



The

Ungh

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Master of Arts Thesis

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Title of Thesis | The Ungh, Knowledge Through Emotional, Sensorial and
Spatial forms of Bodily Being

Programme | Department of Media, Photography

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Date: 28.04.2022 | Number of Pages: 77+35 | Language: English

Abstract

The thesis *The Ungh* is a poetic and theoretical exploration of the intricacies contained within bodily experiences. Considering the interplay between emotional, sensorial and spatial perception in the forming of bodily space. Ungh is a self-invented word or sound that refers to a state of overlapping emotional and sensorial experiences into one unfixable moment. The thesis is formed of two parts: an artistic response and a theoretical discussion.

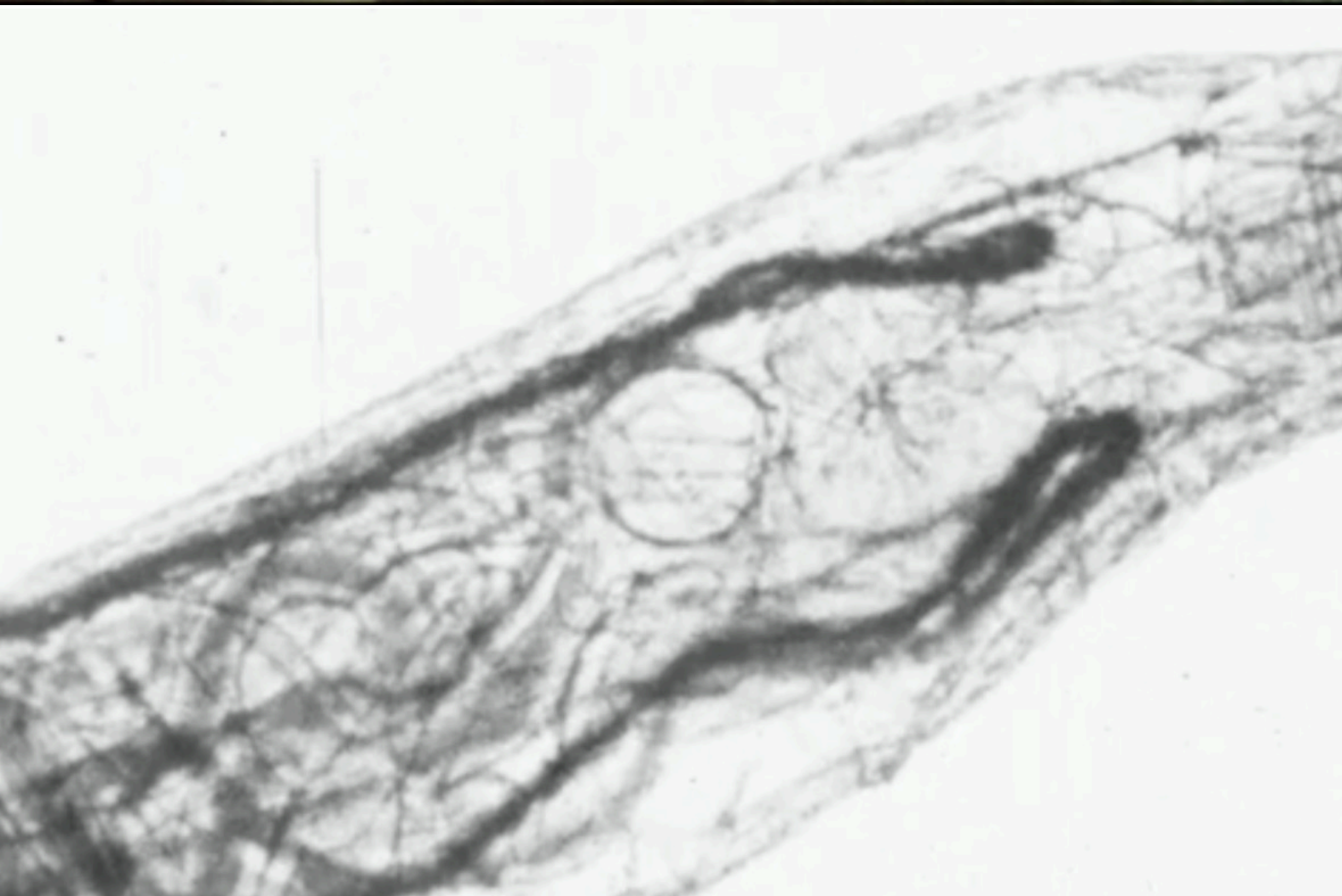
Part One is a collection of four artistic works that address the notion of The Ungh through an experimentation of images and sound. The work was shared in the form of an exhibition titled *Ways of Knowing* and includes: a silent film installation displayed across six screens, a photographic collage, a multi-panel risograph montage and short piece of writing in the form of spoken sound. The work seeks to address embodied forms of visibility, considering how the overlapping nature of matter is connected through affective forces.

