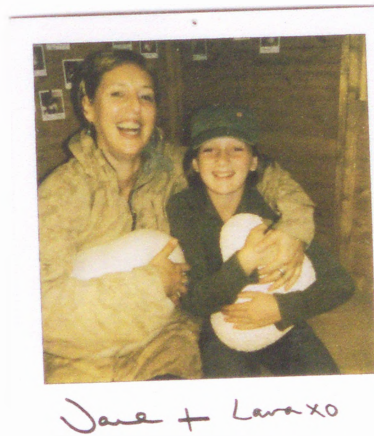


Figure 77

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The responses that the artwork elicited from visitors were much stronger and more freely given than I expected. This was partly due to the large number of visitors, as there will always be a certain percentage of people with whom the work will strike a chord. The high level of enthusiasm for the artwork itself and

the concept behind it, and the strong responses I observed in people handling the artwork resonated with Tiffany Field's claim that we live in a touch hungry culture.^{xi} One comment that was given a few times was that the artwork was 'oddly' or 'strangely' comforting, and a few people commented that they found the experience of touching the work uncomfortable. Significantly, these same people also went on to handle and touch much of the work. I believe that for them the work tapped into the border between pleasure and discomfort, a cognitive dissonance perhaps. An analogy might be in how we sometimes continually touch, rub, and 'worry' a new blemish or a mole.



Lorenzo



Gabrielle and
Cass
Baumberg
Melissa
Murray

Figure 78.

The audience seemed to differ from that normally seen in the College galleries. Numbers alone would support this as almost twice as many people came to the tent as visited the College galleries. The tent drew a more general audience, including tourists from all over the world and many families. The socially diverse audience seemed to have fewer inhibitions than I had observed in previous exhibitions. This could be attributed to cultural and sub-cultural differences, the fact that the tent did not project the normal atmosphere of a gallery and, perhaps, some of the visitors were not regular gallery-goers and

^{xi} See Chapter One, p. 15.

therefore had not acquired the taboos associated with galleries. They handled the work freely and 'tried it on' in many different ways, for instance on or under their heads, under their feet, leaning back against it, and lying down with it between their legs. They were also very free with their reactions (positive and negative) to the artwork, both in facial and body expression and verbally. Between some people, even strangers, a sense of camaraderie formed as they shared the artwork and discussed it among themselves. Families seemed to use the artwork to strengthen bonds as mothers and fathers hugged children who hugged the work, or in one case, a grown daughter hugged her mother.



Figure 79. *The shed.*

The garden shed was given to me. However, there were benefits in that many of qualities I would have sought to create in another setting were intrinsic to the structure. For instance, the materiality (unfinished wood) gave a sense of familiarity and comfort and complemented the subtle off-white colours of the work. The shed is a familiar structure and that probably encouraged visitors to feel comfortable, or at the very least not intimidated. It gave a degree of privacy without cutting visitors off from the rest of the exhibition. This perhaps led them to feel a little less self-conscious as they interacted with the artwork. It also restricted visual stimuli from the rest of the exhibition, of which there was an excess as the exhibition was large and open-plan. Some people liked the shed;

others were clearly discouraged from entering the space. Sheds carry connotations: a place to get away from family; a space for a child to create a hide-out or a teenager to have an illicit cigarette; a work area for hobbies, and it is also integrally linked to the garden. Some felt that the shed was part of the concept of the artwork, rather than a setting for it. In addition, the shed is something of an art cliché. In recent years artists have blown them up^{xii}, floated them downriver^{xiii}, created audiovisual installations of them^{xiv}, and even Sunday supplements have featured shed culture^{xv}.

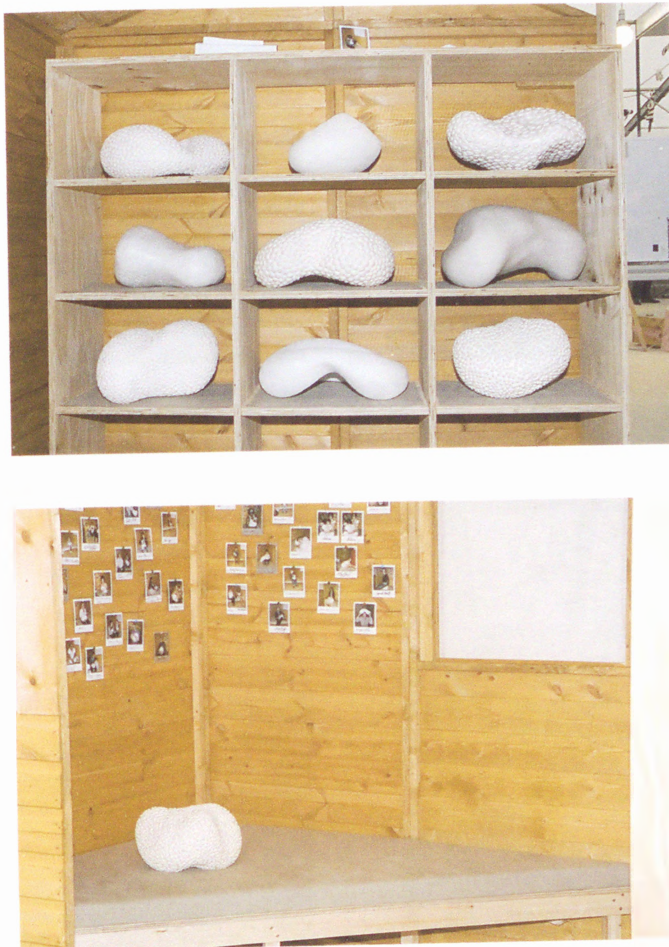


Figure 80. Interior of shed

^{xii} See Cornelia Parker, *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View, 1991*, Tate Modern, at <http://www.tate.org.uk/colddarkmatter/>. Accessed: 12 September 2007).

^{xiii} See Simon Starling, *Turner Prize 2005, Shedboatshed (Mobile Architecture No 2), 2005*, at <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize/2005/simonstarling.htm>. (Accessed: 12 September 2007).

^{xiv} See Jem Finer, *Landscape, 2005*, Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast, N Ireland, at <http://news.ulster.ac.uk/releases/2005/1519.html>.

^{xv} See Terence Conran, *Great Escapes*, *Observer*, Sunday, 27 August 2006, at <http://lifeandhealth.guardian.co.uk/gardens/story/0,,1856539,00.html>.

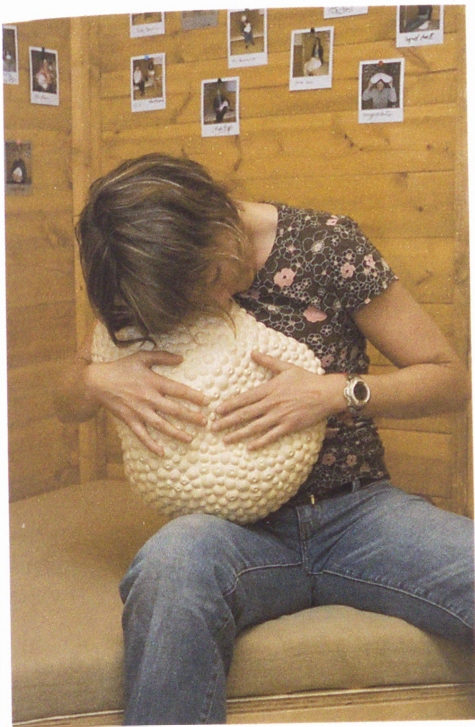


Figure 81. Within the shed.

As an artist this exhibition was a positive experience. I found that I too became a participant, interacting with visitors as they interacted with the artwork. Their comments challenged my views about the work, raising questions about its function, the ways in which it could be brought into the public realm (curated), the role of performance, and the strength of the emotional response that can be brought to bear in experiencing the work tactilely. Some of these issues I have been able to address within this project; others remain beyond the scope of this PhD, such as the function of the work in therapeutic settings.

The overall tone of the response was so intensely positive that there can be little doubt that many people had a fulfilling physical engagement with the objects. However, the diversity of responses reinforced earlier finding that there are no universals to be discovered and that one individual's reactions to a specific artwork can be completely opposite to another's.



Naomi!



Tony Andy



Daniel Fred



John Bollett

Figure 82. Polaroids

REFLECTION

experience, not object

a fully embodied experience

the decentred subject

art that engages the thoughtful body

INTO THE EMBRACE

After considering the experience of the making in relation to myself as artist in the previous chapter, here I grapple with issues of the viewer/toucher's relationship with the finished artworks. It was clear that what I was attempting to do was not only specifically to create an object but also to create an experience through the participant's interaction with that object, and engaging the thoughtful body. As my primary intention was to entice the viewer to fully interact with the artwork I was led to ask the following questions: Could the objects alone lead the toucher to the embrace? Would instructions on interaction with the objects invalidate my aim of privileging experience over the spoken or written word? Did I need to consider the larger environment, rather than the individual objects? I intended these works to be personal possessions, in the home or workplace of someone in particular, not as works in a gallery or as public art, yet the work would most likely need to go through a gallery venue to find that final setting. Would creating a specific gallery setting of colour, lighting, and sound affect this concept? Some of these questions were addressed in the exhibitions of December 2006 and July 2007, where I controlled the setting, including the lighting, the colour of the room, the placing of the objects, and the inclusion of text, also adding further text, images, and the spoken word to cue visitors to touch and handle the work. However, there were two other factors that influenced interaction with the work in a gallery setting that I could not invoke. First, the artwork could not be shown on its own in a solo setting. Generally, in a mixed show most if not all of the other artwork would not be available for touching. This could discourage people from touching my work. Secondly, in my professional practice as an artist, I realized that the visitors'

prior exposure to the artwork was an important contributor to tactile engagement, as familiarity can lead to a suspension of normal gallery taboos.

Observing visitors at the Royal College of Art Degree Show (July 2007) was important in furthering my understanding of the interactive experience as being a progression or movement from sight to the embrace. This is reflected in the Conceptual Exploration earlier in this chapter. What is not reflected is my consideration of the social aspects of the work. I tussled with issues of exclusion – what was my audience? For instance, making the space discrete from the rest of the exhibition gave privacy and encouraged people to touch the work by giving them a place where they would not feel observed, but it also excluded people who would not consider entering such a private area. I decided, as I had earlier in the project in regards to evaluating the qualities of specific textures, that ultimately these decisions were mine (being informed by analysis, observation, and discussion). I recognized that I could not engineer a specific response but should simply present the artwork and the settings I chose.

Within the context of controlling the environment and setting of the artworks, questioning the role of the object and my relationship as artist to the audience led me to explore the concepts of installation, performance, and participation art.

Installation art covers a broad spectrum of work and has many manifestations and definitions. Riemschneider and Grosenick define it as 'A work of art that integrates the exhibition space as an aesthetic component.' [139] In Claire Bishop's explanation, 'An installation of art [how the work is displayed] is secondary in importance to the individual works it contains, while in a work of installation art, the space, and the ensemble of elements within it, are regarded in their entirety as a singular entity.' [140] This is a useful criterion as it establishes that the exhibitions I have mounted fall outside conventional installation art because the artworks themselves are of primary importance and have an aesthetic life beyond the specific settings. However, other aspects within the conventional definitions of installation art do help to provide a

framework for discussion of my work and these became particularly evident during the shows at the Royal College of Art and in Kyoto. In *Installation Art* Bishop states that there is a shift from the 'spectator' to the 'embodied viewer' [141] and this is also the case in my work. 'Rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance, installation art presupposes an *embodied* viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision. This insistence on the literal presence of the viewer is arguably the key characteristic of installation art.' [142] Julie Reiss says that 'the spectator is in some way regarded as integral to the completion of the work.' [143] This concept of completion articulates my position that my Cast Hugs are not complete until they are held.

The issue that Bishop raises of 'activation and decentring' as a position in installation art is also relevant to my work. 'Instead of *representing* texture, space, light and so on, installation art *presents* these elements directly for us to experience. This introduces an emphasis on sensory immediacy, on physical participation...' [144]. Within my work touching, handling, and caressing reinforces this kind of 'sensory immediacy' and 'physical participation'.

More challenging to my research are Bishop's arguments about the postmodernist theory of the decentred subject. As do Bishop and many others, I have chosen to conflate fragmentation and decentring within this discussion of performance art. Within my research I have accepted the postmodernist position that we are not coherent subjects. We are decentred in that not only is there no coherent permanence to ourselves as individuals, but cultures are also decentred in that they can have no one unifying concept or structure, whether it be God, a political stance, or any other 'ism'. Bishop suggests that the experience of installation art is both decentring and centring, that installation work 'insists on our centred presence in order then to subject us to an experience of decentring.' [145] She poses the question '...how is this "fragmented" viewer to recognise his or her own displacement unless from a position of rational centredness?' [146] and argues that the artwork itself '*instates* the subject as a

crucial component of the work.' [147] Here, the implication is that we approach the artwork as coherent subjects. In contrast, in reflecting on my own work, I premise my understanding of postmodernism on the impossibility of the coherent subject, and suggest that what Bishop refers to is not a fragmentation or decentring of a coherent subject caused by the viewing of the artwork, but rather that the artwork is simply *representing* fragmentation, which perhaps the spectator understands and recognizes as part of his or her being.

In contrast to Bishop's view, my artwork offers an inverted experience of centring and decentring. We live our lives as decentred or incoherent and this includes our approach to works of art. Decentring is not a perspective or something we perceive, but rather a continuously changing way of being, as one subject (oneself) is fragmented, another is created which in turn is fragmented. I suggest that we approach the artwork already experiencing fragmentation. My aspiration is to grant those who physically engage with the work the possibility of a moment in which they may have a *sense* of coherence or wholeness. A subjective moment, a centring moment.

As is evident from the documentation of the practical explorations, I began to refine and develop the work produced after the December show based on observations and critical assessment made during that exhibition. Certainly some people engaged with the work, some even embraced it, and I was able to 'cue' more people to touch the work with text and imagery. However, I felt that there were others who might have more fully engaged with the work if I could have invested in the gallery setting ways to further overcome the inhibitions against touching the objects. I considered how I might achieve this for the Degree Show. From the beginning of this project I had felt that the visuality of the work had a two-fold purpose: to be pleasing to the eye and to entice viewers into becoming touchers. However, the project had moved from touching to embracing, and they are not the same experience. While many touched the artwork it appeared to me that many did so to verify their visual perception of its shape or texture, rather than becoming bodily engaged with it. This limited

kind of touching forced me to articulate different qualities of touch that I was hoping to engage and evoke, and led me to decide that enticement could be only part of the visual equation. **I began to see using 'enticement' as one of the criteria for the work as a further capitulation to visual dominance.** In the Degree Show I decided to more aggressively attempt to create a balance between the visual and the tactile experience. To this end I provided times where the work was physically offered to each visitor by me, rather than displayed, ensuring that visuality and tactility were perceived almost simultaneously. The objects were also handed from one visitor to another.

This raised the issue of performance.^{xvi} Even though I 'perform' the presentation of an object, the work is not performance art. In performance art the artist becomes the object that the onlooker (subject) beholds. My intention was to get the work from presenter to experiencer as quickly as possible, ensuring a shift away from the presenter and onto the object and the toucher's experience of that object. Similarly, it could be said that the experiencer is 'performing' the piece. However, my intent was to deny an audience of the toucher's experience in the hope that it would eliminate some self-consciousness. This I did by creating a physically separate space from the rest of the exhibition, one that carried within it connotations of privacy. The aim was to facilitate an experience in which **the artwork and the experiencer become two parts of an object, and also two parts of a subject.**

Although there are aspects of my work that resonate with the developments of interactive art and participatory art, the work is neither. Interactive art generally interposes some kind of digital or computer interface between the viewer and the artwork or may involve a directed and constructed activity between the viewer and the work [148]. Activation is the only common thread between the work of this project and interactive art.

^{xvi} *Riemschneider and Grosenick define performance as 'Artistic work performed in public as a (quasi-theatrical) action.'* [Riemschneider, Burkhard and Grosenick, Uta (eds.). *Art at the Turn of the Millennium, Köln: Taschen, p. 567.*]

Participation art shifts the principle element of the artwork from the object (or, as in installation art, the setting as object) to the social and political cohesion created within a community that is brought together to create the work of art [149]. Bishop cites activation, authorship, and community as the three principles of participation art [150]. 'The desire to create an active subject' [151], activation of the participant within the artwork, is clearly reflected in this research project. However, the issue of authorship is less tenable. If the creation of the art objects themselves is seen as the final creative action of the work then authorship remains firmly with me as artist. If it is indeed the experience of the work that is paramount then authorship remains open. My own understanding is that the work lies somewhere between. It is not created by the person engaged with the work but rather completed by them. Community, Bishop's third tenet, certainly can be and has been created by groups interacting with the work. For example, in the Japan exhibition two people were seen sitting together, both exploring the work while it rested on one's lap. I was invited to display work at the Victoria & Albert Late Night, *Touch This* in 2005^{xvii}. There I observed two women engaged with the work, this time one seated and holding the work and the other standing next to her giving 'instructions' as to what to do next with the object. Thirdly, in a research student seminar, one student lifted, held, and handled one of the sculptural objects, resting it on her lap as we spoke about possible settings for the Degree Show. Soon another student asked to hold it. It was passed from lap to lap throughout the seminar with comments about the piece being freely and easily inserted into the main conversational thread of the seminar. However, none of these occurrences were orchestrated on my part, developing rather as incidental assets.