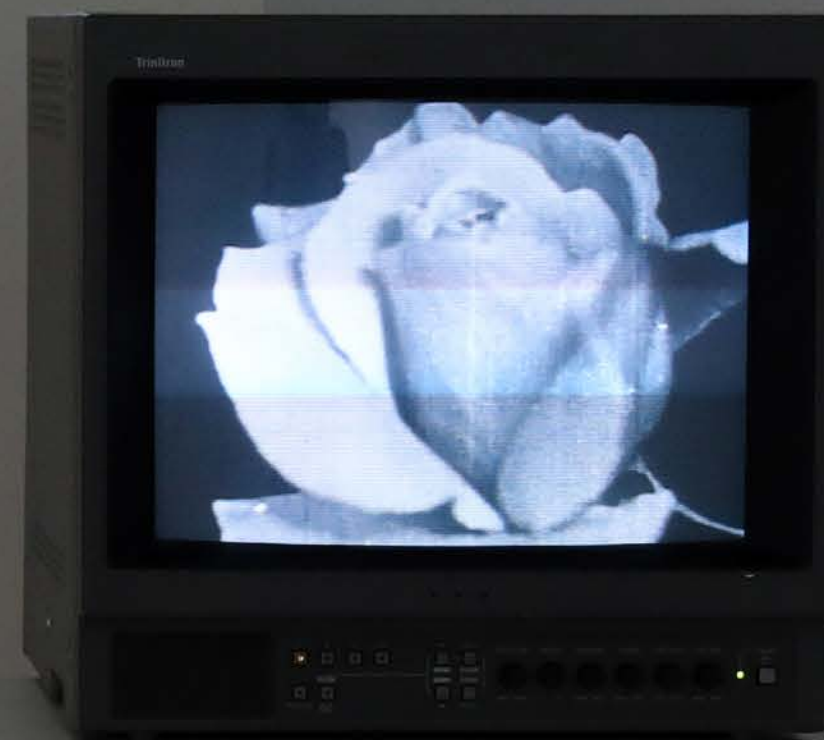
Part Two is a theoretical discussion of the multitude of ways in which knowledge can be formed through bodily ways of being. Crossing philosophy, poetics, science and cultural theory, this section weaves together eclectic arguments that acknowledge the fluid, embedded and *of the world* nature of bodily relations. Beginning with history of Affect theory to provide a contextual framework, the thesis crosses personal and theoretical discussions of the way energetic forces are woven into our bodies and experiences, acknowledging the linguistic limitations associated with such topics. The following section addresses the material quality of spoken sound through ideas of fluidity and felt meaning, turning to the mouth as a site of bodily relation and the possibilities of the voice as a material to carry emotionality and feeling. The final chapter focuses on the sensation of touch and the skin's surface as a site of knowledge, examining haptic visibility and other cross-sensory modes of perception.

Keywords: Embodiment, materiality, affect, touch, photography, film



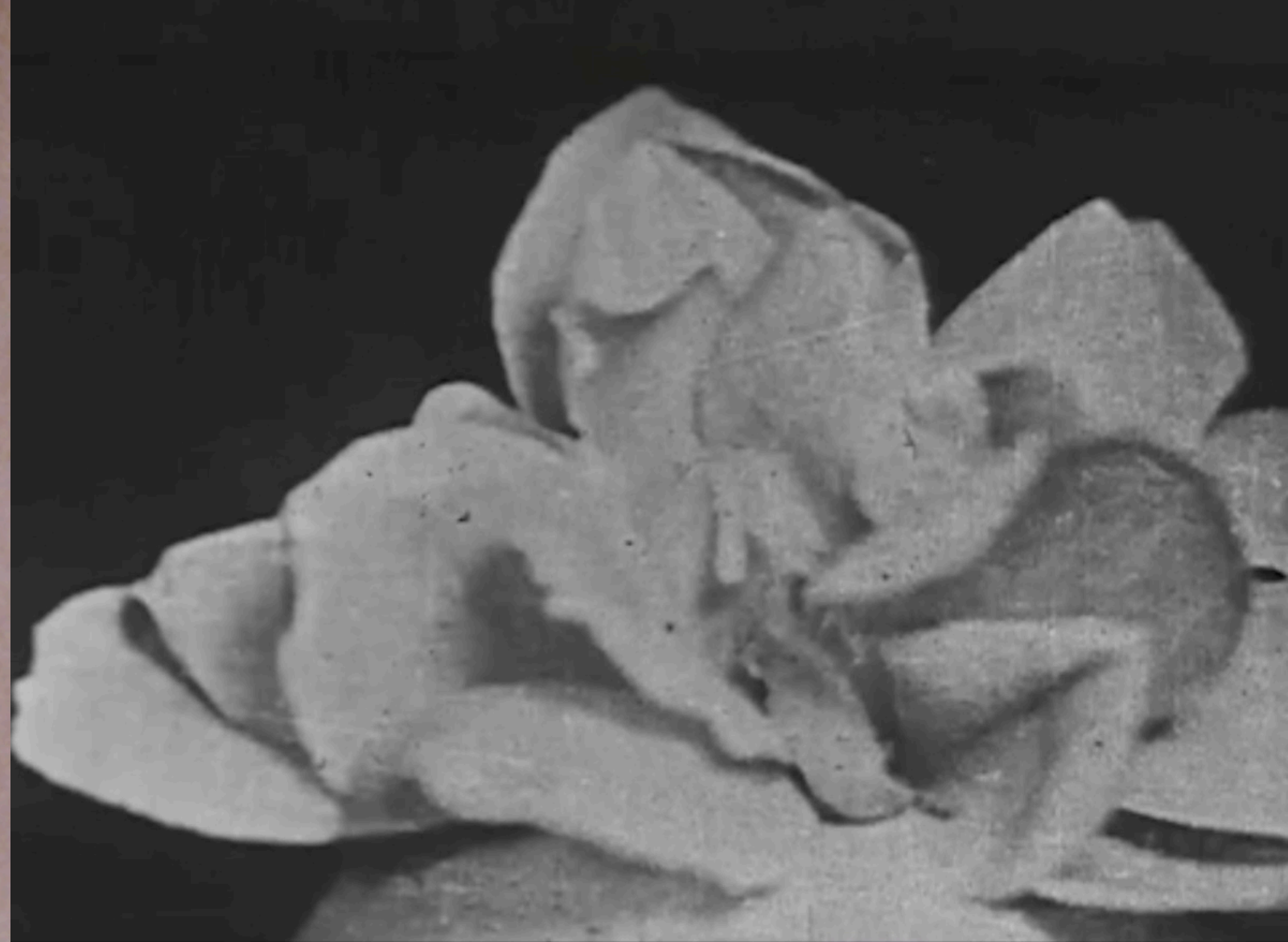


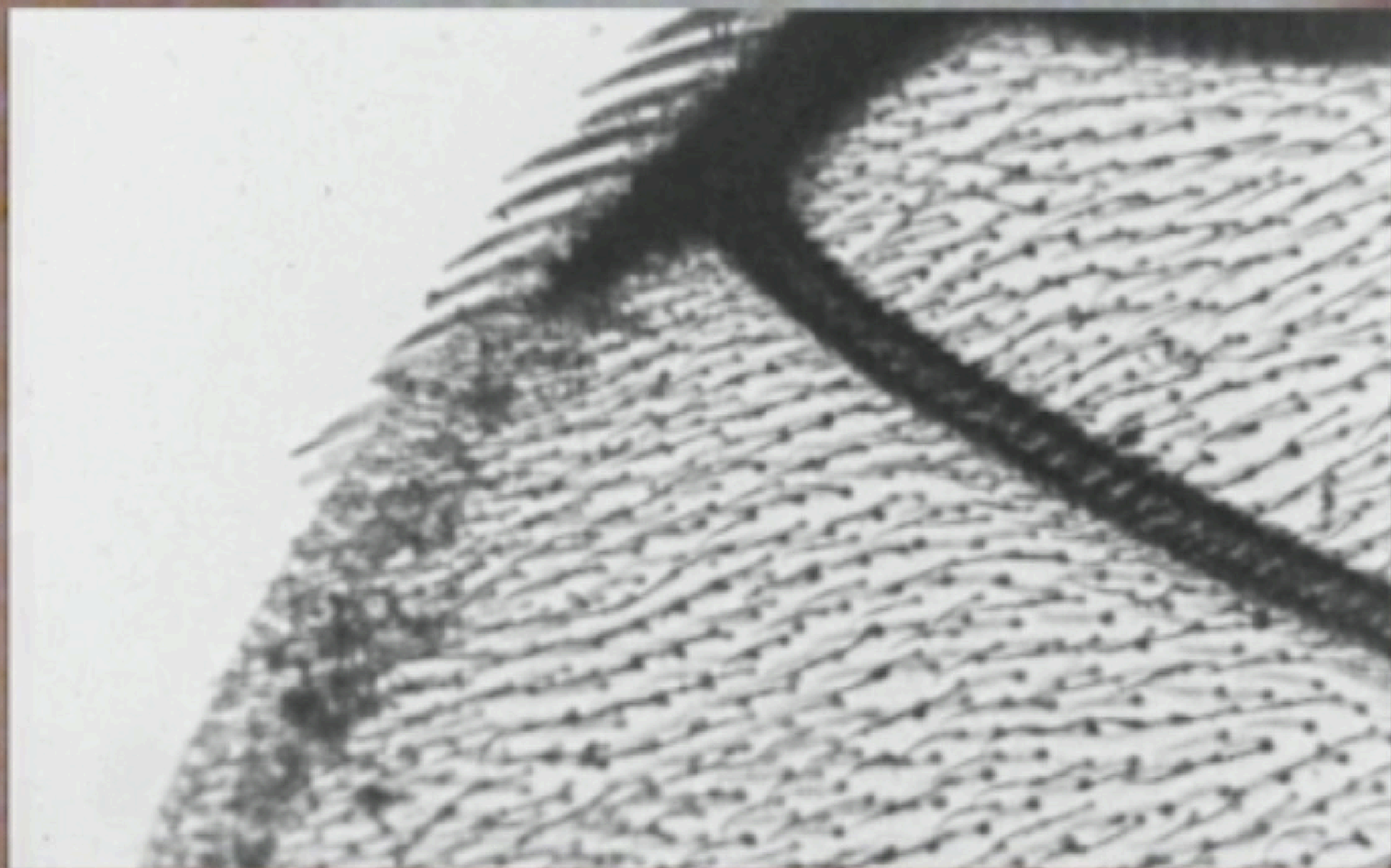






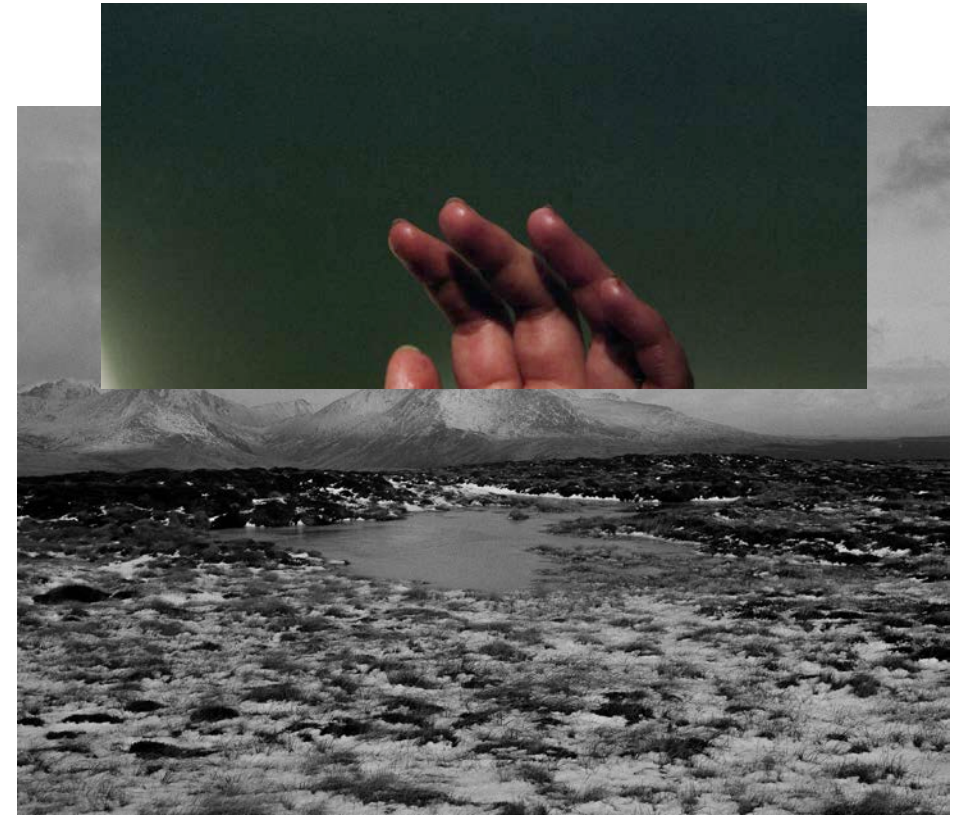






















ways of knowing

2.4 – 19.4.2022

The body allows us to perceive the world through indefinite singularities. In its adaptability it resembles the natural orders of the universe, replicated in the physical arrangement of the fabric that makes us. In the experience of our bodies we store our physical, sensorial and emotional echos within. Subjectivity in its fluidness reinterprets us the world to imbue it with meaning. While some may view ourselves as houses with separated chambers for each individual area of function — language, feelings, mathematics, emotions — others have a more interlinked understanding of our capacities.