Issues of installation, interactive, and participation art have relevance to the work produced within this research project. Considering these issues I came to understand the artworks not as singular pieces or even singular experiences

^{xvii} *Touch This! Friday Late View, as part of Touch Me: Design and Sensation, exhibition, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 24 June 2005.*

of interaction, but rather as opportunities for many sorts of experience. The work can continue to evoke or generate new experiences in individuals and perhaps groups of people long after it has left my purview. These could include private contemplative moments, off-hand moments of distraction, group initiating moments with both non-verbal and verbal manifestations of the group dynamic, or even an object used in performance. Yet, even with this in the forefront of the mind, in the end the objects produced are just that, objects. The work is not about the setting, although that can be used creatively to enhance and evoke the experience of the work, and it is not necessarily about community, although that can be a result of the work. **A self-reflective state comes not from being in a specific place or setting, but through active and bodily engagement with the objects themselves.**

I have written elsewhere about the issues arising concerning tactility and visuality, but I propose that there is a third and more important quality manifested in this work. That is one of physicality. Physicality can be understood as the object's objectness, encompassing both physical presence (shape, weight, scale, volume), the tactile surface qualities manifested in that presence, and meaning that may or may not be conveyed through interaction with the piece. **It is the physicality of the work that allows an encounter with it to be a fully embodied experience.**

Artwork that Engages the Body

Contextualization in this chapter involves late twentieth/early twenty-first century artists whose artworks engage our sense of touch. This can be experienced in several ways. The genre of installation art, as discussed above, serves as an umbrella, in that at least some of the artwork produced by the artists considered here can be said to be installation art. First, I consider artists who create spaces in which we are allowed or encouraged to engage our sense

of touch. Secondly, I look at artists who produce discrete objects to be touched. In many instances these categories will overlap and could be discussed in different sections. As far as possible I have included artists whose work I have directly experienced.

Ilya and Emilia Kabakov's *The House of Dreams* (Serpentine Gallery 2005-2006) presents a useful example of the creation of a touch-inclusive installation. This work, which continued their theme of utopia, had two distinct areas that submerged the visitor in a quiet other-worldly atmosphere. The small individual areas around the perimeter of the installation were created by hanging clean white fabric and providing hard white-draped 'beds' on which visitors could lie. These tightly constructed and oppressive spaces contrasted with the open views of Hyde Park that could be seen through the windows. The other area presented a circular inner sanctum of constructed white walls with four small rooms. As you lay on one of the undersized beds within one of the darkened tightly-enclosed rooms, coloured images travelled the walls, projected from lamps created by the Kabakovs.



Figure 83. Ilya and Emilia Kabakov *The House of Dreams* (2005) [152]

This installation certainly engages one's sense of touch, although it was ambiguous as to whether the intention of the engagement of touch was to be pleasing or not. The actual materials used for the installation made me feel as if I were on a stage set and that the spaces had been created to be consciously

perceived as illusions. The fabrics felt cheap and synthetic and the beds hard and uninviting, more like examination tables than beds, reinforcing the imagery of a medical context already created by the curtained areas.

The use of materials we do not associate with pleasure (whether conscious or unconscious on the part of the artist) can also be seen in Franz West's *Seven Adaptives* (late 1970s, casts 2003), which were shown as part of *Franzwestite: Franz West - works 1973-2003* at the Whitechapel Gallery, London [153]. These squared ring-like pieces could be placed over the shoulder and across the body. West says, 'Early on I realized that the purely visual experience of an artwork was somehow insufficient. I wanted to go beyond the purely optical and include tactile qualities as well. My works aren't things one just looks at, but things that the viewer is invited to handle.' [154] The objects were certainly tactile and made to be handled yet my personal reaction to the work was a negative one. There were several reasons for this. I felt that the work was about action rather than the physical experience of the touching. The material of which they were made was hard, 'sticky', and unresponsive to the hand. They also sat uncomfortably on the body. As Nicholas Bourriaud says, 'Their "dirty" and plastery whiteness, their rough surfaces and the studied deformity of their contours does not predispose them to manipulation.' [155] Engaging with the *Adaptives* is a challenge rather than a pleasure. Video clips of people interacting with the *Adaptives* were included in the exhibition, accentuating the action-based nature of the work, and also objectifying the body by making it into performance.



84. Franz West, *Adaptive* (2001) shown at Whitechapel Gallery, London [156]

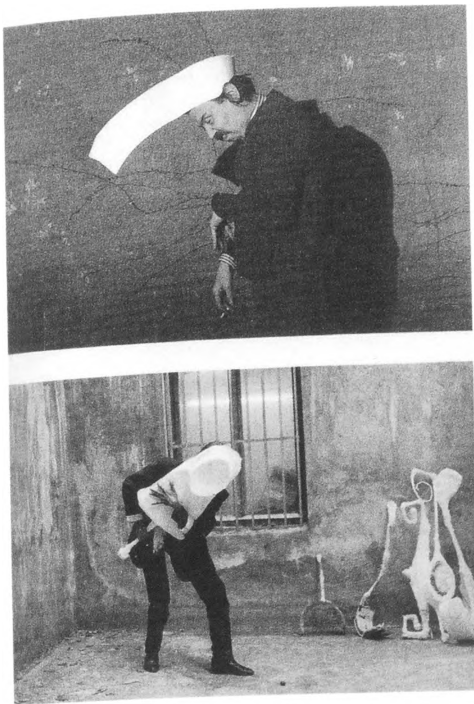


Figure 85. Franz West, *Adaptive* (1983) and *Adaptives* (1983-84) [157]



Figure 86. Franz West with *Adaptive* (1975) [158]

Another intrinsic aspect of the work was humour, as many of the *Adaptives* are oddly shaped and photos and videos of people interacting with them show them 'performing to the camera'. Overall, I had the impression that the work was more about the *idea* of touch than the sensation of touch. West's *Seven Adaptives* and the Kabakovs' *The House of Dreams* are as much about subverting a traditional aesthetic as further exploring or extending it.

By contrast Ernesto Neto's *Body Space Nave Mind* (2005) [159], which is also a tactilely engaging installation, makes you feel as if you are in a 'real' space, not one created temporarily for exhibition or as a stage set. This large construction of sheer fabric hung, stretched, and weighted from a frame is typical of Neto's installation work. I encountered it at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan, in the opening exhibition *Polyphony – Emerging Resonances* [160]. The tent-like structure is entered after removing your shoes. Because of the stretched fabric flooring, walking and moving within it is unsettling, giving you a feeling of disorientation, unbalance, and awkwardness.



Figure 87. Ernesto Neto, *Body Space Nave Mind* (2005) [161]

The 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art is a large public gallery with many visitors, so experiencing *Body Space Nave Mind* meant negotiating your passage with many others. This can also be unsettling. At the same time the diffuse light coming through the sheer material and the soft, giving quality of the tent's fabric make the space feel womb-like and disengaged from the world. In this piece you feel your own influence on the work and a blur of subject and object, as each step or movement stretches and alters the inner and outer shape. In other works (e.g., *Stella Nave* (2001) [162]) Neto also engages one's sense of smell by hanging bags of herbs and spices throughout. Neto also sometimes includes smaller objects within his installations. In *Mime Glip* (1999) [163] large amorphous sacks of human scale are filled with polyamide pellets. Three holes in the sides allow visitors to reach inside. The work *Humanoids* (2001) [164] takes this concept a step further, providing visitors with huge beanbag shapes with cavities for them to sit within and holes from which they can extend their arms and heads. *From What Are We Made, Made, Of Of* (2006) [165] is an installation piece within an enclosed space of many soft cell-like objects, referencing the body, growth, and conception.

Neto comes from a strong Brazilian contemporary art tradition of sensory engagement. In the 1970s another Brazilian artist, Lygia Clark, created interactive works that challenged the spectator to experience her works on levels beyond the visual. Many of the works explored interpersonal relationships, such as *O Eu e o tu: roupa/corpo/roupa* (*The I and the You: Cloth-Body-Cloth Series*) (1967), where a man and a woman discover gender metaphors by exploring cavities in each other's suits. This type of work led to larger communal pieces, such as *Baba Antropofagica* (1973), in which spectators 'vomit' threads that come from spools held in their mouths onto a 'sacrificial' spectator who lies in their midst. Towards the end of her life Clark began to see psychiatric 'patients' for 'treatment', using *Relational Objects* (1960s/1970s) that she created specifically for these treatments.



Figure 88. Lygia Clark, 'The I and the You: Cloth-Body-Cloth Series' (1967). [166]

Superficially it would seem that such works have little to do with the objects I have created, but the theorizing of Clark's work sheds a different light. Lula Wanderley, a Brazilian writer and psychotherapist, says that Clark's works are not about 'a sensorial outlining of shape nor some quality of surface, but something that dilutes the notion of surface and makes the object to be lived in an "imaginary inwardness of the body" where it finds signification. This is where the frontier is broken between body and object.' [167] In *Art in America*, Guy Brett says: 'Clark herself fought a constant battle for people to be able to continue to handle and play with the sculptures after they had passed into public and private collections. They were never intended to be merely looked at.' [168] Two of the three themes he lists as her significant contribution to the art world are also relevant to this project. He states that Clark's objects 'have meaning and structure only in the moment of direct bodily interaction with the spectator, now more accurately called participant' [169], and 'object[s]...no longer privilege the visual sense, but treat the mind and body as one.' [170]

Caroline Broadhead serves as a useful transition between the work of installation artists and those who produce tactile objects. Broadhead's work spans jewellery, textiles, installation, and performance art. She is the only artist considered here who was trained in applied arts and I believe that this is evident in her work. Broadhead has said that during her career she has gone 'from object to experience' [171], but even while focussing on the experience she never denigrates the object. She stresses that she was always interested in what it felt like to actually wear the pieces she created, and goes on to say, 'I was interested in how an object can make you feel something in a direct way.' [172] This is evident in her early jewellery and textile work, such as the *Tufted Necklaces* (1979-1981), where the work was made to be worn, to be experienced. When she adopted the metaphor of the dress, such as in *Invisible Dress* (1998), the work became more conceptual, and the audience no longer had a direct physical encounter with it. 'I see my work as a personal development; it is inward, not outward-looking. What started in jewellery, with implications of

wealth, status and value in materials, has evolved into work which has an emphasis on the insubstantial, the immaterial.' [173] However, with *The Waiting Game* (1997) she returned to physical participation while retaining the metaphor of the dress, as audience members tread on the dancer's dress. In *Court* (2003-2005) [174/175], a collaboration with dancer Angela Woodhouse, she continued with physical engagement, this time by having the dancers invite individuals to interact with them. There was a strong element of choice in this piece.



Figure 89. Caroline Broadhead 'Tufted Necklace' (1981) [176]



Figure 90. Caroline Broadhead 'Stress' (1993) [177]



Figure 91. Caroline Broadhead 'Invisible Dress' (1998) [178]

'COMING IN CLOSE'

In an article published in *Future Forecast / Outcomes and Issues: An appetite for change in the visual arts* by *Artists' Newsletter* in 2006 Rohini Malik Okin addresses the issue of the inclusion of tactility in contemporary artwork. She sees touch in art as 'coming in close' [179], both literally and metaphorically. She suggests, quoting Sarat Maharaj, that such artworks can lead us to 'other' ways of knowing and that 'these...are often rooted in the body and are aimed not at resolution, but at intuitive engagement.' [180] She goes on to say, 'The immediacy of contact does not necessarily lead to a more direct, unmediated knowledge, but may suggest an attitude of "not knowing". Touching need not be a grasping, a grabbing, a taking hold of in order to possess, but may be a gentle seeking caress.' [181]

Within my own work 'coming in close' led from sight to the embrace, which I found to be the fullest expression or manifestation of an experience 'rooted in the body'. The embrace closes the distance to such a degree that your vision of the object becomes redundant. This mirrors and reverses a long tradition where work is first considered visually, then might secondarily be found to have an interesting tactility. As stated earlier, whereas initially one objective of the project had been to entice viewers into becoming touchers and handlers, the practical explorations and seeing visitors respond to the objects led me to understand the work as evoking a tactile response that was always there, ready to emerge, though often latent or even unrecognized. Although I have not downgraded the importance of the visual qualities of the work, in later projects my position shifted to one that sought to privilege touch in a move of positive discrimination as an attempt to raise the status and value of touch to that of vision. Ultimately however, my position concurs with Okin's when she states that it is '[n]ot touch in opposition to vision, as suggested by an often-perceived dichotomy between the two senses, but a more subtly nuanced conceptualisation played out through different registers of tactility.' [182]

CHAPTER SIX

ACHIEVING INTIMACY – DISCUSSION AND OUTCOMES

A SELF-REFLECTIVE MOMENT

You scoot back in the chair, lifting and resettling the ceramic form on your lap, moving the weight of the work slightly as it lies across your thighs and abdomen. As you shift your position, the form moves with you, integrally linked to your movements, yet independent of you. You prop your foot on the chair, securely fitting the form between your stretched thigh and the soft roundness of your lower torso.

The ceramic form fits against your body.

For a moment you simply stay there quietly, a hand on either side of the form, the weight of it shared between your thigh and abdomen. Through your fingers you feel the hardness of the fired clay, yet its solidity feels natural, of the earth.

The form's materiality is pleasing – comfortable and familiar.

You pivot your hand and feel the form's active texture within your hand's sensitive inner recess. So subtle – a feeling easily missed. You cannot name the surface as rough or smooth – it is both. Sitting back to nestle the form against

your breasts and stomach, you drop your head forward onto its curve and run your cheek, then your lips, across its surface. Your lower lip tingles as it crosses the textured curve.

The form has an active texture, simultaneously rough and smooth.

Resting your cheek on the form you feel its reassuring weight against your chest. There is a sense of familiarity in the weight of it. The weight of a cat settled across your body in perfect repose? The weight of a slumbering lover's arm as it rests on you? Or perhaps just the pressure of a close friend's chest against yours in a warm hug of greeting?

The form is pleasingly heavy, its weight sensually satisfying.

You came into this room with your mind abuzz with randomly firing thoughts, some urgent and necessary and others pointless and aggravating. But the form has drawn your attention, and as you hold it within your arms you realize that those wayward thoughts have eased.

The form is a tactile mirror. First it captures your focus, then through your interaction with it, it shifts that focus away from itself and back to you, seeking that inner moment of peace that lies within you.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

In this chapter I revisit the Aims and Objectives set out in the Introduction through discussion of the methodology, practice, and theoretical understandings of the research and the relationship between them, and I will draw together the significant convergence points (in bold typeface) that arose during the project. Further, I will discuss what the project offers us within the context of touch, tactility, and the embrace and the way we live our daily lives.

Towards methodology

- **AIM:** To develop an applied arts research methodology that gives structure and clarity to the relationship between practice and theory within the project around issues of touch and tactility.
- **OBJECTIVE:** To contribute to the culture of applied arts research through the development of a methodology that fully integrates practice and theory.

Art-based research is a new field and as such benefits from the clear articulation of methodologies as they are created and subsequently challenged. Within this project I have developed a methodology that stresses the importance of giving structure and clarity to the relationship between practice and theory around the issues of touch and tactility. This integrated practice/theory model

has contributed to the culture of applied arts research through dissemination as papers and presentations in both research student and international conferences.

The research, although remaining primarily in the field of applied art, is on the conceptual fine art end of the craft spectrum. Historically, much ceramic research has focussed on technical and material advancement, where the research strategies have often used theory to interpret practice, or practice to illustrate theory. The key benefit of the methodological model followed within this project is the linked and intertwined nature of theory and practice, and the recognition and articulation of a positive tension between them that drives the research forward. In addition, the open-ended research paradigm is an approach that fits well into the creative world of art. Writing, serving as both theory and practice and also becoming a bridge between the two, has also been an important methodological aspect of this project. This can be seen in Chapter Four's Conceptual Exploration where weaving a written phenomenological account of the making of the Cast Hugs with consequent reflection on some of Merleau-Ponty's writings led to understandings that were both theoretical and practical, and in the beginning of this chapter where an encounter with a finished sculpture is 'analyzed' through the same emergent writing style. In Chapter Five the explorations looking into the progressive experience to the embrace helped me to recognize the significance of each step of the progression. For instance, thinking about lifting the teabowl in Japanese Tea Ceremony led me to more fully understand the moment of lifting my own sculptures.

The development of the methodology was dependent on several principles that became apparent during the course of the project. The first occurred very early in the research when it became obvious that **the qualities of the experiences of both the making and of the finished artwork, not the quantification of them, was a more appropriate focus for evaluation.** At this point I abandoned the empirical research method that I had been trying to 'fit' onto the project and sought a more emergent, less defined approach. This new

methodology included a second arising principle: that evaluation should be open and unrestrained and that I should **search for both commonalities and oddities within the results**. The third arising principle was that **experiencing the created artwork was the most important issue, not the artefact itself**.

I undertook this research as an artist-researcher, a role that is still being defined. Over the course of the project my understanding of this position developed and I became aware that it was distinctly different from my previous professional role as a ceramist. The interwoven nature of theory and practice within all aspects of the work and the use of writing as exploration, practice, as well as documentation have become integral to this new understanding.

Towards theory

- AIM: To investigate the theoretical precepts that motivated the practical development of the project, including the exploration of what makes us want to engage with a ceramic artwork through touch and handling, and how and why the body responds as it does to the intimacy of this exchange.

The above aim was fulfilled through investigation into the following theoretical strands: human physiology and the differing touch sensitivities across the body; anthropology and how the use of ceramic objects in some cultures differs from our own; the subject-object relationship, drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of the chiasm; and understanding the progressive experience that leads to the embrace and the importance of the embrace itself.

In human physiology gaining knowledge of the cellular and neurological structure of the body led to an understanding of how the body perceives and

processes touch. Significant theoretical principles within the physiological studies included the realization that **there is no universal sense of touch or tactile aesthetic**. Touch is something experienced by everyone, but it is experienced by each of us independently as individuals. Also of significance was the understanding that **the entire body has tactile experience, not just the hands**. This led to developing the embrace as a suitable avenue of investigation.

In anthropology I drew on Nigel Barley's statement that some African women potters make pots to fit their own bodies to aid carrying. This led me to investigate the possibility of making work to fit my body, and subsequently to fit others' bodies.