Ways of Knowing binds the web of experience and the body's mediation with the materialised expression through art. This bond opens possibilities in processing our connections, with ourselves, others and the world around us. The artists demonstrate their own internal processes in their approaches to different mediums in order to spawn understanding, amends or recognition. The art collective, formed in 2021, challenges habitual perceptions of the bodily dimension of our lives by awarding it prominence in its relation to the world.

Jo Hislop's photographic installation PUPA depicts a caterpillar chrysalis. It centers attention to the casing that holds the changing body of the insect. In drawing parallels between how memories are carried in our tissue and attach themselves to our bodies, and the vagueness of what connects them to objects and spaces, love emanates as a ubiquitous force. A moving, ever-changing, nurturing presence that draws things out and grants us growth. It enters in conversation with her film OTHER TIMES THE IN BETWEEN IS FELT around touch as a launch pad for other censorious modes of perception with the mouth as a primal site in the formation of bodily knowledge — A film in which seemingly separate modes of understanding the world actually commingle and overlap. Including the poetic aspect of something between imaginary and real that links the layers of emulsion on film, to the layers of skin on a bodily surface as sites of transference, both somehow capable of detaining affective forces and power. In Ard Bheinn the body is composed onto the landscape and into memory, elements that can carry one another.

Sidonie Ronfard taps into her sensory perception of feelings by asking how to make the invisible visible. In an intuitive register that favours a translation into the realm of colours, the artist views a relation between the musical realm and an abstract imagery that unfolds in endless reinterpretations by those engaging with the work, using colour as binding agent of memory and feeling. The artist hints at the subjectivity of experience again in her depiction of a glass of water that, as a metaphor for watery processes such as condensation, can read as a possible representation of inner liquid feelings. In combination with the depiction of ice, as a state of water we more commonly associate to temporality, she reveals an unsettled form, in which both images begin to allude to a time language, to malleability, to what is there and what will disappear.

Dominik Fleischmann implies human life in a sympoiesis, a “making-with”, of animals and plants. His work concedes the agency in beyond-human environments, underlining our interconnectedness and interdependence with the natural world. The juxtaposition of large and small format prints from Finnish woods to the Cloud Forests of Costa Rica show visible differences but more than that, it unravels a similar endangerment of habitat, similar workings and similar wonders. The photographs in the exhibition conjugate life and decay as a reciprocative interplay that is mirrored in the leaves he borrowed to hold images. In honour of the ability of trees to transform sun-rays into life and sway between the fragile ways of experiencing and becoming, the leaves begin a dialogue with nature's cycles through their inevitable decomposition. The natural photograph, the chlorophyll process that prints on leaves, in combination with rescued wood and cyanotypes, accentuate a duality of death as a force of renewal but also a danger that menaces our relationship to the natural world.

celine s diaz' ON AQUEOUS (Dis)SOLUTION holds as a main agent the process of embodiment and empathy in which one is able to recognise oneself in some other, using water as a recipient and source. The analogy in feeling the body as liquid, supports a broader dissolution of identity, gender and thinking, that blends with emotion and perception. The project draws up a relationship between the artist themselves, the water's characteristics, such as mutability and fluidity, and its temporary states in their multiple forms. Pondering this conception in the piece EU SOU ÁGUA E A ÁGUA EMBALA-ME, the knitted pouches appear liquid-like as they sustain and contour around the weight of glass, embodying the artist's experience of water, life and the corporeal. The glass sculptures' shapes, (inspired by lakes), invoke a visual resemblance to small bodies of water that in their opaque transparency appear both frozen and retained, as allusions to the flux under which water occurs.

The Ungh

Knowledge through emotional, sensorial and spatial
forms of bodily being

Jo Hislop

Master of Arts Thesis

Degree Programme in Photography

Department of Media

Aalto University of Arts, Design and Architecture

2022

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1. Introduction

This thesis uses artistic research to consider the capacity of bodies as an experiential space and a site of knowledge. Through both theoretical and poetic explanations, the research unravels some of the ways in which emotional and sensorial processes interrelate, and the possible effects this may have upon bodies and spatial relations to the world around them. The title of the thesis *The Ungh* describes a concept, notion or sensation that is experienced through the body. Ungh is an imaginary word that came about intuitively when other words or sounds in language did not suffice to fully describe the sensation I was seeking to explain. Ungh is moment that is not always seen but is felt and *known* nevertheless. It manifests something that is beyond a feeling, a memory or a bodily sensation but instead is a kind of culmination of these and many other forces. It is at the core or essence of experience, where all of the moving and overlapping elements that make up any one moment in time, pause just long enough for the body to feel this sticky collision all at once. Much like the notion of affect, in its nature it is unfixed, moving, moulding and adapting continuously amongst different contexts. Therefore explanations that seek to describe the ungh are usually fluid, and do not arrive at one definitive meaning.

This research contains two key approaches: *Part One* is an artistic response resulting in a multi-disciplinary exhibition of work and *Part Two* is a written response to the theory surrounding the thesis topic and its interplay with artistic processes.

Part One

Through a research based process, this work was a creative experimentation with the notion of the ungh through film, photography and writing. This culminated in a collection of works that were shown at a group exhibition titled 'Ways of Knowing' at Mäntinranta Art Centre, Tampere, Finland from 1 - 19 April 2022. Consisting of four art works, the exhibition included: an experimental film installation, two photographic montages and a sound piece. These works were show along side the work of three other artists, all of whom display individual responses to the multiplicity of ways in which knowledge can be understood.

Other times the in between is felt (2022) is a multichannel silent film installation displayed across six different screens. Weaving together fast paced and overlapping imagery, the footage combines originally shot super8 analogue film alongside archive footage that was gathered from an eclectic range of sources, including insect documentaries and nasa images of space. This experimental film piece examines the way seemingly separate modes of understanding the world actually commingle and overlap. Playing upon the poetic, imaginary but perhaps also real ways in which layers of emulsion on a film surface, much like the layers of skin on a bodily surface, are sites of transference that are capable of carrying affective forces and power.

Pupa I (2022) is a photographic installation made up of six risograph printed panels of that are hanging from the ceiling of the gallery wall in a grid. The caterpillar cocoon depicted is enlarged to almost human-sized proportions and draws attention to the casing that holds the changing body of the insect. The work considers the way memories are carried in bodily tissue, whilst questioning what substances and materials connect bodies, objects and spaces to one another. Thinking of how love moves and changes, intensifies and depletes — but is always present and entangled in

all that we do. The way love nurtures and draw things out, and how we are dependent upon it in order to grow.

Pupa II (2022) is a sound installation of my voice reading a short piece of writing. Heard through a directional speaker in one corner of the space, the piece is quiet and intimate. The story that is heard is description of my mother planning and designing her own coffin made from felt, followed by an account of my memory of carrying her body on the day of her funeral. Speaking of bodily connection and cycles of life and death, the story compares the coffin to a pupa cocoon — directly referencing *Pupa I*. Heard closely to four of the screens that show the film work, there is an interplay of deeply personal and broadly universal topics.

Ard Bheinn (2022) is a photographic montage of risograph imagery, archival prints and plastic vinyl. The work contains hand-cut and cropped images of overlapping landscapes, bodies, plants and animals. The title is taken from a mountain on the Isle of Arran in Scotland—a place of deep personal and emotional significance. Playing with the emotional connections between bodies, land and memory and the ways in which these components have the capacity to carry and effect one another, the work contemplates borders and surface, looking at how intimacy is contained in sensorially engaged relations to the world.

Documentation of the artistic component of this research is presented at the start of this thesis. Acting as a visual overview of the work, it contains exhibition installation photographs and detailed depictions of the imagery from both the film works and photographic montages.

Part Two

Through the notion of the ungh, the written component of the thesis weaves together a theoretic framework with which the unsteady subject of bodily, emotional and affective forces may be better understood. The intention of the work is not to answer a question or to solve the mystery of what the ungh is, but rather to suggest a way of thinking about the relational qualities of bodily and emotional experience through a framework that can be interpreted and applied in an adaptable way for each reader. Always noting that any theory or concepts that can be grasped and understood should also be known to be part of a much larger constellation of ever changing moments. The work draws upon theorists in the field of philosophy such as Baruch Spinoza and Brian Massumi in their explanations of affect theory, alongside fiction writers such as Max Porter and experimental filmmakers like Nathaniel Dorsky. The eclectic range of sources from which the research draws, is an intentional approach to demonstrate the broad scope in which the ungh can be related. This is exemplified further with short creative writing (stories and poems) excerpts that are embedded in the text to support and help frame the concepts and ideas being discussed.

Beginning with affect theory, the thesis draws upon the history of this concept and the way in which it has evolved to provide a explanation for the relational forces that connect bodies to one other and with the space around them. Highlighting the role of affective forces and considering the way in which they move in between and impact upon bodies, creates a conceptual framework through which the notion of The ungh can more easily be accessed. The discussion then leads to the way in which artists, most notably experimental analogue filmmakers such as Tacita Dean, approach subjects that are difficult to pin down or define and that are interlaced with emotionality and feeling. Delving in to materiality and

surface, the work goes on to consider the how the artistic response of the thesis uses analogue film to carry poetic meaning.

After touching upon issues that may arise with the linguistic framing of such changeable notions as affect and the ungh, the research begins to offer possible approaches to language as an embodied and felt practice or experience — turning towards an investigation in to the materiality of spoken sounds. Thinking of the duality of linguistic meaning and the sounding texture of the voice, the work draws upon Philosopher Alice Lagaay's inquiries in to the way the voice functions as a sounding force. Thinking of the bodies role in the experience of language takes one to considerations the mouth as a primal site in the formation of bodily knowledge and the way in which words and sounds are one of the materials that connect bodies. This research is based within the thoughts of Brandon LaBelle in his book *Lexicon of The Mouth*, acknowledging the cacophony of functions and actions the mouth as a site contains, looking towards its role in connecting the individual self with that of the broader world. This chapter culminates with a more poetic reflection upon the position of the voice as a material that has a unique presence and capacity to carry emotionality.

Finally, the thesis arrives at the sensation of touch, unpicking this bodily sensation to embrace a space for unfixed meaning and fluid interpretation. Drawing upon feminist writing from cultural theorists such as Sara Ahmed and the inescapable queer physicists of Karen Barad to provide suggestions for alternatives to the hierarchy of knowledge systems that dominate Western thinking. Both theoretically and conceptually, the research contemplates the surface of skin as a site of knowledge, exploring touch as a launch pad for other censorious modes of perception. This area of the thesis also discusses the concept of haptic visuality and other cross-sensory modes of perception as established by media theorist Laura. U Marks.

Both the artistic and written components of the research unravel and piece back together fragments of memories, emotions, gestures, words and ideas. Reframing how these moments can be understood and placing the body in a central role in the formation of knowledge making.

2. Affect and The Ungh

In all of the descriptions I have encountered that discuss the term Affect or Affect Theory in relation to art and culture, there is usually some kind of disclaimer that hastens to mention how complex and difficult it is to assign a definitive meaning to the term. Writers, researchers and artists are forewarned to tread with caution as this subject is likely to produce more questions than answers and more chaos than clarity. I will not disrupt this trend of caution by noting that affect is, in of it's self, multifaceted and its definition, role and impact change according to the context in which it is being discussed. It is a malleable and fluid theory and to give affect a fixed meaning would be a kind of oxymoron, it is unfixed in its nature. It is this very quality, it's resistance to linear theories that seek to categorise experiential processes, that drew me towards uncovering some of the ways in which affect has been characterised and to consider what role it plays within my own research-art-practice. In its broadest terms, affect seems to describe a relation between bodies and the way they interact with the world around them, what makes them act or respond. A kind of energy that is constantly at play, informing and influencing ones understanding of their own experience. As outlined in the introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* — 'Affect (...) is the name we give to those forces — visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion — that can serve to drive us toward movement'.¹

If Affect is made up of 'vital forces', that do in fact *force*, in that they create a change or move something in or out of its place, not only is the term conceptually unfixable but the literal action of affect is something of continuous change. The complications that occur in attempts to describe

¹ *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J Seigworth (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 1.

this theory do not negate the importance of discussing and researching affect, if anything it enhances the need to keep returning to the subject. Its slippery nature is one to be relished. I do not seek to uncover all of the possible ways in which affect can be understood or approached, as this would inevitable lead to something outside of the capabilities of this research, rather, I will unravel a small knot in the entangled strands of this theory. I will outline what affects means in relation to the ungh and my research in to bodily, sensorial and emotional ways of being in the world. Affect is about relation and the force of that relation, it is about how things (bodies, people, places) interact, and the movement or behaviour of the energies that exist in and around this relation. The ungh describes the intensity of the bodily experience that occurs when all of the forces that affect us intermingle and overlap in to a tangible moment that cannot be categorised as one thing or another.