Developing an understanding of Merleau-Ponty's challenge to the subject-object dualism led to my creating **works that could be perceived as body extensions or part of the subject rather than as separate objects**. In addition, Merleau-Ponty's concept of the chiasm resonated within the making of the Cast Hugs as the boundaries between body and object blurred.

The theoretical free-form analysis of the progression from sight to touch to the embrace encompassed various approaches, some interpretive, some expositional, and some explorative. These included subjects such as a scientific view of the reach to grasp movement, Irigaray's references to the caress, and the importance of the embrace to both adults and children. All these perspectives informed and influenced the development of the Cast Hugs.

Other significant convergence points within theory included the leap to **understanding that over-focussing on visual enticement as a criterion in the artwork was a capitulation to the visual hegemony**. This challenged my approach and the assumptions underlying my practice.

The theoretical conceptualizations presented in this PhD should be seen as embedded in ceramic studio practice. For example, this is not a PhD about Merleau-Ponty's writings on the subject and object, but rather one that explores how an understanding of those writings might be melded with studio practice.

In effect, theory and practice merge into a working research paradigm of conceptual artwork. To prevent an ineffective grappling with too large a component of any one stance, theoretical strands within this research encompassed only issues that it was possible to rigorously explore through the practical work. For instance, in choosing to investigate Irigaray's writings I concentrated on the caress (placing that concept within a broader understanding of her work). I also had to direct the theoretical strands I was able to pursue, deciding, after investigating areas such as feminist perspectives of the body or a psychoanalytical understanding of touch, not to pursue such ideas or concepts because I felt that within the constraints of this study these could be seen as peripheral and that there was not the scope to consider them in sufficient detail.

It was not my intention to make a contribution to the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, the science of neurophysiology, or the aesthetic considerations of Zen Buddhism. Rather, my attempt was to bring those theoretical concepts into the world of ceramics and, conversely, to introduce art-based experiential evidence of the theoretical concepts back to the theoretical fields considered. For example, interacting with the artwork may challenge a neurologist's understanding of touch.¹

This project centred on the experience of the individual as maker and as viewer/toucher. Now that this initial work is done, the practice-based research could be broadened to consider areas such as social, community, and political issues. Feminist issues could also be more directly addressed.

¹ This has been started with the presentation of a paper at *Atoms to Art*, a conference on science and art (See Appendix 6, page 283), and in the publication of papers in *Interpreting Ceramics* (See Appendix 7, page 284) and at *New Craft – Future Voices* (See Appendix 9, page 286). Further papers are planned to disseminate the experiential understanding of these theoretical concepts. In addition, I am part of a collaborative study with the University of Cambridge Department of Developmental Psychiatry (Learning Disability) into touch and Asperger's Syndrome, and am exploring avenues about other possible collaborative studies which would use the artworks in various therapeutic settings (See Appendix 12, page 294).

Towards practice

- AIM: To create a body of work in fired clay that invites the individual to more fully engage the body's sense of touch, offering an experience of grounded sensuality.
- OBJECTIVE: To challenge the dominance of vision by creating a body of work that offers a physical, sensual experience for the viewer/toucher/engager.
- OBJECTIVE: To guide people towards valuing touch more in their experience of the qualities of sculptural ceramics, and to contribute to a developing tactile appreciation within the visual arts.
- OBJECTIVE: To encourage the extension of the existing gallery culture to include tactile engagement with ceramic sculptural objects.

A significant body of ceramic work was created that provided viewer/touchers with an experience of grounded sensuality by more fully engaging the body's sense of touch through the embrace. Insights occurring during the course of the research included an understanding that **engaging the body's sense of touch went beyond simply touching to handling, reaching out, lifting, and holding**. This led to the embrace, which offered not only a significant pleasurable physical response but could also lead to a **self-reflective experience**. The forms that invited the embrace and the textured surfaces of the sculptures were found to lead to a quiet self-awareness.

The objective 'to challenge the dominance of vision by creating a body of work that offered a physical, sensual experience for the viewer/toucher/engager' was fulfilled through the production and presentation of the artworks.

The various exhibitions of the artwork during the course of the research contributed to the fulfilment of the objective 'to guide people towards valuing touch more in their experience of the qualities of sculptural ceramics, and to

contribute to a developing tactile appreciation within the visual arts.' As is evidenced in Chapter Five in the documentation of the Royal College of Art Show, people did touch and hold the artwork, interacting with it both with physical and emotional intimacy. In addition, the objective 'to encourage the extension of the existing gallery culture to include tactile engagement with ceramic sculptural objects' was also achieved through the success of the exhibitions.

To entice people into touching and holding the artwork involved addressing issues of trust, comfort, and familiarity. Visitors felt intrigued enough to want to touch and handle the work, and comfortable enough to overcome any taboos about touch and touching artwork. Various settings were constructed to give privacy to visitors, and words, images, and the physical presence of other touchers were included to 'give permission' to visitors to handle the work. Ultimately, however, **the self-reflective state that could arise through engagement with these sculptures was not due to the specific place or setting, but arose through an active and bodily engagement with the objects themselves.**

The artworks were of fired clay, a material with which we have a 13,000 year history and with which we interact daily, yet my sculptural artworks provide us with new experiences of fired clay, distinct from our everyday encounter with functional ceramics. The sizes and weights of the artworks are between a large cat and a big baby, on the basis that this general scale and weight is familiar to most of us and often generates positive associations. Using an analogy such as this, rather than giving measurements, is intentional as these objects are not scientific illustrations, but objects to be interacted with day-to-day.

The first significant realization to arise during the practical explorations was that the **tactile quality of the surface of an artwork could not be**

considered separately from its form, and in subsequent explorations surface and form were investigated simultaneously.

The practical explorations and the application of an open-ended research approach led me to use my body directly when creating the artworks. **The intimate sensory experience of making the work became integral to the project as a whole. The sculptures were made specifically from and for the embrace.** The shapes of the final Cast Hugs are characterized by curves and bulges with no straight or angular lines, including a curved side or 'bottom' that visually lifted the work from the surface on which it rested, offering an inducement to handle the work. An opening in the forms was found to be a distraction to the overall tactile interaction with the work. **A consequence of keeping the forms closed was that it took the work away from the traditional vessel forms of ceramics and fully into the sphere of sculpture.**

All the later work has a sense of volume, of a filled space.

A very smooth surface was found to be or to be perceived as slippery, deterring people from lifting the work. Therefore, I textured the surfaces using various techniques, but maintaining an overall smoothness to the hand. My aim was to create **objects that felt simultaneously rough and smooth, soft and hard, stimulating and restful.**ⁱⁱ

There are no particular orientations for the work and they were held or placed against the body in many different positions by viewer/touchers. Significantly, **visitors found ways to embrace the objects that were different to the position in which the pieces fit me in the casting.** This influenced my understanding of my relationship as artist to the audience. The intention was not that the viewer/toucher would undergo a replicating or echoing of my experience of the making. Rather, the experience of the object is newly created by each person as there is a unique 'fit' between each piece and an individual's body, mind, and emotions.

ⁱⁱ This is another example of Nishida's 'self-identity of absolute contradictories'. See *Reflection, Chapter Four*, p. 109.

My experience of exhibitions of my studio ceramics prior to this research suggested to me that because of the self-consciousness sometimes engendered from the real or imagined possibility of being seen stroking a human form, if people are aware of bodily representation in an artwork, they are less likely to engage with it tactilely. In addition, even if it is abstract, if the work is figurative people tend to explore it visually, trying to distinguish the major features of the body. Because of this, I felt strongly that the objects should not be overtly figurative, even though they are wholly about the body.

Therefore, although cast against my body, the forms are ambiguous in shape with non-specific allusions to human figuration. The issue of body and figure has proved important.ⁱⁱⁱ The figure is seen as a realistic or abstract representation of the body, objectifying it and therefore taking the focus out of oneself and to the figurative object. My aim was to shift focus back to the person experiencing the artwork, from object back to subject, allowing the subject to absorb the object. This experience is not closed but progressive and continuing; engagement is not a lock-down position but an open-ended experience of changing focus, of giving and receiving, touching and being touched.

ⁱⁱⁱ See *Reflection, Chapter Four, p. 113.*

ACKNOWLEDGING THE THOUGHTFUL BODY

A culture of fear

This has been a project about finding comfort in a frightening world. We watched the Twin Towers as they fell. We watched the waters flood into Aceh Province in Indonesia. The disasters and tragedies of the world are closer to us now that they are graphically and audibly presented to us in real time. We are constantly reminded of the dangers that beset us in 'real place' as well as real time. 'Ladies and gentlemen, please keep your belongings with you at all times and report any unattended items or suspicious behaviour to a member of staff or a police officer. For your safety and security CCTV is used throughout London Underground.'^{iv} Fear can be independent of actual threat. A recent study showed that while crime rates in Britain are dropping, fear of crime is on the rise [183].

We live with fears within ourselves as well. Fear of failure can prompt us into working harder and achieving more, but it can also completely inhibit action. It can be fear of failure that keeps the virgin sketchbook virgin and the paper we had always wanted to write unwritten. Our culture worships intelligence and intellectualization (by which I mean the 'ignor[ing] of the emotional or psychological significance of an action, feeling, dream, etc. by an excessively intellectual or abstract explanation' [184]). Our society, especially

^{iv} Verbatim transcription from 17 August 2007.

our middle-class culture, values intelligent men and women above others. We fear not being clever enough.

Fear of failure extends to how we treat our bodies. Body manipulation through training, dieting, cosmetic surgery, and countless hours and pounds spent on making ourselves appear as we think we should appear, suggest that as a culture we are obsessed with our corporeality. However, this obsession often objectifies and commodifies our bodies, adding to a disassociated body awareness, awareness of the body as distinct from the mind.

A further manifestation of fear is of embarrassment, which I have observed in British culture. The fear of appearing silly or vulnerable, or worse, ridiculous, is a strong inhibitor and can stifle new experience.

That women have always lived with fear is well-described in Margaret Atwood's novel, *Lady Oracle*:

... I'd never developed the usual female fears: fear of intruders, fear of the dark, fear of gasping noises over the phone, fear of bus stops and slowing cars, fear of anyone or anything outside whatever magic circle defines safety. I wasn't whistled at or pinched on elevators, I was never followed down lonely streets.... Although my mother had warned me about bad men in the ravine, by the time I reached puberty her warnings rang hollow.... So when I [lost my fat and] shrank to normal size I had none of these fears, and I had to develop them artificially. I had to keep reminding myself: Don't go there alone. Don't go out at night. Eyes front. Don't look, even if it interests you. Don't stop. Don't get out of the car. Keep going. [185]

All of these 'women's fears' can be seen as a wider fear of touch, more specifically, a fear of *being* touched in ways that threaten and intimidate or might lead to abuse. This fear further contributes to the touch hunger that many people in the field feel we experience in our culture today^v [186]. Constance Classen goes as far as to say that living in a society as starved for tactile engagement as ours gives one 'the feeling of being out of touch with one's

^v See Chapter One, page 15.

society, one's environment and one's cosmos – an isolated fragment in an indifferent world.' [187] This project is partly a response to that touch hunger and the larger fears with which we live.

Away from fear

Our bodies are the sponges of all we experience. For some of us^{vi}, seeing images of the women of Darfur clutching their emaciated babies to their breasts or a Middle Eastern man mourning the death of his wife to a bomb on a bus gives us an overwhelming physical feeling of distress. Although we may be more buffered from direct experiences of physical calamity within our personal lives, and we may be safer and more sheltered than people of previous centuries, mass media ensures that we are never far from physical and emotional tragedy. We cannot ever hope to divorce ourselves from these kinds of images and the consequent stresses that they bring. Living a hermitic life divorced from the world we have created is not an option for most of us, especially those of us who feel we have a social responsibility to the world and those in it.

How are we to cope with these stresses and fears? A cat seeking comfort will curl up in your lap. A child will clutch at a parent's hand. As adults, we restrict our comfort times with other humans to outside the working day and we severely limit the number with whom we seek and gain physical comfort. We use distraction to try not to feel discomfort and fear. We eat for comfort. To try to alleviate our anxieties we use drugs such as valium, beta-blockers, cannabis, and alcohol, and even alternative substances like Rescue Remedy and aromatherapy oils. We watch endless hours of mindless television, read popular novels or magazines voraciously, and spend hours matching wits in intellectual

^{vi} New research into 'mirror synaesthesia' identifies some people who when seeing someone else being pinched, have similar brain activity as actual pain response. See Alison Abbott. 'Ouch, I Saw That: Some People Literally Feel What They See', *News@nature.com*, June 11, 2007. http://www.nature.com/news/2007/070611/pf/070611-14_pf.html. (Accessed: 20 June 2007).

discussions at dinner parties in an attempt to get away from the stresses we carry around with us in our bodies. We do not give ourselves a chance, and we find no relief from the recurring stiff neck, aching shoulders, headaches, and a million other stress-related physical symptoms. Or perhaps we use various forms of psychotherapy and counselling, all intellectual approaches.

What if we were to try to value our bodies/our sensations as much as our thoughts? If we sought forms of physical comfort, not just distraction, in our everyday lives through moments of pleasurable, associative physical engagement? It would not change our world but perhaps it would make our everyday lives a little more comfortable.

Touch, and in particular the embrace, is about intimacy. Craving intimacy is a normal human condition (probably arising from the human need for community, bonding behaviour, and child-rearing), but intimacy occurs in many forms and at many levels. As an American living in Britain it was at least a year before I realized that there are cultural differences around intimacy, and that I was shocking and alarming new acquaintances by talking of things in my life they considered inappropriately intimate. Physical intimacy is the same. Striking differences exist across cultures and between individuals. The kiss as a form of greeting, for instance, may be perceived as nothing more than social convention in some cultures but may appear as a form of intimacy in others. It is useful to note that the Americans I observed interacting with my work seemed more willing to lift, handle, hold, and embrace it, men and women alike, than their British counterparts.

Why might someone not touch one of my artworks? First is a lack of interest or desire. Not everyone is drawn towards tactile stimulation. Some avoid it. Some are averse to it. Then there are the cultural and personal taboos about touching. Many of us carry a taboo against touching in general, even if we are drawn to an object, and many more of us avoid touching anything that

might relate to the human body. Finally, within some cultures many feel that touching for touching's sake is a self-indulgence.

Then there are fears associated with touching art objects in particular. 'Do Not Touch' is the most commonly found sign in a gallery or museum. We are taught from a young age that we should not touch art. High monetary value may inhibit us from touching. There is also the fear of harming the artwork. Might I break it? Might I dirty it?

Intimacy also requires trust. To interact with an object you must first be in a setting that encourages touch, and second, be reassured that the object will not harm you. It must appear familiar or sufficiently reassuring for you to have no fear of it and, in interacting with it, it must fulfil those expectations. Allowing oneself the physical intimacy of interacting with an object, such as the artworks created within this project, requires a willingness to experience a level of self-intimacy, an acceptance of one's own physical and emotional state and an opening up of oneself to the sensation of pleasurable touch, that is acknowledging the 'thoughtful body'.

TOWARDS A CLOSE

At the outset of this project I considered the research to be about exploring and producing various tactile textures in fired clay. The emergent nature of the research led me to more complex and serious questions, which I have articulated and addressed. My open-ended research approach nurtured the use of serendipitous discoveries, weaving together divergent strands of theoretical investigation, and resulting in open-ended research outcomes. My work moved out of the sphere of the traditional ceramic vessel and into that of the sculptural object.

One clear finding was that there are no universals to be found in terms of a tactile aesthetic. Although universals cannot be established, this research project has contributed to issues about touch by opening out and articulating these issues in art and our society and by offering further questions about how art can be used and developed through investigating such issues.

There is no doubt that research will continue in the many fields in which touch is currently being investigated, such as medical treatment, psychology, anthropology, feminist theory, and cultural studies. It is hoped that more tactile and bodily engagement will be enacted within many other areas of our lives as well. The increasing number of tactile exhibitions and the inclusion of touch days in museums is evidence that the move to incorporate the body and all the senses in fine and applied art will also continue to move forward. An area for creative research might come from collaborative projects between some of these diverse fields, which would increase understanding across all areas.

As a result of my research I conclude that there can be substantial benefits to incorporating more touch into our everyday lives. The mind and body are integrally embedded in each other, and a bodily pleasure is inseparable from an emotional or intellectual pleasure. Touch can be a trigger for intimacy, with others and with oneself, and my work provides such a trigger. In exhibitions of the work I have presented sculptures and settings that have allowed individuals to successfully overcome the inhibitions and taboos that normally prevent them from engaging tactilely with works of art. This was done by producing artworks made both from and for the embrace, taking the experience of touching artwork beyond the hand and into a fuller engagement of the body. A positive moment of grounded physical sensuousness, a moment where everyday fears are suspended, for many, has been the result of the heightened body awareness and self-intimacy that arises from embracing the artwork.

The weight of the work on the thighs, the fired clay's texture under the fingertips, the surface moulding to the torso gives a sense of body awareness, a self-reflective moment of intimacy and sensuality, an engagement of the thoughtful body. Not the object itself, but the tactile experience of that object.

APPENDIX 1

DETAILS OF RESULTS FROM PRACTICAL EXPLORATIONS 1 – 2 (CHAPTER TWO)

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 1

Clay Workability

See page 36.

Clay bodies tested

Johnson Matthey's:

A. LTW

Potclays:

B. 1106 White St Thomas

C. 1106-30WB White Crank

D. 1120 Buff 'Grey' Clay

E. 1121 Buffstone

F. 1123 Special High Temperature Stoneware

Valentines:

G. Stoneware Arctic

H. Special Porcelain

Valentine's Earthstone Clays:

J. E/10 Extra Smooth

K. E/20 Smooth Texture

L. E/40 Handbuilding

M. E/70 Architectural Body

Testing Procedure

A three-point scale (1=poor quality, 2=acceptable quality, 3=good quality) was used for evaluation at Steps 2 and 4.