2.1 The Origins of Affect in Philosophy

Affect can be traced back to Philosopher Baruch Spinoza in his book *Ethics* published in 1677. Spinoza used the term affections to describe “The state of a body being affected by another body”² and the way in which this impacts upon the body’s ability or desire to act. In Spinoza’s theory affections could be referred to as emotions or feelings, although this is later disputed by other theorists and many would now consider this as somewhat of an over-simplification, in that affections are related to and may cause emotions, but they are not the same thing and it is important to note their differences. As outlined by Historian Lewis Waller in his video series *Now and Then*, affections are a way to confront and dispute the dominant rhetoric of a mind-body separation.³ Instead, affect brings forward the critical importance of bodies in forming understanding and knowledge, communicating *with* the mind and relating to the other, other bodies, other places. It is important to note that in Spinozian philosophy, because everything is made up of matter, a *body* is referring to anything of the world that is of material form and can have an impact upon another body,⁴ not just a human body. Affect describes the *forces* that dictate or lead to the behaviour and actions of these bodies, forces that are both sensorial and social.

The term affect was elaborated upon by philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari during the late 1980’s and early 1990’s.

² The intellection surge, *Spinoza - 06 - Affections and Affects: Joy, Sadness & Desire*, online video recording, Youtube, 10 February 2016, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bX-H7dYoP0>> [accessed 7 March 2022].

³ Lewis Waller, *Introduction to Affect Theory: Brian Massumi & Eve Sedgwick*, online video recording, Youtube, 9 February 2019 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeMS8QEYIQU>> [6 March 2022].

⁴ Lewis Waller, *Introduction to Affect Theory: Brian Massumi & Eve Sedgwick*, [6 March 2022].

However, the notion of affect wasn't developed in a much more in depth way until Brian Massumi (*Parables of the Virtual*) & Eve Sedgwick (*Touching Feeling*) approached it in the mid-1990's through a movement that is sometimes called the Affective Turn. Through Massumi's approach, affect is considered as involuntary and pre-emotional, a force that causes the body to react. A process that cannot successfully be described using language because it takes place before a linguistic way of processing information has occurred. Unlike emotions, for Massumi, affects are not personal in their nature because they emerge *before* a personal reaction can be formed. However, I would argue that the personal cannot be fully separated from affective worlds, as affects are experienced through personal bodies. Questions around where and if the personal and collective begin and end lead to an approach that is oriented around a process-based way of seeing things in relation to one another rather than separations, binaries or oppositions. For example, to return to the mind/body dichotomy, linear trains of thought may suggest that the mind thinks and then the body reacts or visa-versa the body reacts and the mind then registers a thought. However in affective terms the physical and the psychological are in a constant flow of interaction, where it is not possible to order and separate processes into consecutive events because the conscious and unconscious, physical and conceptual can all exist simultaneously.

Through his publication *Parables of the Virtual* (2002) Massumi commented 'When I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name. Two things stand out. It *moves*. It *feels*. In fact, it does both at the same time'.⁵ This thought points to what I consider to be two of the most important elements of bodily ways of being and to the foundations of affect that intercept with my research: the way we feel (sensorially and emotionally) as bodies and the role of movement in our bodies relation to it's surroundings.

⁵ Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 1.

Affect is the theoretical foundation with which to access the ungh, it creates a structure amongst the interplay between bodies and space that acknowledges and embraces multiplicity. Carving out a way of thinking that delineates the hierarchical structures of overly dominant knowledge systems that place fixed meaning and hard logic at the forefront of *knowing*. The ungh, much like moss sprouting from a forest bed, grows out of a moist and mushy mulch of forces. The microbes, insects and plants that support the life of the moss are in a continuous state of change and action, moving all the time through cycles of growth and decay. Even death contains movement. The ungh exists in a similar state, being fed by continuous undulating cycles of affective energy that never stop for long enough to be fixed. Therefore theoretically, The ungh as a concept, much like affect, can never be fully defined, it is a wriggling state that can only be held briefly before it continues forth.

To look further at the role of movement in Affect brings us back to Gilles Deleuze. One of the core concepts within a Deleuzeian approach to philosophy is challenging the idea that things are static and stable. This theory claims that everything in the world contains movement and therefore all matters of life must be in a constant state of flux. This suggestion is indicative of a process-led approach to epistemological matters because process acknowledges journey and transition and in turn, the movement that arises from this. Deleuze draws attention to and builds upon Spinoza's theory that everything, both physical and theoretical is connected, by insisting that new spaces occur in the midst of these relations forming a continuously changing web of interconnected potential and possibilities. As stated by Lewis Waller 'For Deleuze it is the spaces in between things, the differences between all of these things that creates the

possibilities for newness'.⁶ This is where I look for understanding within my research and practice, the unfixed, in between moments and spaces.

To understand this further, let us consider the Deleuzeian theory of difference and repetition, which suggests that as bodies we are in a constant state of repeating what we are experiencing around us and every time a repetition occurs through say, a thought or an action, no two thing stay the same — there is always a difference in these repetitions. This difference occurs because of the unique set of contributing factors that make up the contextual setting of the body that is in action. This space, the gap that occurs between the repetitions, creates difference and this is where potential is held, where meaning and knowledge can be found. A space that understandably, is often overlooked, but that brings one back to the in between as an exciting site of possibility. Deleuze also considers the variable space that exists between these repetitions *the virtual* — ‘The virtual is a product of the intensities between difference.’⁷ This is a space that creates the possibility for possibility, it is what enables things to be in flux and for the potential of newness to be a constant presence. The movement, energy or force of this space is synonymous with its capability to affect bodies. The key word here is ‘intensities’, as this describes the variable nature and strength of these forces that affect and move bodies. In the staging of the elements that make up the scene of these theories — the *virtual* is the space, the *affect* is this force and the *ungh* is the moment of collision or stickiness.