1. All clays were wedged by hand.

2. A 200-gram ball of each clay was pinched into a specified bowl shape.
3. The clay workability was rated using the three-point scale.
4. Slumping was rated.
5. Cracking was rated.
6. The bowls were allowed to dry to soft leatherhard and then pinched again.
7. The workability of the clay was again rated.

Ratings of Clay Workability

	Clay	Plastic workability	Leatherhard workability	Slump	Plastic cracking	Leatherhard cracking	Qualities & Problems
A	LTW Johnson Mathey	2	2	3	1	1	Much too elastic; tears rather than cracks
B	1106 Potclays	2	2	3	1	1	
C	1106-30 Potclays	3	3	3	3	2	workable grog
D	1120 Potclays	1	1	2	1	1	Tears easily
E	1121 Potclays	3	3	3	2	2	Excellent at leatherhard
F	1123 Potclays	3	3	3	3	2	Workable, smooth, workable at leatherhard
G	Arctic Valentines	3	3	2	3	2	
H	Porcelain Valentines	3	2	3	3	1	
J	ES 10 Valentines	1	1	3	1	1	Too elastic
K	ES 20 Valentines	3	3	3	2	2	
L	ES 40 Valentines	3	3	3	3	2	
M	ES 70 Valentines	3	3	3	3	2	

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 2

Clays and Firing Temperatures

See pages 37 – 38.

Clay bodies tested

The same clays were used with the same designation as in Practical Exploration 1.

Testing Procedure

1. All clays were wedged by hand.
2. 50-gram pieces of each clay were rolled in the hands into a ball, then pressed between two flat plaster moulds, one smooth and one textured. Two discs were made of each clay.
3. The 24 pressed tiles were fired together at the same height in the same kiln. In each clay, one tile was fired textured side up and the other textured side down.
4. Firings were done to Cones 06, 04, 02, and 1.
5. Rating for a 'positive tactile experience' of the fired clay was done by me and others.



*A few test tiles from
Practical Exploration 2*



Detail

APPENDIX 2

DETAILS OF RESULTS FROM PRACTICAL EXPLORATIONS 3 – 10 (CHAPTER THREE)

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 3

Small hand-held forms




See pages 49 – 51.



The making and testing

Ten small, lightweight hand-held pieces were made by modelling or pinching. Two clays were used, Valentine's B17C and Potclays White Crank. After forming, the pieces were textured with a variety of tools using impressing, incising, and sprigging. They were all fired to 1000°C. Each piece was then 'experienced' by me personally by placing it on or running it across different parts of my body, and notes taken of my immediate responses.

Results

Designation	Intended area of the body	Size (mm)	Shape	Texture & shape notes	Critical comments and experience of work
3.1 'Rice'	Face	85 55 50	Fits hand, convex surface	Carved as grains of rice. Space between: 2-3mm	Cannot distinguish texture on cheek but can feel it is textured. Clear articulation on lips. Exciting to <i>move</i> from cheek to lip.
3.2 'Shoulder'	Shoulder	80 75 25	Curved skewed square	Impressed star shape. Space between: <5mm	Fits shoulder well. Fits breast less well. Nipple does not distinguish any better than other

					areas of breast. On shoulder and breast, cannot distinguish texture but can feel it is not smooth.
3.3 'Thigh' 	Thigh	173 125 40	Curved oval	Swirl texture painted on with shellac then clay wiped away when bone dry.	Fits thigh well. Fits into hand well. Fits back of thigh, calf. Texture too dense to distinguish on thigh.
3.4 'Disc' 	No specific area	120 35	Round, convex	Densely impressed with knife point. Fine (1x3) on one side, larger (3x7) on other.	Fits hand well for holding. Contrast between sides good when explored with fingers. Also engages face, inner arm. Particularly engrossing to run down the inside of the arm, across the palm, and off the fingertips. Fine texture too fine to be distinguished elsewhere. Visual quality worth pursuing.
3.5 'Pillow'	No specific area	105 40	Square pillow shape with elongated points	Impression made with rough stone. Space between: 10 mm	Can feel texture but not distinguish well on arms, legs, cheek, stomach. Cannot feel texture on buttocks. Suitable shape for holding. Curves fit neck and under breast.
3.6 'Jomon'	Thigh & elsewhere	127 95 25	Wide shallow dish shape	Impressed with end of stick. Space between: 6-10mm	Does not fit well because of inclining sides. Fits only shoulder, elbow, etc. Cannot

					distinguish texture well because it is not raised.
3.7 'Dimples' 	No specific area	135 123 30	Wide shallow dish shape	Knuckles pressed into clay. Width of texture: ~12mm	Feels much too rough in all areas of the body.
3.8 'Stripes'	No specific area	128 120 25	Wide shallow dish shape	Stripes cut out of clay surface at leatherhard. Width of texture: ~5mm	Too large to hold comfortably. Can feel texture on chin and a little on shoulder but undistinguishable elsewhere.
3.9 'S' 	No specific area	157 70	"S" shape flattened coil	Made by pressing coil into ridged mould. Space between: 4mm	Awkward to hold. Shape not suggestive of rubbing across the body. Texture can be felt on face but not elsewhere.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 4

Further small hand-held forms





See pages 52 – 54.

The making and testing

As before, small lightweight hand-held pieces were made by modelling or pinching. Seven pieces were made using Potclays White St Thomas. They were then textured. They were all fired to 1000°C. Each piece was then 'experienced' by moving it across different parts of my body, or moving parts of my body across it, and I noted my and others' personal responses.

Results

Designation	Intended area of the body	Size (mm)	Shape	Texture & shape	Critical comments and experiences of work
4.1 'Small Roulette'	No specific area	35 25	Small cylinder with soft ends	Rolled over ridged mould	Very little sensation noted anywhere, even when rolled over same place on the skin. Roulette action is not easily done. Shape does not suggest running or turning against the skin.

<p>4.2 'Roulette'</p> 	<p>No specific area</p>	<p>122 28</p>	<p>Cylinder with soft ends</p>	<p>Carved in 'zebra' stripes</p>	<p>Ineffective for reasons as above.</p>
<p>4.3 'Rounded ridges'</p>	<p>No specific area</p>	<p>160 100</p>	<p>Irregular slab</p>	<p>Half-coils added to slab, then impressed</p>	<p>Too large to handle. Texture not pleasing, not very distinguishable. Can feel more on stomach and bottom than earlier pieces.</p>
<p>4.4 'Thumb'</p> 	<p>Thumb</p>	<p>650 20</p>	<p>Very small shallow dish</p>	<p>Pinched, then impressed</p>	<p>Fits thumb well. Encourages movement. Both shape and texture works well. Texture could be finer and still be distinguished.</p>
<p>4.4 'Hallux'</p> 	<p>Hallux (big toe)</p>	<p>50 10</p>	<p>Small shallow dish</p>	<p>Pinched, then impressed</p>	<p>Can feel with big toe but doesn't feel like much. Awkward to get to toe. Better for thumb. Nipple cannot distinguish texture. No particular sensation on elbow or heel.</p>
<p>4.5 'Hallux cup'</p> 	<p>Hallux</p>	<p>50 350</p>	<p>Small cup</p>	<p>Pinched, then impressed and incised</p>	<p>Fits big toe but not exciting or interesting. Does not fit anywhere else. Awkward to use.</p>

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 5

Forms to Fit the Body (1)

See pages 55 – 57.

Making and testing

First, I had a plaster body cast made of myself in a seated position, using plaster-saturated scrim applied to the front of my torso, from above my breasts down to mid-thigh. The ceramic works were made on this cast, usually starting with a slab on the surface of the cast, then coiled until the form was closed. The parts of the forms not touching the cast were made with curves and bulges that echoed parts of the body, such as shoulders and thighs, which I felt would fit the hand well. When leatherhard the work was removed from the cast and textured. The areas that had been touching the body cast were textured with a less dense texture than the areas which when resting against the body would be held with the hands. The works were made one after another over a series of weeks, with some overlap in the later stages of texturing. All six pieces were fired to 1000°C. A small amount of sanding was done after firing to some pieces to remove tactile 'flecks' of clay. The pieces were evaluated as in the last studies – I set aside a specific time and place and noted my reactions, then those of others experiencing the work.

Results

Description: 5.1

Closed form with large bulbous protrusions and slightly concave areas. Clear ridges. Uniform texture from repeating circular pattern about 4mm wide (using the end of a pen). Smooth areas in the folds between the



protrusions. The concave areas have a carved, freeform design.



Size: 37 x 23 x 20 cm

Clay: Earthstone 40

Visual: Shape too phallic. Only one angle looks appealing. Pleasant texture on hand area. Carved areas look contrived/amateurish. Areas of smoothness engaging. Colour of clay shows texture well.

Tactile: Overall, pleasing tactility for hand. Carved areas dominate the hand's perception. Smooth areas feel intriguing in contrast to textured areas. Edges between areas too sharp. Bulges and curves feel sensual/sexual.

Fit: Weight feels satisfying, can be lifted, but feels solid, secure. When placed back into position for which it was made, it fits snugly.

Other: Visually the piece makes the holder look madonna-esque. Also, it is almost figurative.

Description: 5.2

Bulging closed form. Rounded on one side, two slightly concave areas with raised ridge at the other. Texture (impressing stick) has one density and depth, and covers the piece.



Size: 28 x 18 x 23 cm

Clay: Earthstone 40

Visual: Too egg-like from one side, odd-looking on the other. Texture follows contour too closely – looks contrived. Colour of clay body is appealing.

Tactile: Shape feels intriguing, including both the 'navel' and the ridge, but bulges do not feel sensual. Egg side doesn't lead anywhere and too uniform. Texture is pleasing but a bit too mechanical.

Fit: Pleasing weight but towards the heavy side. Feels like a pregnancy (not a good thing). Feels tentative. Too symmetrical. Does not make me want to hug it.

Other: Too Brancusi-esque.

Description: 5.3

Closed oblong form with undulation on one side, concavity on other.



Size: 33 x 25 x 15 cm

Clay: Potclays 1120 Buff Body

Visual: Intriguing and engaging shape from the side made for the hand. Colour okay although might be considered a little raw. Body texture looks a little contrived. Ridge from casting too defined. Texture not dense enough (too large? not intricate enough?). Except for ridges, shape of concavity (on body side) is engaging.

Tactile analysis: Excellent combination of texture and smoothness with large areas untextured or texture very widely spaced. Shape fits the body and palm of hand well. Shape encourages movement, grip, exploration. Fingers and thumb work in opposition. Undulations on one side. Body area too rough. Ridges too pronounced.

Fit analysis: Feels pleasing. Encourages cuddling, stroking. Must be held in place. Ridges make it feel secure. Pleasing weight.

Other: A successful piece.

Description: 5.4

Irregular closed form with knobby protrusions. Texture made with pointed knife to look like feathers or fur.



Size: 34 x 20 x 20

Clay: Potclays 1120 Buff Body

Visual: Unappealing. Nobbly. Texture too hard, stark. Creature-like both in shape and texture. Shape ambiguous. Ridges too accentuated. Texture not done subtly enough and looks contrived.

Tactile: 'Grain' feels smooth when running hands up and down and rough when hands are run across. Hard to distinguish. Ridges detract and feel uncomfortable. Bulges too small for hand. Indentation could be interesting but leads only thumb (too small?). On the body side texture very smooth in some directions. Surface too uneven.

Fit analysis: Uncomfortable. Feels unsure, tenuous. Too small. Too light. Not satisfying (no 'ahh'). Does not engage enough of the body.

Other: Problems with cracking. Overall, piece is not successful although the two 'lobes' might be a useable feature on another piece.

Description: 5.5

Small smooth closed form with two bulges and a pointed centre area.



Size: 23 x 16 13

Clay: Potclays White St Thomas 1106

Visual: Too small to hold attention. No urge to pick it up. Ridge too prominent. Shape ambiguous and arbitrary. Unappealing.

Tactile: Bumps in the surface are immediately evident. Ridges and pointed end do not feel pleasing. Engaging surface on body side for heel of hand to move across. Tips too easily on the lap.

Fit: Too small. Not secure. Feels a little like some kind of kinky toy.

Other: Cracks. Boring visually and tactilely and clay is dull without texture.

Description: 5.6

Large slab with star-shaped stamping, denser on the upper side than on the under.



Size: 36 x 33 x 16

Clay: Potclays White St Thomas 1106

Visual: Unappealing. Looks like armour. Texture too large and uninviting. Edge of slab unfinished, neither smooth, nor textured. Do not want to touch it/lift it, much less 'try it on'. Too big? Colour unappealing.

Tactile: Feels unpleasant on both sides. Shape difficult to handle. Slab unappealing to touch. Feels dead.

Fit: Restrictive, like a corset or being trapped. Movement makes it push uncomfortably against either thighs or torso.

Other: Does not work on any level.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 6

Made in Japan

See pages 58 – 60.

Making and testing

Three pieces were created by moulding soft clay into hollow forms against my body. When leatherhard, they were smoothed, then textured by stamping. The textures investigated inversion (the reverse of the texture also being applied), application density, and depth of texture. They were slow-fired in a gas kiln with reduction to approximately 1160°C. The experience of the finished artworks is documented in Practical Exploration 7.

Results

Description: 6.1

Two-lobed shape with aperture on one side. Built to rest against the torso and across the right thigh. Texture for engaging the hands impressed with pointed clay tool. Area against body created with clay tool (made by creating the reverse of the first tool, i.e., a hollow tube). Valleys between the lobes were left smooth in an irregular pattern.



Size: 42 x 30 x 14 cm

Clay: White grogged stoneware (Japanese)

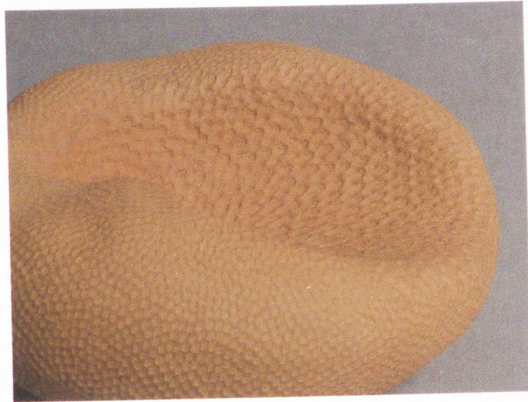
Positive: Shape is engaging. Size is good, both visually and fits well against the body. Pleasing weight. White clay shows texture well. The aperture 'guides' the hand. Hands fit well around the many curved sides. Invokes sensual and sexual feelings.

Negative: White clay body is dull. Aperture creates a top and bottom. Aperture gives visual/tactile focus to the piece. Hand tends to follow the smooth areas, rather than exploring the textured areas. Difference between textures and the body part it is intended for does not come across.

Questions: Is the aperture positive or negative? Does it matter that the work fits people in ways I had not intended it to fit? Do the smooth areas give more than they detract to the work?

Description: 6.2

Round closed form. Formed on knee. On one side a strong indentation, other side rounded. Texture made with a wooden stick. Inside of indentation the stick has been impressed more deeply and been spaced more widely. On opposite side just the tip of the stick has been used, resulting in a delicate and subtle texture.



Size: 32 x 14.5 x 14.5 cm

Clay: White grogged stoneware with 10% earthenware (Japanese)

Positive: Both textures inviting and rewarding to touch. Colour excellent, lots of firing variation throughout. This clay, temperature, and firing gave a vitrification level that felt fired yet absorbent. Rounded back feels exciting to hand (active and soothing at the same time). Hands fit sides very well.

Negative: The knee is too far from the torso, it does not encourage interaction with the torso. Although the weight is acceptable overall, resting on the knee it feels too heavy to be so far from the centre of the body.

Questions: Is spinning or moving the work (kinetics) to be encouraged or discouraged?

Description: 6.3

U-shaped form with large scoop on one side and slight indentation on other. Made to fit over thigh and rest between thighs. Textured with star-shaped clay stamp, densely on area for hand and less densely on area against thighs.



Size: 32 x 22 14.5 cm

Clay: White grogged stoneware with 30% earthenware (Japanese)

Positive: Satisfying weight to hold. Size acceptable but should not be any smaller. Could be easily lifted but still felt substantial. Hands fit well around each curved side. Colour pleasing. Fingertips fit into texture well.

Negative: Over-vitrified, a little too hard. Sparse impressing does not create a raised texture so not felt as clearly.

Questions: This piece was not very engaging visually, yet that did not hinder people from picking it up and interacting with it. Why?

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 7

Kyoto exhibition

See pages 61 - 65 for images and critical results.

Background

In December 2004 Kyoto Geidai mounted an exhibition of work made by their foreign university students at the Kyoto Art Center, a public art gallery in downtown Kyoto. All three pieces discussed in the last Practical Exploration were included in this show. They were situated in the centre of the gallery, surrounded by other artwork. Each ceramic piece was exhibited on one end of a bench-like plinth. On the other end was a *zabuton*, Japanese cushion, as an invitation to visitors to sit. There was a small sign on one plinth in Japanese saying that visitors were allowed to handle the work but warning them that the work was heavy.

General observations

All observations were made during one afternoon's invigilation.

Some people became intensely engaged with the work in exhibition. People did sit on the cushions and most then touched the work, reaching over with one hand to stroke the top surface. Some men straddled the plinth/bench and then used both hands, sometimes turning a hand over and running the back of the arm over the surface of the work or trying to fit their arms into depressions in the forms. Some fit the pads of their fingertips into the indentations created by the textures.

With the piece with an opening, almost all visitors ran their hands up and over the corresponding bulge and down into the opening.

Most people touched the work without hesitation. Men and women, Japanese and non-Japanese, willingly picked up the work and held it against their bodies. Younger and older people were seen to explore the work. However, those

younger seemed to be more adventurous in their explorations. One woman looked away from the work as she explored it.