By discussing some of the origins of affect in philosophy, my intention is to pull out some of the key aspects and ideas that enables the landscape

⁶ Lewis Waller, Introduction to Deleuze: Difference and Repetition, online video recording, Youtube, 5 December 2018, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUQTYICTfek>> [6 March 2022].

⁷ Lewis Waller, Introduction to Deleuze: Difference and Repetition, [6 March 2022].

though which I am exploring to come in to view. The broad approaches necessary to encompass affect in its many forms can be seen in both publications *The Affect Theory Reader* and *Reading/Feeling*. Both books attempt to tackle affect in its wholeness and whilst acknowledging the impossibility of this task, include an eclectic range of voices and writers that vary enormously in their approach. In this way, the concept of affect is inclusive and democratic, the collective nature of the term can only be tackled with a collective response. As Melissa Gregg, and Gregory J. Seigworth importantly note, ‘there can only ever be infinitely multiple iterations of affect and theories of affect: theories as diverse and singularly delineated as their own highly particular encounters with bodies, affects, worlds.’⁸ In the corner of affect that I am exploring, affective energy or force is the fluid through which memory, touch, thought, language and imagination are carried. It is what allows these seemingly separate components to be experienced through an overlapping jumble — connecting bodies to other bodies and to the space in which they are held. The ideas I am presenting are not here to define but to sit in amongst a crowd of others.

⁸ Gregg and Seigworth, pp. 3-4.

2.2 The Love of My Mother and Other times the in between is felt

Pupa

In the leading months, she began to organise and prepare as if it were a birthday party. Every time I came to visit, she told me with excitement about a new strand of the event she had concocted. The coffin was to be made by a women in Somerset, her body measurements were already sent. It was to be sewn from biodegradable felt with a detachable hand-stitched plant design that could be removed and hung on the wall if we wished, her eyes lighting up with pride as she explains each detail.

When we carried her swollen body in that soft felt cocoon, it was as if she were a caterpillar encased in a chrysalis. Softness surrounding her skin. Delicate and malleable, moulding around the curves of her flesh with a subtle strength that promised to hold her tight. I clutch the edges of my dress as the wind gushes past my legs, goose bumps puckering my arms, hair wrapped around my face.

Within Affective worlds, if the in between moments are sites of potential and even knowledge, where can these moments be found and what can they look like? If Language can be troublesome to describe the nature of affects, must we turn away from this and look to other forms of expression or can we re-frame our relationship to language to accommodate the changeability? I suggest we should try to do both. Crucially, the site and space in which affective forces are experienced is the body. Therefore, through artists and researchers that have an embodied relationship with their practice and by touching upon my own work, I will navigate through the way in which in between moments and bodily experience can contribute to a type of knowing, a feeling that might be hard to explain using words but is somehow known nevertheless.

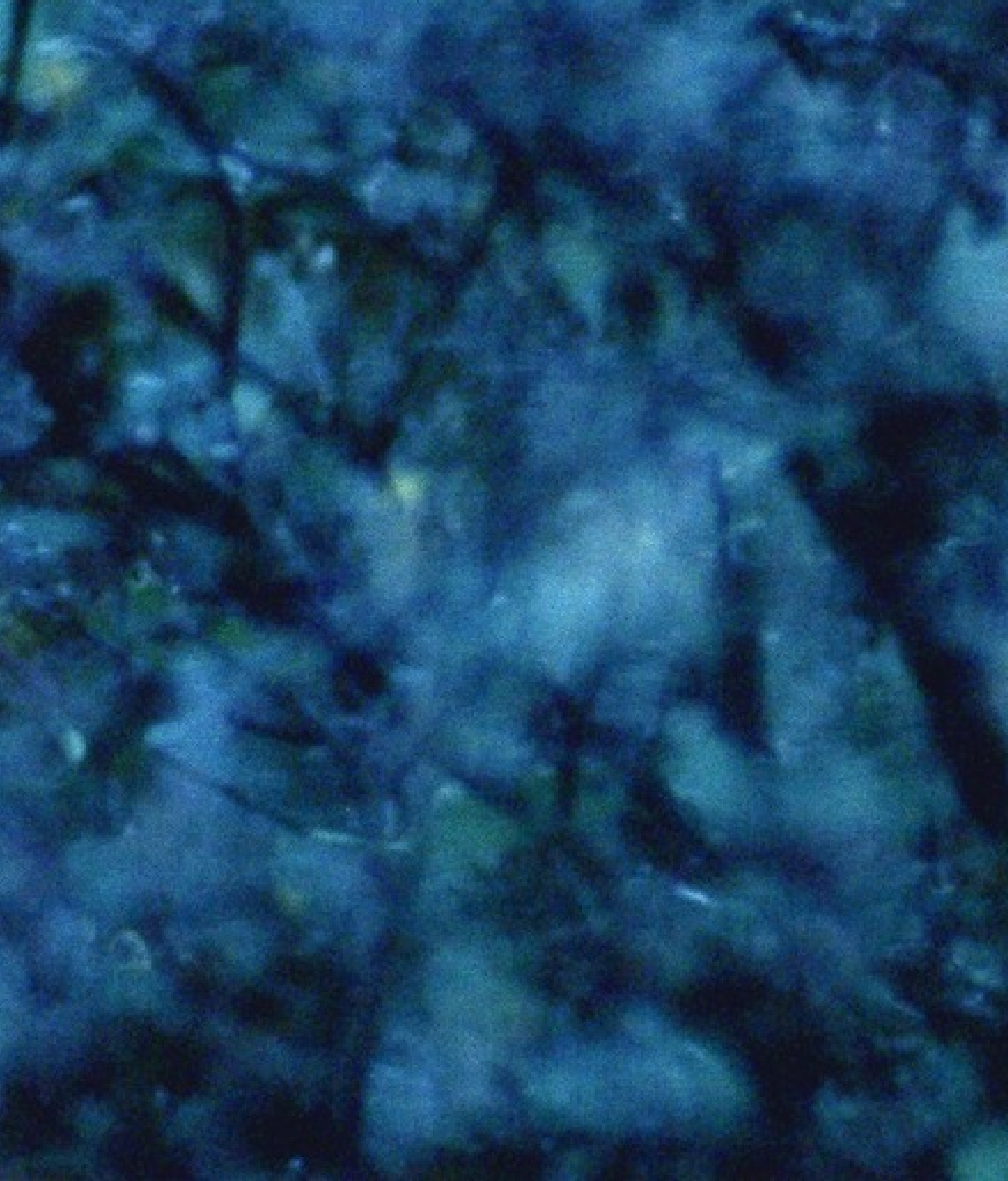
I will begin by turning towards Nathaniel Dorsky, an American experimental filmmaker who has been making work since the 1960's. In an interview on *In to The Mothlight Podcast* ⁹ Dorsky shared thoughts about his artistic process during the covid-19 pandemic lockdowns. Restricted to outdoor spaces within his local environment, Dorsky created an intuitively led series of short film works featuring local parks, woodlands and gardens. Shot in his signature format of 16 mm film, Dorsky noted that he wasn't making a film about the plants themselves, but instead — the way the light looked on the plants. These thoughts are mirrored in an Artforum article in which Dorsky noted 'I didn't want to make a film that depicted a garden or plants or flowers, but one where the film itself became like a plant that could fill with light'.¹⁰ I was struck by this comment, imagining the movement of light and shadow across leaves and the feeling of sun on my