Observations of others interacting with the work:

Observations specific to the work:

6.1

People 'tried it on' in many ways, not just in the way that it was made against my body. The aperture became a black-hole that held people's attention to the exclusion of the rest of the piece. People peered into the hole, put their fingers into it, put their ears up to listen to it, and blew into it.

6.2

People put it on their shoulders and knees, and one tried it on his head. They put its indentation facing up on their laps and tried resting an elbow and arm in it. One person spun it as it rested on its rounded bottom. Its symmetry led one person to run his hands down both sides simultaneously.

6.3

This piece, more than the other two, more fully engaged the hand because of the fingertips fitting into the texture. People put it on top and under their thighs. Some had the scoop facing up and rested their arms in it. One person tried it on her waist.

Verbatim comments from viewer/touchers

- *The benches and zabuton work well.*
- *The weight gives a sense of solidity and safeness.*
- *The forms suggest the direction of the hand's touch.*
- *The opening is good because it leads the hand and suggests something forbidden, the body. It is sexual.*
- *The white colour shows the texture well.*
- *The smoothness of the white piece is a good contrast to the textured areas.*
- *The texture is too rough and uncomfortable.*
- *Unsure if ceramic is the right material, too hard and cold.*
- *Touching the work makes me feel a little guilty or naughty.*

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 8

Forms to Fit the Body (2)

See pages 66 – 67.

Making and testing

Five closed forms were coil-built using the plaster body cast to form the shape of the area to be held against the body and as support. The ridges that had developed in the earlier work as a result of using the cast were removed from these pieces. The base clay used was buff in colour, but in three of the pieces red earthenware was mixed with it to improve the fired colour. Textures were created using natural objects, such as stones and nuts.

Results

Description: 8.1

Closed form with hollows and indentations on part next to body. Textured with volcanic stone – fine on side for hand and coarse on side for torso.



Size: 48 x 30 x 12

Clay: 90% Potclays B17C + 10% red earthenware

Firing temperature: 1140°C

Visual: Shape intriguing. Solicits investigation. Hollows, bumps on side for body make it fit well. Very three-dimensional, goes 'around the corner' of the lap. Looks vaguely figurative. Texture dull, looks a bit like vinyl on the hand side. Colour of clay too fleshy.

Tactile: Very large. Feels awkward until the proper fit is found, then rests well on thigh and against torso. Engages both thigh and abdomen. Arm rests comfortably on it. Feels too 'dry'. Texture has unpleasant snags and is too smooth.

Other: Problems with cracking.

Description: 8.2

Small round closed form with indentation on one side within which is soft point. Texture made with walnut shell.



Size: 24 x 23 x 11

Clay: 80% Potclays B17C + 20% red earthenware

Firing temperature: 1000°C

Visual: Rounded shape not engaging. Texture visually intriguing but wide texture (for torso) looks a bit like puckered skin. Colour flesh-like, raises ideas of the 'abject'.

Tactile: Shape feels satisfying. Weight a little heavy. Sits well on thigh, like having cat on your lap, makes you want to stroke it. Texture feels intriguing.

Other: Problems with cracking. Does the shape suggest pregnancy too much?

Description: 8.3

Rounded closed form with concavity on one side. Two symmetrical indentations lead to one end protruding slightly. Texture made with pointed end of hazelnut, varying in depth and density from area next to torso to area for hand.



Size: 28 x 24 x 14

Clay: 80% Potclays B17C + 29% red earthenware

Firing temperature: 1000°C

Visual: Shape unappealing, slightly turtle or brain-like. Texture appears pitted but not unappealing. Transition between texture densities good. Does not make me want to pick it up. Colour too fleshy.

Tactile: Shape too symmetrical. Surface irregularities too apparent (expectation that it will be even). Weight is reasonable. Fits in only one position and makes me feel pregnant, an odd although perhaps not bad experience. Can wrap an arm around it, but does not lend itself to being cuddled.

Description: 8.4

Softly triangular closed form with curved inner surface and undulating back. Texture made with pointed end of almond, varying in depth and density according to placement against body.



Size: 39 x 25 x 14

Clay: Potclays B17C

Firing temperature: 1000°C

Visual: Engaging undulating shape gives solid three-dimensional quality. Looks lifted with subtle arch. Looks interesting with either side up when resting on a surface. Pleasant colour.

Tactile: Fits body in several positions and 'build position' not too obvious. Curves fit hand well. Pleasing weight, size. Texture intriguing, particularly difference between big and small.

Other: This is a good working piece. Visually it makes you want to pick it up. Tactilely it is non-specific in fit yet rests well against the body. The texture is visually intriguing and tactilely satisfying. It is smoothly rough or roughly smooth, an active smoothness perhaps.

Description: 8.5

Long rounded shape with two distinct indentations. Textured all over with stone, but in indentations there is an additional finer texture made by pressing Demerara sugar into surface.





Size: 46 x 19 x 15

Clay: Potclays B17C

Firing temperature: 1000° C

Visual: Too obvious that this was moulded to breasts. Too symmetrical. Too regular in shape. Shape does not make you want to pick it up. Indentations appear as breaks in an integral shape. Soft colour, warm, some discolouration that is not unpleasant.

Tactile: Too much like breasts. Does not fit, even on breasts. Too heavy. Too much like breasts on reverse side as well. Sugar surface is too rough. Texture too pronounced. Too dry.

Other: Does not work on any level.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 9

Forms to Fit the Body (3)

See pages 68 – 70.

Making and testing

Two new body casts were made in plaster using a casting technique that involved stretching a latex sheet on a frame, which was then pressed down onto my upper back and shoulder, and in the second cast, my hip, thigh, and calf. Plaster was poured and then piled as it set onto the latex. This technique resulted in softer, less defined casts, which I thought would be beneficial in the attempt to avoid figuration.

Five closed forms were coil-built using the new body casts. As before, the work was started on the cast to form the shape of the area to be held against the body, and later used as a support. More consideration was put into the visuality of the work as it was being made. A black earthenware clay was used in some pieces in the search for a non-fleshy fired colour.

Results

Description: 9.1

Closed oblong form coming to a soft point at one side with a deep indentation on one side and a shallow indentation on the other. Made on the shoulder. Textured with a star-shaped clay stamp with no appreciable difference in density or depth across the piece.

Size: 35.5 x 23 x 15

Clay: Pottery crafts black earthenware

Firing temperature: 1000°C

Visual: Engaging shape but a little too 'designerly'. Also slightly vessel-ish.



Well-lifted off the surface on which it stands. Interesting texture. Soft, pleasant colour although the texture and shape were harder to see in this colour.

Tactile: Shape engaging but limited 'fit' to the body. Curves fit hands well and induce movement. Depression on one side fits arm and hands well – again induces movement. Fits if held chest height but not a particularly natural position. A little too heavy. Texture has 'snags' even after sanding.

Other: Problems with cracking.

Description: 9.2

Oblong closed form with depression on one side. Made on the hip and upper thigh. Texture is not all over and forms a maze pattern. Texture made with a rough stone.



Size: 33 x 18 x 9

Clay: Pottery crafts black earthenware

Firing temperature: 1000°C


Visual: Unappealing. Looks too much like shoe or bowl. Too two-dimensional. Inside texture engaging but too much smoothness – looks forced, arbitrary, contrived (designerly). Colour a little grey. Do not want to pick it up.


Tactile: Reasonable size and weight. Limited fit. Too flat. Too dry, especially where smooth. Smooth and textured areas make hand follow the smoothness and you lose the tactile experience of the texture.

Description: 9.3

Large L-shaped flattish closed form with depression on one side. Made on the hip and thigh. Textured with a clay stamp.




Size: 48 x 32 x 8
Clay: Pottery crafts black earthenware + 4% calcined alumina
Firing temperature: 1000°C
Visual: Shape not enticing to touch – too flat and two-dimensional. Texture holds your attention but untextured areas are visually distracting (too ‘designerly’). Brown body colour is pleasing to look at but the texture and shape are harder to see than in the lighter coloured clays.
Tactile: Too large and heavy to lift comfortably. Awkward shape to handle. Does not fit body well. Some snags in the texture need correcting but texture feels satisfying in general. Smooth areas are distracting.

Description: 9.4
Small closed shape forming a single curve. Textured with a mixture of clay stamps. Made for hip.

Size: 20 x 8 x 10
Clay: Pottery crafts black earthenware + 4% calcined alumina
Firing temperature: 1000°C
Visual: Small, vessel-like. Texture too large for size. Colour a little grey. Does not make me want to lift it. Darker clay makes texture and shape harder to see.
Tactile: Fits in multiple places: across thigh, side of abdomen, back of thigh. When on thigh, comforting to stroke. Small enough to try in many places. Curved sides fit the palms well. Too heavy for size but a satisfying weight in general. Texture needs sanding.
Other: Can lift in one hand.

Description: 9.5

Curved flattened closed form with smooth interior and exterior and lumpy sides. Texture is all-over, made with clay star-shaped stamp. Half built on thigh, other side built on stomach, then the two joined.



Size: 36 x 27 x 20

Clay: Earthstone 40 + additional 20% rutile + 10% red iron oxide

Firing temperature: 1000°C

Visual: Unappealing shape visually – looks tormented. Bumpy outer edge not appealing. Size and colour acceptable, neither particularly exciting nor too dull. Texture unattractive – arbitrary and mechanical.

Tactile: Fits well in several places on body. Concave outer surface strongly encourages exploration with hands. Fits snugly against stomach and over upper thighs – stays upright on body on its own. Bumps on outside make handles. Texture feels reasonable.

Other: An unappealing piece yet surprisingly satisfying to handle.

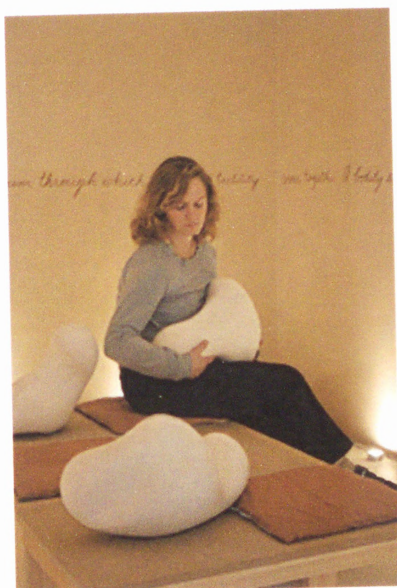
PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 10

Work in Progress Show 2005

See pages 71 – 72.

Observations

- Many visitors did not seem to notice the work initially.
- Some people did gravitate towards the work, but once seated, they often appeared to be visually distracted by other work in the exhibition.
- One piece was lighter than the others and sometimes men held this piece away from their bodies, exploring it predominantly through sight.
- Some women, to greater and lesser degrees, hugged and fondled the work, holding it to their torsos and rubbing their cheeks against the textures.



APPENDIX 3

DETAILS OF RESULTS FROM PRACTICAL EXPLORATIONS 11 – 16 (CHAPTER FOUR)

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 11

Casting hugs in plaster

See pages 92 – 94.

The making

Twelve plaster casts were made by holding a plaster filled balloon against my body until it set. Different body positions were used, applying more or less force to the balloon. Different mixtures of plaster were tried, such as putting foam in plaster, or plaster into foam, and adding sawdust to the plaster. In these cases, a cloth sack was filled, and then held against the body until it set. Possibilities of using expanding foams and plastics were also investigated but none was found to be feasible.



PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 12

Slip-casting

See page 95.

The making

I chose one cast that had a particularly appealing and strong form, fit well against the body, and had a surface of smooth and rough areas. Some of the rougher areas had been created by air bubbles trapped in the plaster at the top of the balloon. I reworked some of these, making decisions on the basis of the tactile quality of the roughness and smoothness. I then made a three-piece mould in plaster that would be suitable for both press-moulding and slip-casting.

Results

Designation: 12.1
Clay: earthenware casting slip
Comments: Piece collapsed in mould because of problems with the earthenware slip. Poor seams. Quality of cast surface was very, very smooth.

Designation: 12.2
Clay: earthenware casting slip
Comments: Piece cracked severely with drying and collapsed.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 13

Forms from mould (1)

See pages 96 – 97.

The making

I made three pieces using the same mould that was used for Practical Exploration 12, which was taken from a cast piece from Practical Exploration 11. Different techniques were used to press the clay into the mould. The final form (41 x 21 x 18 cm) was oblong with rounded ends and one well-defined edge.

Results

Designation: 13.1



Clay: Earthstone 20

Firing temperature: 1160°C

Technique: Large slabs were made, cut to size, and then eased into the mould. Some irregularities, such as joins and the 'navel' formed by sealing the neck of the balloon, were left on the surface. At leatherhard, the surface was scraped back, then smoothed with a rubber kidney.

Visual: Undulating shape except on sharp edge. Smoothness makes me want to touch it but not to lift it. Bone-like. Baby sized. 'Elegant'. Colour acceptable but dull.

Tactile: Heavy. Rounded peaks good to explore with hand. Fits the body in limited ways. Too 'elegant' to want to cuddle. Feels baby-like when held. Does not fit well enough to cuddle. Smoothness isn't really smooth but has irregularities, which are a distraction.

Designation: 13.2

Clay: LTW (white earthenware)

Firing Temperature: Unfired due to severe cracking

Technique: Slabs cut off clay and pressed into mould using a 'smear' technique for the joins.

Visual: Interesting stripy texture left from the cutting wire.

Tactile: Stripy texture cannot be easily distinguished.

Designation: 13.3

Clay: LTW (white earthenware)

Firing Temperature: 1000°C

Technique: Small slabs were textured using a piece of coral, and then put into mould, using 'smear' technique to join. Some additional texturing was done with coral after piece was removed from the mould.

Visual analysis: Texture interesting. Joins are too distinct. Colour unpleasant – dead white.

Tactile analysis: Suitable weight. Too smooth. Texture is dull and unengaging. Feels underfired.

Other comments: Some cracking. Sounds underfired.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 14

Forms from mould (2)

See pages 98 – 99.

The making

I reworked parts of the plaster cast piece (Practical Exploration 11), removing the 'navel' made by the constricted neck of the balloon and other rough areas to create an overall, unmarked form. Some castings had textures created by treating the surface of the moulds with various materials. On some pieces I removed the seams, disguising them. On others I left the seams. The final form (32 x 23 x 18 cms) was squarish in shape with rounded corners, soft indentations, and an integral twist.

Results

Visual attributes of all six: Form good liftable size and shape. Curved ridges twist and flow into one another well.
Tactile attributes of all six: Size in human scale. Weight comfortable for exploring various fits. Curves fit hand well. Very huggable – sits well on lap, arms fit concave areas well, hands fit, feels like it moulds to your body. Small lump on 'base' feels intriguing.
Other: Kinetic – rocks when placed back down on flat surface.

Designation: 14.1
Clay: LTW (white earthenware)
Mould treatment: Liquid latex (Copydex) painted into mould and then green tea

leaves were sprinkled onto convex areas of mould. The seams were finished.

Firing Temperature: 1000°C

Visual: Tea leaf texture in concave areas too dominant and appeared arbitrary. Too much of a contrast to the smooth 'knobs' of the work. Colour is harsh white.

Tactile: Smooth clay feels dead.

Designation: 14.2

Clay: Y material

Mould treatment: Copydex painted into mould and then coffee grounds glued all over. Seams left unfinished.

Firing Temperature: 1000°C

Visual: Seams add nothing to form or freshness. Pitted surface is good, but although I am not averse to touching it, it does not draw me.

Tactile: Seams feel uncomfortable and inhibit moving it around.

Designation: 14.3



(Images of piece after oxide treatment)

Clay: Potclays B17C

Mould treatment: Copydex splattered inside mould. Seams left unfinished.

Firing Temperature: 1200°C

Visual: Seams add nothing to overall appearance. Looks stone-like or moon-like.

Tactile: Seams are uncomfortable against the body. Surface texture engages the sense of touch well.

Designation: 14.4



Clay: Potclays B17C

Mould treatment: None, but slabs textured with roulette to produce a pebbly surface before being put in the mould. Seams were finished with same roulette.

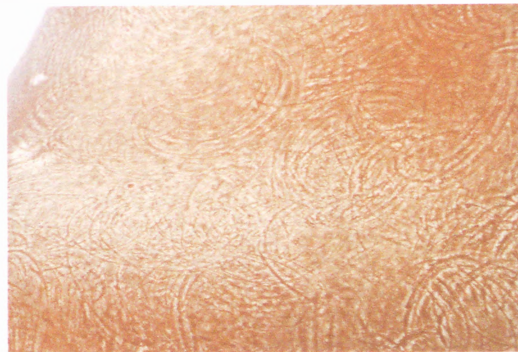
Firing Temperature: 1000°C

Visual: Seams are still visible. Having an all-over texture gives integrity, but unsure about this specific texture.

Tactile: Satisfying weight. All-over texture feels very pleasing and leads to exploration.

Designation: 14.5

(Image shows detail of piece after glazing)



Clay: Potclays B17C

Mould treatment: None, but piece was sanded with wire mesh at bone dry all over in small spirals. Seams removed.

Firing Temperature: 1120°C

Visual: Texture appears arbitrary although fineness of it is satisfying to the hand.

Tactile: Too heavy. Cannot distinguish texture well but still feels interesting.

Designation: 14.6

(Image shows piece after oxide treatment)



Clay: Potclays B17C

Mould treatment: Copydex painted into mould and then coffee grounds glued all over. Seams finished. Texture of fabric from slabbing left.

Firing Temperature: 1120°C

Visual: Coffee grounds give eroded look. Seeing the texture of the fabric from the slab-making is distracting. Irregularities also distracting. Seams too obvious, visually intrusive.

Tactile: Satisfying weight. Texture and clay are pleasing to the touch.

Other: Sounds a little dry when grazed with the hand or finger.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 15

Composite forms

See pages 100 – 101.

The making

Several casts were press-moulded, using the two existing moulds. At leatherhard, I cut the casts into pieces and fitted them together to create three different works. All three pieces were finished to a lightly burnished surface using a rubber kidney. The clay used Potclays B17C.

Results

Designation: 15.1



(Images show piece after terra sigillata treatment)

Size: 43 x 43 x 38

Firing temperature: 1000°C

Visual assessment: Appears twisted, tormented. Edges are too sharp. 'Navels' unpleasant. Do not want to touch it. Too big to lift and looks like it would break on lifting.

Tactile assessment: Can really interact with the piece with the hand. Smooth surface feels too dry. Interesting hidden spaces to explore.

Other comments: Some cracking at seams. Not finished well enough.

Designation: 15.2



(Images show piece after terra sigillata treatment)

Size: 38 x 33 x 16.5

Firing temperature: 1120°C

Visual assessment: Generally unappealing. Looks too vessel-like. Seams show. Most people would probably touch it, but few would try to lift it.

Tactile assessment: Smooth surface feels dead. Engages the hand only. Too heavy to lift.

Other comments: Cracking. Unsatisfactory on any level.

Designation: 15.3

Size: 56 x 36 x 19

Firing temperature: Unfired

Visual assessment: Far too complicated a form. Contorted. Irregularities are irritating. Much too big to lift. Curves and bumps are too small to want to put your body up against them but good for drawing in the hand.

Tactile assessment: Convolutd – hand exploration becomes solely about determining the form. Interesting to the hand but not huggable and certainly too heavy to lift. Smoothness is unappealing.

Other comments: Unsuccessful.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 16

Forms from mould (3)

See pages 102 – 103.

The making

Three pieces were made using slightly thinner slabs than previously to allow for the increase in size without affecting the weight.

Results

Pertaining to all three:
Dimensions: 84 x 28 x 27
Clay: Earthstone 20
Firing temperature: 1160°C
Visual: Monumental in gesture. Large size and rounded volume make these pieces a bit Henry Moore-esque. Too large to want to pick it up? Lively three-dimensionality. Slightly bone-like, perhaps dinosaur bones?
Tactile: Comfortable weight. Large but huggable and comfortable on the lap and in the arms. Fits interestingly including over the shoulder. Satisfying to hold.

Designation: 16.1
Surface treatment: smooth surface scratched back with metal kidney.
Visual: Scratched surface appears a little forced, arbitrary. This piece collapsed slightly on the 'bottom' – this makes it more interesting. There are some small dimples that are appealing.

Tactile: Surface is a little rough but feels engaging. Maybe not quite enough happening on the surface with such a large piece.

Other: Technical improvement – seams do not show.

Designation: 16.2

Surface treatment: coffee grounds glued into mould. Seams finished by rubbing a cloth that had coffee grounds glued to it onto the area.

Visual assessment: Visually much more engaging than others.

Tactile assessment: Surface texture is more appealing than others.

Other comments: Seams show a little.



APPENDIX 4

DETAILS OF RESULTS FROM PRACTICAL EXPLORATIONS 17 – 25 (CHAPTER FIVE)

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 17

Surface treatment and colour

See pages 129 – 131.

Making and testing

Existing work from previous Practical Explorations was used.

Results

Designation: 17.1
(original study 14.1)



Additional surface treatment and application technique:
Potclays Yellow 2329 "Artistic" – sprayed all over
Potclays Bright Red 2327 "Artistic" – brushed with gesture

Clay: LTW

Firing temperature: 1040°C

Visual: Very strong visceral reaction against this finish - bright, flat, arbitrary, shiny, reflective, hard. It evokes images of the worst of cheap ceramics.

Tactile: Strong visceral reaction against this finish. Feels slippery and tacky at the same time. Cold and unresponsive. Only textured areas elicit interest, and to an even smaller extent, areas of glaze that have an orange peel effect, where not fully matured. Cannot feel clay or any texture through glaze. The shininess of the finish induces fearfulness that piece might slip out of hands or off lap. Feels like bathtub or sink.

Designation: 17.2
(original study 14.2)



Additional surface treatment and application technique:

- Potclays Yellow 2329 "Artistic" – squirted with slip trailer in splodges
- Potclays Bright Red 2327 "Artistic" – squirted with slip trailer in splodges

Clay: Y Material

Firing temperature: 1180°C

Visual: Colour and application of glaze startling/attention grabbing. Form still strong even with glaze but slightly flat. Unfinished seams do not add anything. The pitted surface of unglazed areas is interesting and engaging. Evoked no desire to touch or lift with this surface.

Tactile: Unfinished seams are uncomfortable against body. Glaze holds tactile attention yet the feeling of these areas is slippery/sticky (strong bodily reaction against this surface). Unglazed areas feel more 'active' (alive?).

Other: More interesting than 17.1, yet ultimately not engaging tactilely.

Designation: 17.3
(original study 14.5)



Additional surface treatment and application technique:
Potclays Bright Red 2327 sprayed all over

Clay: B17C

Firing temperature: 1040°C

Visual: Too shiny. Too flat. Blotchy surface. Colour might be acceptable if it were more even and less shiny, but not worth pursuing, especially with its association with blood.

Tactile: As with 17.1 and 17.2.

Designation: 17.4
(original study 14.3)



Additional surface treatment and application technique:
Rutile and small amount of alkali frit mixed with water and brushed onto surface. Silicon floor sealant brushed after firing.

Clay: B17C

Firing temperature: 1140°C

Visual: Colour makes form less flat than original white surface. Colour seems arbitrary. Surface still dry-looking.

Tactile: Does not feel overly dry but has some snags (rough areas) that are unpleasant.

Designation: 17.5
(original study 14.6)



Additional surface treatment and application technique:
As in 17.4

Clay: B17C

Firing temperature: 1140°C

Visual: As in 17.4

Tactile: As in 17.4

Designation: 17.6 (original study 14.4)

Additional surface treatment and application technique:
Terra sigillata¹ sprayed

Clay: B17C

¹ Terra sigillata recipe: 1000 kg Hyplas 71 in 4 litres water. Ball mill for four hours. Add 5 grams Sodium Hexametaphosphate (dissolved in water). Leave for three days. Use centre section

Firing temperature: 1030°C
Visual: Colour dull but has appealing sheen that looks soft and not too dry.
Tactile: Satiny finish feels excellent, engaging and pleasant.
Other: A most successful finish that works on this large texture.

Designation: 17.7 (original study 13.1)
Additional surface treatment and application technique: Three stages of terra sigillata (recipe as above) sprayed all over: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No colour added• Honey stain P4134 added• Honey stain P4134 + Golden Brown stain P4112 added Light sanding with diamond pad after firing, followed by silicon floor sealant brushed.
Clay: B17C
Firing temperature: 1030°C
Visual: Colour sickly in appearance, neither tan nor orange and very pale. Does not draw the hand.
Tactile: Surface feels smooth but colder and less responsive than 17.4
Other: Terra sigillata should have been sieved to prevent the need for additional sanding.

Designation: 17.8 (original study 13.2)
Additional surface treatment and application technique: Same as 17.4
Clay: B17C
Firing temperature: 1030°C
Visual, Tactile, and Other: Same as 17.4

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 18

Solid forms

See pages 132 – 133.

Making and testing

The pieces were constructed in solid clay, directly on the body. At leatherhard, they were impressed to create textures.

Results

Designation: 18.1
Clay: Potclays Crank
Firing temperature: unfired
Dimensions: 31 x 26 x 11 cms
Visual analysis: Formless. Where the pieces of clay met were distracting.
Tactile analysis: Too heavy. Too formless. Joins in the clay meant that fingers explored the joins, not the form as a whole.
Other comments: The clay was too hard to squeeze; it could be modelled only.

Designation: 18.2
Clay: Potclays Crank
Firing temperature: unfired
Dimensions: 23 x 23 x 9 cms
Visual analysis: Too round and bowl-like.

Tactile analysis: Too heavy. Joins in the clay meant that fingers explored the joins, not the form as a whole.

Other comments: Modelling only.

Designation: 18.3



Clay: Brick clay + large amount of sawdust (mixed origin and size)

Texturing: ceramic stamp made with pinpricks in a spiral

Firing temperature: 1000°C

Visual analysis: Good terra cotta colour. Shape is rather flat. Texture is engaging.

Tactile analysis: Too heavy. Too flat. Depressions in the form do not fit the body.

Other comments: Using very soft clay, as here, was more successful. However, the piece is not as engaging visually or tactilely as works that were not built solidly.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 19

Casts in cloth

See page 134.

Making and testing

I made cloth sacks and used those, rather than the balloons, to 'cast hugs'.

Results

The finished plaster casts did not fit the body, probably because of distortions caused by the fabric. 'Corners' and points also limited possible 'fits'. Since the casts were to be converted into clay, the surface qualities were not relevant. Therefore, there is no tactile analysis on these forms.

Designation: 19.1
Dimensions: 51 x 30 x 30 cms
Visual analysis: Too many angles and not enough subtlety of form. Lacks curves that echo the body. Too large.
Other comments: I used a squared sack that caused too many corners.

Designation: 19.2
Dimensions: 48 x 30 x 28 cms
Visual analysis: 'Uncomfortable' form with too many angles. Lacks curves that echo the body. Too large.
Other comments: I used a rounded sack and this eliminated the corners but still

did not produce an engaging form.

Designation: 19.3

Dimensions: 45 x 30 x 25 cms

Visual analysis: Rounded but formless.

Other comments: In an attempt to make the form lighter, I mixed the plaster into sawdust, as much as it could hold and still be workable. I used a rounded sack and this eliminated the corners but still did not produce an engaging form.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 20

Body builds

See pages 135 – 136.

Making and testing


Using a coil and squeeze technique I formed the works around the curves of my torso. After doing the structural build, I allowed the clay to harden to leatherhard before working the forms for shape, then smoothing them and applying stamped textures.

Results

Designation: 20.1
Clay: Earthstone 20
Dimensions: 44 x 28 x 10 cms
Firing temperature: unfired
Texturing: end of paintbrush evenly over the surface
Visual analysis: Too pointed on one end.
Other comments: Form is not 'comfortable' to look at and unappealing to the sense of touch.

Designation: 20.2
Clay: Earthstone 20

Dimensions: 46 x 30 x 11 cms
Firing temperature: 1160°C
Texturing: end of paintbrush
Visual analysis: Form is too flat and two-dimensional. Does not make you want to pick it up. Indentations from the paintbrush are uneven but they do not appear that they should be.
Tactile analysis: Paintbrush end texture is too strong and too deep.
Other comments: Piece looks too much like a giant ear. It is much too flat; it has no lift off the surface on which it sits. Problems with cracking.

Designation: 20.3

Clay: Earthstone 20
Dimensions: 15 x 11.5 x 6 cms
Firing temperature: 1160°C
Texturing: coffee grounds pressed into surface
Visual analysis: This piece incorporated my arm, creating a valley that was curious to explore. However, it also created a 'cup' that again appeared ear-like.
Tactile analysis: The back of the form did not relate to the side that was next to the body and did not fit against the body. Too rough, even after light sanding. The square-ish shape did not make the piece sit well against the body. Too heavy.
Other comments: Problems with cracking.

Designation: 20.4



Clay: Potclays crank

Firing temperature: 1160°C

Texturing: ceramic stamp made from coral

Visual analysis: This piece was visually exciting, perhaps too much so. It looked figurative, like a reclining nude. It had a lot of movement and looked intriguing. This did not, however, make me want to pick it up.

Tactile analysis: Did not fit the body well at all. Was too large and too heavy. The texture felt engaging, making you want to explore it more.

Other comments: Problems with cracking.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 21

More cast hugs

See page 137.

Making

Using sizes and shapes of latex balloons not previously used, nine cast hugs were made (46 cm balloon and eight 92 cm balloons), three of which were heart-shaped. Casts were created across my torso as I lay on my side, another was held around my shoulder, and another was made as I reclined against a wall.

Results

A significant number of casts were produced in a variety of shapes, providing ample choice for later development. The 92 cm balloons were able to hold plaster up to about 46 cm across before bursting, which proved to be a satisfying size to handle in the finished work.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 22

Work in Progress Show 2006

See pages 138 – 140.

Making and testing

Nine cast hugs were made using one 46 cm balloon and eight 92 cm balloons, three of which were heart-shaped. One form was cast across my torso as I lay on my side, another was held around my shoulder, and a third cast while I was reclining with an earlier cast held down on top of it to apply extra weight.

Results

A variety of shapes was produced. Using the earlier casts for support prevented flat bottoms but added many additional bumps and curves. Pressing earlier casts down into the balloon being cast created curves that did not fit the body. The heart-shaped forms offered a different shape.

Initial set up and subsequent changes made during the exhibition

Stage 1:

- A thick cushion of foam covered the whole large plinth, and three pieces (Practical Exploration 16) rested on it.
- Hand-written on the outside wall was 'Towards the Embrace: A PhD Research Project to Make Viewers into Touchers'.
- Hand-written running along the three complete walls inside at eye level when seated were the words:

Touch is the act of contact between two objects.

Tactility is the quality of the touched surface. The body is the medium through which touch and tactility come together.

A bodily experience: seeing → touching → grasping →
lifting → holding → caressing → embracing.

Stage 2: One of the pieces on the central bench/plinth was removed.

Stage 3: The large cushion was removed from the central plinth and three smaller cushions were placed in a zigzag position. Two pieces of work were placed on the exposed areas of the plinth.

Stage 4: I hand-wrote the following words on the inside of the front wall above the piece on the tall plinth:

Please sit and
touch grasp lift
caress fondle feel
nuzzle clasp hug
nestle stroke embrace
enfold snuggle enjoy

Stage 5: A small image (approx 8 cm x 4 cm) was mounted on the wall at the beginning of the long run of text. The image was of me embracing one of the pieces on display. A small notebook and pen were left on the large plinth for visitors to leave comments.



Observations

- As many people interacted with the work as did not.
- Some people did not enter the space.
- Very few people “embraced” the work.
- Only one person was seen lying down with the work.
- Groups of two and three people interacted with one piece.
- No one lifted the piece from the lowest plinth or the chest-high plinth.

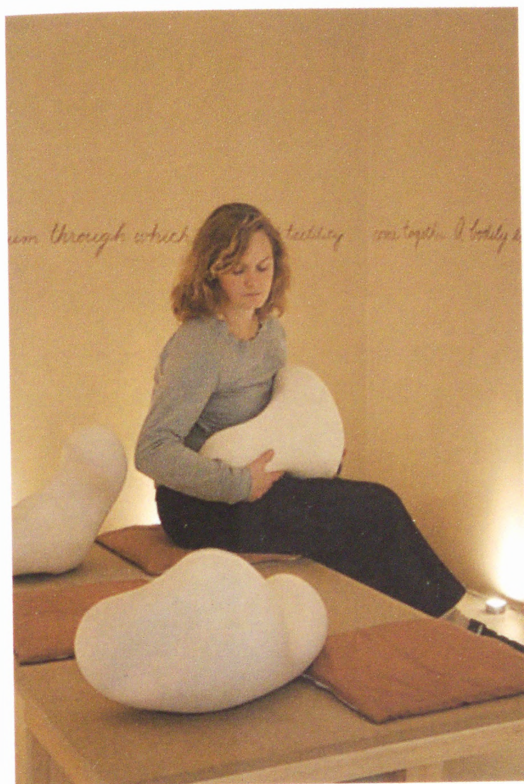
Verbatim comments:

- Bellmere meets Moore. Sensual work.
- They feel like my own babies. Without thinking, I stroke it against my cheek. The smooth and meandering surfaces and their weight are just right and remind me of mammal babies.

- Love the cuddle rocks, so did my baby though he is too small to hold – can only touch. My sister held one as I held my son, 'Look, I have one too!!' We thought of a large one to lay down next to but thought it probably very sad, like a blow up doll!!
- You transform something hard and unyielding into soft, smooth, inviting and irresistible.
- Didn't want to put down, felt like holding a baby – like looking after a baby because we suppose in the end it must be quite fragile!? Gorgeous surfaces, really tactile.
- Going towards a new way of feeling art --- very good. Seeing is not enough.
- Liked the valleys and dimples. Something to explore.
- The baby-like scale and weight makes me feel protective of it, but I think it's more protecting 'the child within' than protecting some baby substitute.
- The curves of the objects made me think of my family when I touched them, and gave me tears. A very warm feeling.
- The small image draws the eye.
- The surface is good. It feels porous. If it were 'ceramic' [glazed], it wouldn't feel the same. It would be too much like something on a shelf then.
- It's so engaging. Drew me to it.
- The words drew me to it.
- It fits. I just want to wrap my arms around it.
- It's cooling my chest, but warming where my hands are. It feels really good.
- It's amazing how touching the work revs up your awareness of your body.
- Because it is ceramic I expected it to be hard and cold. And it was, as long as I was handling it. But as soon as I fit it to my body and found a place where it was comfortable, it didn't feel cold or hard anymore.
- It's so intimate and personal.
- It's so sensual. I feel it reconnects me with my sense of touch, makes me more aware.
- I don't want to lift it – too heavy. [She then lifts it.] Oh, it's light.
- First you slide your hand all over, then you begin to find the dimples. I just want to explore them.
- I could stroke it all day.
- Feels unusual, yet natural.
- Feels organic.
- The coldness feels good. If it were warm I wouldn't want to pick it up.
- It fits really nicely.
- If I were at home with it, I would stroke it all the time. I would rest my head on it.
- It's too precious to pick it up. And I wanted something soft.
- It's calming and quiet. The texture makes you go into the piece – want to feel the wabi-sabi imperfections. The smoothness feels too hard – you

search for the imperfections. The texture makes you explore. And it's required. It touches you. You and the work absorb each other.

- Unconscious stroking like stroking a cat. The dimples are good. I go back to them again and again.



PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 23

Using casts as models

See page 141.

Making and testing

The pieces were coiled, starting with the middle coil and making one half first, then turning it over and building the second half on top. A variety of texturing tools were used.

Results

Designation: 23.1



Clay: Earthstone 20

Dimensions: 41 x 28 x 16.5 cms

Firing temperature: 1000°C

Texturing: ceramic stamp made with pinpricks in spiral

Visual: Looks almost functional with bowl-like depression. Fine and even texture gives overall effect, accentuating the form.

Tactile: Too heavy! Uncomfortable to lift and hold. Does not fit well against body. Texture feels calming and satisfying because of fineness. Rounded edges good for gripping.

Designation: 23.2

Clay: Earthstone 20 + 4% calcined alumina + 5% rutile

Firing temperature: unfired

Texturing: Pieces of 'heel scrub' were pressed into leatherhard piece. Texture varied across piece because of crumbliness of heel scrub. After texturing, it was 'massaged' (rubbed with the palm of the hand) to remove rough areas.

Visual: Looks 'clunky'. Is not adequately lifted off surface of table. Texture is a bit dull – nothing new about it. Texture perhaps has association with vinyl?

Tactile: Too heavy. Does not fit. [Cannot determine any more qualities because unfired.]

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 24

Press-moulded forms

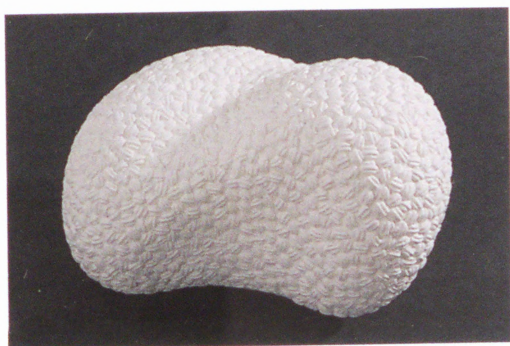
See pages 142 – 147.

Making and testing

Two-piece moulds were made of the three selected casts and press-moulded. When leatherhard they were covered uniformly with sprigs, each piece using a different design of my making. After the initial bisque firing they were all treated with terra sigillata, first by brushing, then by six sprayed coats.

Results

Designation: 24.1



Clay: Valentine's Earthstone 20

Dimensions: 35 x 30 x 20

Firing temperature: 1000°C

Visual: A strong piece. Intriguing form, makes you want to explore it visually. Dense sprigged texture particularly appealing – strengthens form. Colour appealing in its neutrality.

Tactile: Fits really well. Feels really engaging to hand too. Excellent

rough/smooth surface. Can fit in many ways. Weight is satisfying and easy to lift. Size helps lifting too.

Designation: 24.2



Clay: Valentine's Earthstone 20

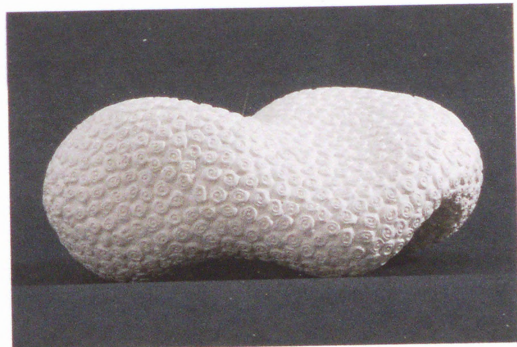
Dimensions: 40 x 30 x 17

Firing temperature: 1000°C

Visual: Has a lot of visual associations (suckers, kisses, lips...). Shape is a bit blobby but curves flow into each other engagingly. Sprigs too widely spaced, look too individual.

Tactile: Excellent fit against torso. Sprigs feel a little far apart – no sense of smoothness.

Designation: 24.3





Clay: Valentine's Earthstone 20

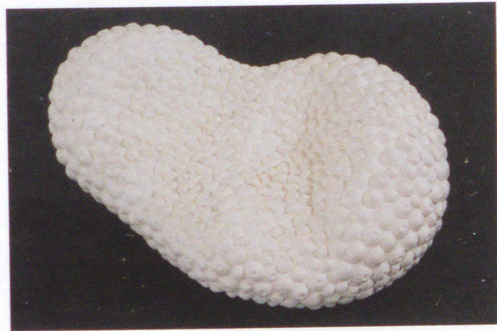
Dimensions: 38 x 32 x 18

Firing temperature: 1000°C

Visual: Sprigs have associations with roses, water swirling. Density of the texture gives good overall surface. Shape holds your attention from both orientations.

Tactile: Weight is easy to pick up and handle but heavy enough to make it feel 'significant'. 'Elbow' indentation does not fit comfortably anywhere. One side fits better than the other. However, it still feels comfortable against the body. The bulges fit the hand and other parts of the body well.

Designation: 24.4 (same mould as 24.2)



Clay: Valentine's Earthstone 20

Dimensions: 40 x 30 x 17

Firing temperature: 1000°C

Visual: Dense texture is engaging. There are associations with barnacles. Terra sigillata brushing is too obvious.

Tactile: The texture is *very* engaging. Its largeness and density engage the fingers in exploration. The piece fits extremely well as in 24.2.

Designation: 24.5 (same mould as 24.1)



Clay: Valentine's Earthstone 20

Dimensions: 35 x 30 x 20

Firing temperature: 1000°C

Visual: Very 'bumpy'. You perceive a slight fearfulness about picking it up, but at the same time a sort of appealing *frisson* in that fearfulness.

Tactile: Surprisingly restful considering the bumps, almost like a massage tool. Texture encouraging finger exploration. Fits as in 24.1.

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 25

Degree Show

See pages 148 - 162 for images and critical results.

Background

The Department of Ceramics and Glass showed in a large tent constructed in Hyde Park in the 2007 Royal College of Art Degree Show. The exhibition, which ran over a period of two weeks, was open 12:00 – 9:00 every day and there were 48,000 visitors. My artwork was shown in a shed within the tent. Inside was a bench for visitors to sit on and shelving to store the nine pieces being exhibited.

Results

Polaroids were taken of visitors interacting with the work. In addition, their comments were noted, either by themselves in a book kept in the space or written as closely verbatim as possible by me after they left the space.

GENERAL RESPONSES:

General comments:

- Great concept – huggable art!
- It's, like, really satisfying.
- Real pleasure.
- So very sensual, fresh and definitely intimate.
- As sculptural objects these are beautiful, they are also visually very inviting. You want to touch and hold them.
- I love your work and want to sleep with it.
- It makes you want to lean into it.
- Love captured!
- Soft, hard, squashy, resilient – need to touch them!

- It's great and surprising. I've never hugged a work of art to my body before.
- It's like an instrument, a guitar. And the tone is nice. [Playing it like a drum.]
- What a great experience!
- It's extraordinary really. Really seductive – and vaguely disturbing.
- As you move it around, it finds different 'homes' against your body.
- I love the feel of the shape. Can they be made of a material that can extract warmth and return it to the body?
- –This is a very strange experience. [How so?] –Well, it's disturbing...and unpleasant.
- [Would you like to hold one?] –No, I've had four children.
- So want to touch and hold them but scared to drop them! Ceramics' negative connotation.
- I might come back and hug one later. I'm a bit too English to start hugging ceramics at my age. But it looks very nice, very sensuous. [Looking at me holding one.]
- It feels weird. Uncomfortable. I don't think it's really me. [She handled the work very quickly.]
- I don't want to hold it because I'm too scared I'll drop it. [She did not touch any artworks either.]

Comments about more than one aspect of the artwork:

- It makes me feel sleepy. Maybe that's because I need something heavy on me to fall asleep. The weight feels safe and reassuring. It feels significant. Also, the texture is important. It feels right. Calming. It wouldn't work if they were soft. The hardness feels strong, safe.
- For a brief moment there, I almost felt broody – longed for my big heavy cat, who I miss profoundly. Loved the bobbly one – stimulate the veins surface. Comforting to my very painful back and shoulders. Extraordinary and deeply engaging.
- I am astonished by the way these rock-like works fit so lovingly around all the curves, the places of my body. They are cool to the touch, and appeal to the sensual, maternal aspects of my being. They are marvellously feminine, voluptuous and strangely comforting.
- Snuggling up next to an object that 'fits' with your body – quite intimate yet strange, as you are not the only person who 'fits' with that object...it's like sharing the same intimate moment – that is experienced by many others but at different times in different places – people with different associations, experiences and backgrounds.
- At first it feels cold, but very quickly you can feel it becoming warm. And as you move your hands over it, you can feel where you've been holding it. So you have a sense of how you are changing it as much as it is affecting you. It's responsive. And you feel responsible for it.

Interesting stories, ideas, and analogies:

- At the Kobe earthquake museum, they give you forms to hold while you watch a video of a forest.
- I bet you've had lots of uptight English people. We crave intimacy but run a mile from it. I think these should be compulsory in schools in England.
- Reminds me of large stones in my village in Iran where women in labour press their bodies against the stone to take away the pain. Also, we have stones that we believe take our emotional pain away. We say then that the stone is crying.

Other uses for the artwork:

- I think people in counselling or doing work with therapists may benefit from holding one of these as it is comforting and distracts from issues in your mind.
- Good for a sexual health clinic.
- You could use them in a nursing home for people with dementia.
- It would be good on a children's ward.
- Good for physiotherapy.
- Good for massage.
- I feel I should be weeping, having a breakdown, like it's drawing it out of me.
- Have you looked into bioenergetics? It's about releasing emotional blocks through releasing physical blocks.
- I would use these in my practice as a marriage counsellor.
- The continuous texture is safe and let's you explore it to find new ways. An analogy for new patterns in life. Could be used in psychoanalysis.
- I felt like I could feel my heart rate slowing. It's so calming.
- Are you a therapist?

COMMENTS ABOUT FEELINGS AND ASSOCIATIONS:

Calmness and comfort:

- A wonderful experience, so gentle.
- Great cuddling.
- It's a settling feeling – but somehow, not, at the same time.
- It's quite seductive, isn't it?
- It's very comfortable.
- When you get it in the right place, it works. It rests on you, feels comfortable.
- Oddly comfortable.
- I don't think I'm going to give it back.
- Great. Thank you. I feel comforted now.

- I don't think I can let go of it.
- I could stay here for quite a long time.
- I love 'em. They're fantastic. Huggable. Make me feel kinda warm inside.
- Like holding a purring cat!
- Strangely comforting.
- It's a surprising experience. Intuitively you think it won't feel very nice because it's hard and heavy. But it feels good. It's soothing.
- I feel comforted.
- Who would have thought that ceramics could be so comforting?
- It's so soothing. It sort of melts into your body.
- It's surprisingly comfortable but I think I still prefer a pillow.

Hugs:

- So comforting! Hugs are the most special thing in my life!
- I can see that they would fit anyone – after all, hugs fit everyone.
- I play the bassoon in an orchestra and this reminds me of that. During times when I'm not playing, I hug my instrument and run my fingers over the holes. The holes [indentations] feel like those.
- Thanks for the unique hugging opportunity!
- Thanks for the HUG!
- Keep on hugging.
- The whole world should hug.
- The hug is about a closeness, sharing an emotional charge. I feel like I am getting the charge from all the people who have hugged this before me. It's important that it's been hugged before – a shared hug. The hug gives you emotional energy.

Self-reflection:

- Pressing the curvaceous shape into my body felt as if I was hugging an extension of myself.
- Feels like it's become part of me. I feel very possessive of it. MINE!
- It's like a missing part of me.
- It makes me feel slightly more important because now I have a purpose, I am looking after something important.
- [After leaving the piece and the shed] I feel like I've still got it against me.
- It's a kind of self-discovery.
- I imagine if you sit here long enough, it begins to feel like part of you.
- It's about me but at the same time it's about this object.
- It's fascinating – and relaxing. It has the same feeling as yoga. It helps you think because it gives you something to touch and handle.

Making animate what is inanimate:

- Well, my friend [the artwork], we must part.
- Almost like your mother. Makes me feel comfortable. I've got, like, a bond with it now. When I'm not hugging it, it feels wrong.
- It wants to be held – it doesn't want to be put back in its box.
- I don't want to let go of it now.
- The big smooth one feels like you have to look after it. The others feel like they're looking after you.
- You feel much more attachment that you should to an inanimate object.
- Why do I feel protective of it?
- I feel that the textured ones reject me.
- They all have different personalities. Do they have names?

Babies:

- What's our best experiences? Those of holding our babies – the warmth, the way they fit up against you, their preciousness. This evokes that.
- Tummies. It's a foetal moment.
- It's so like a baby. It's making me all broody.
- I'm having a baby in a month [a man], so I think I should try holding one.
- Lovely babies you've got there.
- Its' so like a baby. It's making me all broody.

COMMENTS ABOUT THE PHYSICALITY OF THE ARTWORKS:

About weight:

- Amazing experience. It feels like it's breathing for you, like you've stopped breathing and it's doing it. It's the weight. The weight feels like it goes forward, not down. It's very therapeutic. I feel relaxed now. It really does work.
- It's good they're so heavy. Something lighter wouldn't press against your body.
- It's definitely the weight that does it. It wouldn't be the same if it was lighter. It's like when someone you love leans on you while you're watching TV or something. It's restful, and reassuring.
- It's too heavy. [An older woman.]

About texture:

- The smooth ones have more potential for experience; the heavily textured ones make more of a statement and close off the experience for

me.

- The texture reminds me of a recurrent nightmare I had as a child when I was feverish. The smooth blankets would suddenly become like a Hazelnut Cluster. [She went on to touch every artwork.]
- The textured ones are therapeutic because there's a lot to investigate. The smooth ones are more soothing.
- The bare ones [without terra sigillata] feel more natural and those textures do too. The textured ones feel more like they were designed.
- When I can't sleep at night, I stroke the edge of my pubic hair – not in a sexual way – and this reminds me of that.

About temperature:

- I love the coolness.
- Very beautiful pieces, just thinking though, don't know if this is something you've done/doing already...But have you thought about heating them? Aren't ceramics a good heat insulator?

About hardness:

- At first it felt hard, then nice. And cold, then warm.
- The hardness of the ceramic is interesting – like a hug. A hug is soft but strong and firm too.
- Isn't it amazing that something so hard can feel so soft?
- Strangely comforting for something so hard.
- Irresistible! You were not here but I cuddled your forms anyway....As I very carefully mauled your 'barnacle' surface form I was reminded of the occasions when I wake and have the strange sensation that my pillow is rock hard!
- I like the way the hardness makes me move around and fit my body to it, rather than the other way around. It makes me aware of muscles and my body that I'm not normally aware of. It's good.
- It's too hard.
- It would be better if it was soft on the outside with a hard core.

APPENDIX 5

THE APERTURE IN CERAMICS

THE APERTURE IN CERAMICS

The opening is a powerful legacy from our ceramic past. Within the three strands of ceramic history – domestic, sculptural (including votive) and architectural – contemporary studio ceramics is a relatively new field, dating back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and owes its development to the domestic ware tradition, with historical sculptural ceramics strongly influencing later developments. This tradition is deeply rooted in craftsmanship, and advancement in the field has traditionally been based on technical achievement. Peter Dormer emphasized this type of tacit or craft knowledge in his celebrated book, *The Art of the Maker*.ⁱ As potters or ceramists, whether we pursue careers in the production of functional or sculptural work, we are trained in the traditional techniques of domestic ceramics, such as throwing, coiling, slabbing, and pinching. All of these techniques lend themselves to creating a containment of empty space (a vessel), and hence, usually an opening. The traditional sculptural technique of modelling, which uses either an addition or subtraction building method and therefore does not create a contained space, is not generally taught to ceramics studentsⁱⁱ. If we as ceramists use modelling, we generally learn the technique on our own. Because of this type of learning and the tacit knowledge we acquire, does it perhaps 'just feel right' for us to retain an opening in a ceramic piece?

ⁱ Dormer, Peter. *The Art of the Maker*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1994.

ⁱⁱ I found evidence for this by questioning Royal College of Art students. Out of a total of thirty-four postgraduate students trained in ceramics at BA level and enrolled as MA students in the RCA's Ceramics and Glass Department in the Spring of 2005, only four had been taught modelling in their BA ceramics training (one in Korea, one in Sweden, one in Denmark, and one in the UK, but the last student's tutor was a sculptor, not a ceramist). Four others received some training in modelling as part of their pre-BA Foundation courses (whether or not their Foundation tutors were sculptors or ceramists is not known).

Thus the aperture in ceramics is often taken for granted. First, it is a functional necessity, an opening into a vessel that aims to contain. Much non-functional sculptural ceramics, however, continues to embrace the vessel form and therefore the opening. For instance, Gordon Baldwin's sculptural works usually include an aperture.



Figure 92. Gordon Baldwin, 'Vessel from an Enigmatic Form' (2003) [188]

My own studio experience also reinforced the inclusion of an opening, and as a ceramics teacher I have often told students that the rim or aperture demands eighty percent of the viewer's attention, regardless of size or placement.

The opening in ceramics serves as the focal point. The eye cannot leave it for long and is drawn back repeatedly, even leading people to try to see inside it. The opening makes you conscious of the void within the form, changing your perception of the artwork. It is not just in ceramics that this happens; it occurs in other fields as well. Richard Wentworth's *Pupil* (2005), which was shown in *State of Mind: The Exhibition* at the London School of Economics as part of the BIOS projectⁱⁱⁱ, is a useful example. On viewing this installation piece, you entered a room with no furnishings of any kind. The wall of windows opposite the door was covered from ceiling to floor with carpet. In the carpet were holes about eight centimetres across. The 'plugs' from these holes were distributed

ⁱⁱⁱ See <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/BIOS/images/State%20of%20Mind/pupil.htm>.

onto the other walls. What was striking on the sensory level was that on entering, your focus was immediately drawn to the holes and as you looked towards them, you found yourself attempting to look through them. Your eyes are continually drawn back to the holes even as you explore other parts of the room.

All the factors considered here can be both engaging and detracting in terms of the tactility and handle-ability of an artwork. Most importantly, if the eye is fully engaged, it will dominate the hand^{iv}. Furthermore, the opening determines how viewer/touchers will interact with the work. It creates a top and a bottom, the opening usually being on the upper side. This establishes object orientation and prescribes how one touches, lifts, and holds the object. The hole serves as a guide, or focus/locus, for the hand as well as the eye, becoming an explorative tactile experience that dominates the interaction with the object. It also is associated with the mouth or sexual orifices and can give you a sense that the piece is figurative, more specifically, representing a human figure. Again, this may engender a taboo against touching the 'skin' of a human form, touching a stranger as it were, and evoking self-consciousness, which, at least in a public setting, discourages touching.

^{iv} Spence, Charles. 'A Multisensory Approach to Touch', conference paper, The Magic Touch: Touching and Handling in a Cultural Heritage Context, *Heritage Studies Research Group, Institute of Archaeology, University College London, 20 December 2004.*

APPENDICES 6 - 12

ABSTRACTS FOR ACADEMIC PAPERS

APPENDIX 6

Touch and the Caress: Scientific Knowledge Applied to Tactile Sculpture Ceramics

Abstract for paper given at Atoms to Art Conference, Manchester, 14 September 2005.

This illustrated paper is part of a research project that looks to neurophysiology to understand the science of touch, and applies that knowledge to the development of sculptural ceramic objects with the aim of more positively engaging our tactile sense.

Touch is the act of contact between two objects; tactility the quality of the touched surface; the human body the medium through which touch and tactility meet, and thus, the beginning of my research.

I looked at sensation at cellular level, at the peripheral nervous system, and finally at the processing of sensations into perceptions within the brain. A diversity of neurons perceives different forms of touch, e.g., pressure, temperature, or pain. Two-point discrimination, a neurological test used to determine sensitivity, measures the threshold at which two points simultaneously applied to the skin are perceived as one. A two-point discrimination test on a neurologically healthy person reveals the threshold on the lip to be 2.2mm, i.e., at 2.2mm apart two prongs applied to the lip feel like one, whereas the thigh threshold is over 60mm.

Using my own body I created ceramic objects to 'fit' the body as an investigation into whether differing ceramic surface tactilities could be experienced across the body. These objects were made to be touched and handled, and the surface texture densities were based on my own two-point discrimination thresholds. This presentation will show how the creation of tactile forms and tactile surface textures can alter the way in which we encounter a sculptural ceramic object.

APPENDIX 7

Touching the Body: A Ceramic Possibility

Abstract for peer-reviewed paper, Interpreting Ceramics, Issue 8
[<http://www.uwic.ac.uk/icrc/issue008/articles/22.htm>]

Touch is the most intimate and immediate of the senses, yet our culture is dominated by a hegemony of vision to the detriment of our tactile awareness. Ceramic art includes a long and intimate history of tactility, giving us an innate understanding of the tactile qualities of fired clay. Creating sculptural forms in clay, intended to be touched and handled, can challenge and redefine our encounter with ceramics and incorporate the tactility of ceramics into sculptural objects, thus challenging and redefining our ceramic experience.

The larger research project of which this paper is a part includes investigation into philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and physiology. This paper presents a series of projects based on knowledge gained from physiology, in particular, neurophysiology. The artist looks at how a neurological test giving information about the sense of touch across the body can be applied in the creation of sculptural ceramic objects.

APPENDIX 8

'Towards the Embrace: Engaging the Body with Sculptural Ceramics'

*Abstract for invited paper, Parallel Connections Conference, Sunderland,
1 – 2 March 2007*

This paper presents a PhD by Practice project in its final year. The aim of the project is to more fully engage our sense of touch through bodily interaction with sculptural ceramic objects. The project encompasses several fields of study, including neurophysiology, philosophy, feminist criticism, and the study of art forms outside of our western culture, such as Japanese Tea Ceremony. During the course of the research an emergent methodological structure evolved that is fully dependent on a "critical and inextricable meld of theory and practice"ⁱ, as the theoretical and practical explorations developed each out of the other. The progressive development of the research is echoed in the experience of the finished work: seeing → touching → grasping → lifting → holding → embracing. This progression illustrates a move from distanced sight and intellectual understanding alone to the absorbing intimacy of physical contact.

ⁱ *Robyn Stewart*. 'Practice vs Praxis: Constructing Models for Practitioner-Based Research', *TEXT* Vol. 5 No. 2, October 2001, <http://www.gu.edu.au/school/art/text/oct01.stewart.htm>

APPENDIX 9

'Towards the Embrace: A Case Study of an Emergent, Interwoven Research Methodology in Sculptural Ceramics'

*Abstract for paper given at New Craft – Future Voices International Conference,
Dundee, 4 – 6 July 2007*

This paper will present the methodological research model developed within a PhD by Practice in ceramics. The objective of the project is to more fully engage the body's sense of touch within sculptural ceramics, in an experience of sensual groundedness. The outcomes include a series of textured ceramic forms that can be encountered through bodily experience: *seeing* → *touching* → *grasping* → *lifting* → *holding* → *embracing*, and a written thesis of differing styles as best express each segment.

The project moves away from scientific method towards a more emergent and open-ended model, amalgamating material from many fields through the application of specific information (e.g., understanding how the body perceives), research techniques (e.g., Grounded Theory), and general understanding (e.g., phallogocentrism). These fields include neurophysiology, anthropology, philosophy/cultural studies, feminist criticism, and the study of Japanese Tea Ceremony and ceramics.

The methodology has evolved from within the research itself. An interweaving of theory and practice developed as issues from theory led to questions that were addressed within practice, followed by issues arising within that practice being addressed theoretically. The resulting methodology is iterative, in that each research question reflects and revisits the work that went

before, and emergent, in that the results are not calculated or fully anticipated. This allows for both systematic and serendipitous development.

The ceramic objects produced in the practical investigations throughout the project are not intended as *illustrations* of theory, just as the theory is not intended to serve as *explanations* of the practice. There has been an attempt within art-based PhDs to “avoid using such dichotomies as theory and practice”ⁱⁱ. Although this sits well in a post-modern world, within this project, articulating the interdependent relationship of theory and practice, and deliberately intertwining the two threads of enquiry, gave rise to the research strategy itself and is the driving force that propels the project forward. Another methodological model drawing on many sources was espoused by Ryan and uses the Deleuze/Guattari rhizome metaphorⁱⁱⁱ. However, I believe that a concatenated model, where each theoretical and practical strand is both grounded in the previous investigation and also leads to the next, is a more dynamic model.

Ultimately, the aim is that the understanding developed within the theoretical research be embedded within the results of the practical work, and that resolutions arising from that practical work be manifest within the theoretical writing. Thus, I hope to theorize practice and practice theory.



(photo credit: Alys Tomlinson)

ⁱⁱ University of Helsinki. 'Frequently Asked Questions about Dissertations'
<http://www.uiah.fi/page.asp?path=1866,1917,2728,14387> (accessed August 13, 2006)

ⁱⁱⁱ Ryan, Alyssa. 'Connecting Two Research Strategies: A hybrid model', *TEXT* Vol. 9 No. 1,
<http://www.gu.edu.au/school/art/text/april05/ryan.htm>.

APPENDIX 10

'Thinking and Doing: The Emerging Role of the Research Artist'

Abstract for invited paper given at Idea & Act Symposium, Bath Spa University, 7 September 2007

My aim in this paper is to use my PhD research to illustrate the potentially creative relationship between Idea and Act, Theory and Practice, Knowledge and Intuition, and perhaps even Mind and Body – and how for me, art-based research has provided a way to unite these seemingly dichotomous elements.

My PhD is about engaging the body's sense of touch through the embrace of sculptural ceramics, and I will show images of people physically interacting with my work at the Royal College of Art Final Show in 2007. The ceramic objects in the photos are made by hugging, and they are made to be hugged.

Giving a brief narrative of the research project I will show how a methodology evolved that intertwined theory and practice in an interdependent manner. Issues that arose theoretically were answered practically, and questions arising through practice were addressed through theory. This will be illustrated with examples.

The role of the research artist is an emergent and evolving one. I hope to demonstrate that the methodology described creates a new role that is different than that of the studio ceramist, one where theory (acquired knowledge) and practice (tacit knowledge) are brought together to produce artworks that could not have been created any other way.

APPENDIX 11

'Towards the Embrace: Sculptural Ceramics that Engage the Body'

*Exhibition proposal for New Craft – Future Voices International Conference Exhibition,
Dundee, 4 – 6 July 2007*

Summary:

'Cast Hugs' that fit the body within an embrace are part of a PhD in ceramics, which aims to create an experience of sensual groundedness by engaging the body's sense of touch. Form, texture, weight, material quality, and one's personal interaction are all factors that contribute to the tactile experience.

Proposal:

Touch is our most direct, least intellectualized, sense. It is the grounding sense, the sense of tangibility that places us in the world. Yet within our western culture a hegemony of vision erodes our tactile sensitivities. There are those who challenge this visual domination, such as the psychologist Tiffany Field, who states that within our culture we suffer too often from 'touch starvation'^{iv}. We have long known that children (and babies of other mammals) are adversely affected by touch deprivation^v. Field and colleagues at the Touch Institute at the University of Miami School of Medicine have shown the detrimental effects of touch starvation for adults as well.

^{iv} Field, Tiffany . *Touch*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003.

^v Montagu, Ashley. *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*, 3rd Edition, Harper & Row, New York, 1986.

In studio ceramics, as in other art forms, vision dominates. This perhaps can be linked to the development of fine clays, especially porcelain, in earlier centuries, and the subsequent value placed on this type of fragile functional ware. Another contributing factor may be the developments in sculptural studio ceramics that are linked to the larger art movements of the twentieth century. It is only in fairly recent times that some fine artists have produced work that goes beyond the visual (e.g., Anya Gallaccio's *preserve 'beauty'* (2003) as seen in the Turner Prize 2003 exhibition, where one smells the decay of the flowers mounted behind glass). However, much of this work does not provide an engaging experience. At the Whitechapel gallery in London Franz West's *Seven Adaptives* (late 1970s, casts 2003), squared ring-like pieces that can be placed over the shoulder and across the body, were shown as part of "Franzwestite: Franz West - works 1973-2003". These objects provide some limited tactile experience, yet it is more the idea of touch, rather than the development of an aesthetic of touch, that is explored in these pieces. The material of which they are made is hard, "sticky", unresponsive to the hand, and they sit uncomfortably. West's work is more about subverting a traditional aesthetic than exploring or extending it. The experience of touch engagement is further eroded by an accompanying film that shows others interacting with the work, thereby causing the tactile experiencer to revert to being a mere viewer. Whether or not West intended this film to be shown alongside is not known.

Sculptural ceramics is integrally linked to functional ceramics through materiality and technique, and for most makers the tactile materials-based craft legacy remains important. Within the field there is overt acknowledgement of the tactile qualities of clay, and much work is still made by hand. In addition, not as makers but as users, we have a long history of engaging our sense of touch in ceramics in that most people in most cultures handle ceramic ware on a daily basis. This gives us, both as makers and users, an innate and intimate sensitivity to fired clay. Because of its tactile roots, craft, in general, is a good area in which to challenge visual dominance. Sculptural ceramics, with this

strong sense of tactile materiality behind it and our inherent understanding of the fired material, is an appropriate medium in which to further this challenge.

The three sculptural ceramic objects proposed for exhibition at New Craft - Future Voices were drawn from a body of work created as part of a PhD by Practice, the aim of which is to more fully engage the body's sense of touch. The weight and size of the works fall within the parameters of the body; all the work can be embraced within the arms, resting comfortably against the torso. The works are non-figurative yet relate directly to the body, rounded curves fitting against the body in various ways and resulting in differing sensations.

The ceramic works have been created in such a way as to allow our bodies to interact with them on several levels. I have used surface textures to engage our hands' abilities to distinguish surface quality. The weight of the work as it rests against the body stimulates a pleasurable sensation of pressure. The work is low-fired to facilitate the equalization of temperature between the toucher's body and the ceramic pieces. As the body settles around the work in different positions, our sense of proprioception is engaged, that is, we sense our body in space and in relation to the objects around us. As the work moves across areas of bare skin the sense of a delicate touch, 'the lover's touch'^{vi}, stimulates areas of the brain associated with pleasure and well-being. Handling and embracing the work evokes touch memories and subconscious associations. Finally, I believe that interaction with the work can generate a sense of self, a sense of wholeness in oneself, through a blurring of the subject/object divide. This leads the toucher to a self-reflective sensuality. The embrace is, above all, a centering action, one of comfort and security.

The progressive experience of the work, seeing → touching → grasping → lifting → holding → embracing, makes viewers into touchers, moving them away from sight alone and its required physical distance, to the intimacy of bodily contact. The works are not completed until they are held. To this end, in exhibition it is beneficial for the works to be placed in such a way that visitors feel comfortable interacting with them. I propose that each of the three pieces be

^{vi}BBC. 'Lover's touch is special', BBC news report, 29 July 2002.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/2158489.stm>. (Accessed: 13 May 2006)

shown on a low bench-like plinth with a piece on one end and a cushion on the other. Alternately, one large plinth could be used. The cushion invites the visitor to sit down, slow down, and lift and handle the work.

The context of the making of these works falls within a PhD project whose methodology evolved from within the research itself. An interweaving of theory and practice developed as issues from theory led to questions that were addressed within practice, followed by issues arising within that practice being addressed theoretically. The resulting methodology is iterative, in that each research question reflects and revisits the work that went before, and emergent, in that the results are not calculated or fully anticipated. This allows for both systematic and serendipitous development. Several areas of exploration comprise the project, including neurophysiology (how we perceive), anthropology (how ceramic ware is used and handled in different cultures), philosophy (the role of the self and the subject/object divide), and cultural studies (a feminist perspective on the caress and the embrace). No theoretical or practical exploration stood alone in these investigations.

It was as important to retain an emergent approach in making as it was theoretically. To this end I set frameworks for each piece or project, rather than executing a pre-conceived idea. In the case of these particular works, I created the forms by filling very large balloons with liquid plaster and hugging them against my body, the framework being my body, the limitations of the shape and size of the balloon, and the liquid plaster. After the 'cast hugs' were set, a mould was made of each one, again in plaster. The final ceramic forms were press-moulded, then the seams and surfaces were finished and an overall texture was applied, either through the use of stamps or through other surface treatments. The works were low-fired (unvitrified) so the clay body remains porous or "responsive" to the touch. The works have no particular orientation and can be placed on any surface in any position.

Biographical Details

Bonnie Kemske traces her influences to her early dance training in New York and her experiences of the Japanese Zen Buddhist art form of tea ceremony in Kyoto. Living as an American in Britain, she seeks to understand displacement and alienation, and the resulting search for forms of comfort.



Cast Hug I (photo credit: Alys Tomlinson)

APPENDIX 12

Collaborative study with University of Cambridge Department of Developmental Psychiatry (Learning Disability)

Report on collaborative study (in preparation)

In January 2006 I was asked to collaborate in a research project with the Department of Psychiatry, Learning Disability, at the University of Cambridge. The study is based on embedded figures tests, which are well-established visual tests used by psychologists to ascertain analytic ability and the way in which an individual's cognition works. A subject is shown a geometric figure on paper and then is asked to find that figure in a more complex drawing in which the figure is embedded or hidden. It has been shown that people with autism spectrum disorders generally have high skills in this test. This is thought to be due to a cognitive concentration on detail and a subsequent inability to see the broader picture. There are several explanations for this, one of which is that people with autism have weak central coherence, which is generally understood as the mind's inability to easily integrate diverse units of information into a single concept.

Panagiotis Siaperas, a PhD student in the Department of Psychiatry, Learning Disability, at Cambridge University, is investigating dyspraxia as a feature of Asperger's syndrome, which falls within the autism spectrum. He has undertaken to investigate the theory of weak central coherence by testing children and young adults with Asperger's syndrome through the use of embedded figures tests that have been adapted for tactile perception.

I have met with Panos Siaperas, Dr Howard Ring, and Professor Tony Holland several times and have been able to contribute to the design of the project through the understanding I have gained in my own PhD work about how we tactilely interact with objects and what surface qualities and designs might be most easily 'read'.

In discussion I felt that the researchers were unconsciously pathologizing the ability to obtain high scores on embedded figures tests, and I challenged them on their prejudice. Many psychologists and psychiatrists have high skills in conceptual thinking and do not score as highly in skills requiring structural abilities, such as the embedded figures tests. I informally tested students and staff in the RCA Ceramics and Glass Department, a group in which one would expect to find such structural abilities, to demonstrate that although those with autism score well on the test, others also do as well. This may have some significance to the final conclusions of the study. A follow-up study may be done to look at other issues that might be implicated in cognitive function of those who score high on embedded figures tests, such as dyspraxia.

I developed ceramic prototypes for the tactile embedded figures test, but because of the realities of the testing procedure, constraints of time, and my own time limitations, we decided that lightweight and more quickly produced tiles were needed. I chose which designs to use and made modifications as necessary, then had the test tiles made through rapid prototyping at RapidFormRCA.

Testing has now begun and the results thus far appear to be significant.

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Figure 51: Hélène Binet

Figure 52: Adam Rzepka

*Figure 57: From *Der Eintänzer*, a film by Rebecca Horn (1978)*

Figure 83: Artangel London

Figure 84: Jerry Hardman-Jones

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Figure 89: Collection of Family Clark. Courtesy Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro.

Figure 90: David Cripps

Figure 91: Michael Harvey

Figure 92: Gary Kirkham

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