⁹ 'EP.30 - Nathaniel Dorsky', into the mothlight podcast, online sound recording, 6 May 2021, <<https://www.intothemothlight.com/home/ep30-nathaniel-dorsky>> [accessed September 7 2021].

¹⁰ Matthew Carlson, 'Nathaniel Dorsky on celebrating light and celluloid', *Artforum*, (2019) <<https://www.artforum.com/interviews/nathaniel-dorsky-on-celebrating-light-and-celluloid-78602>> [accessed 25 March 2021].

skin. Although a seemingly simple comment considering the role light plays in the process of film and photography, this description stuck with me, and I began questioning what substances and materials connect bodies, objects and spaces to one another. The role of the light in this example is inverted from its traditional position within photography as a means to see something else, to show the main subject, a way to highlight a face or spot on the landscape. In Dorsky's narrative, the light *becomes* the subject, a protagonist in the scene, where the viewer can experience a choreographic sequence of moving light amongst the space.

Dorsky's comments brought in to focus, a sharp realisation about the way the in between exists within my own artistic practice. For many years now I have been creating work that features or relates to my mother, who passed away in 2015. Although as a subject, it appears frequently, the work is rarely directly *about* my mother or my mother's death and the process of grief that follows. However because the subject of my mother and her death somehow seems to be intertwined with and lined in almost all aspects of my life, by default it becomes impossible to separate it from the work I am creating. It dawned on me, through Dorsky's words that through the photographs, films and writing I create that feature my mother, I am speaking of the love that surrounded and came from her. Much like the light in Nathaniel Dorsky's garden, I am making work about the way the love looks and feels, not about my mother herself. The light and the love are what make the other things visible. They move and change, intensify and deplete — but they are always present, entangled in all that we do. They nurture and draw things out, we are dependent upon them in order to grow.



This motherly love I speak of is something that I recognised in varying states and moments throughout the time that my mother was alive. Manifesting in material ways that I can concretely point to, such as: a hug, a conversation or words and gestures of encouragement and care. However there are many ways in which this love was intertwined in to my life that I never knew were there until they weren't. The love was embedded, wrapping around, and spreading out, it wasn't just something I experienced when I saw her or spoke with her. It was woven throughout my body and the space around me, leaving a dizzying and disorienting process of realigning self and the world in the wake of her death. This process is one with no specific end, it exists in the virtual, the in between, touching various things with variable intensities. I experience the love of my mother like a kind of affective force, always present with the power to insight action or move me, emotionally and physically.

I appreciate that motherly love and it's associations can and do contain a whole variety of feelings and experiences for different bodies and I do not intend to homogenise the breadth of that. Neither do I wish to romanticise my own relationship with my mother in to one of pure care and affection, when, like most intimate or close relations, it also involved conflict, hurt and confusion at times. Instead I am discussing the way in which her love took on forms and spaces in unexpected ways, the continued connection of my body to hers and how words, gestures and images can contain this love. How is it possible for moving or still images to *contain* (and not just depict) love, how can this feeling in one body be felt through a camera and in turn through other bodies? The love of my mother, like Dorsky's garden light, is powered by ever changing affective forces of relation.

When asked to expand on what Dorsky calls, ‘looking through the camera with a sense of love’¹² he describes how ‘When I’m looking through the camera I feel like I’m not looking at something other, something outside of myself (...) the love has to do with the moment when the seer and the seen are in union’.¹³ In order to comprehend the idea that Dorsky, or any other artist for that matter, is capable of expressing love through the gesture and action of using a camera, one must let go of the constructed concept that one body and another body exist in complete isolation. Through one’s intention or through the feeling with which one approaches an action or behaviour — emotionality can be felt. In order to express love, Dorsky suggests the two bodies of ‘seer and seen’ merge, the boundaries between one individual and another are blurry, there is a kind of coming together. If it is possible then for the gesture of using a camera to carry a sense of love, perhaps affective forces work across surfaces, objects, gestures and even intention as energetic sites of transference.

This brings us back to the subject of affective forces, but more specifically to the way in which they are carried between bodies or spaces. Philosopher and Psychoanalytic theorist Teresa Brennan notes, when discussing the transmission of affect: ‘(...) we are not self-contained in terms of our energies. There is no secure distinction between the "individual" and the “environment”’.¹⁴ If this is true and bodies are not in fact completely autonomous, this goes some way in offering an explanation as to how emotional states, feelings and even thoughts are capable of moving in between bodies both with and without conscious intention. The boundary

¹² ‘EP.30 - Nathaniel Dorsky’, into the mothlight podcast, [accessed September 7 2021].

¹³ ‘EP.30 - Nathaniel Dorsky’, into the mothlight podcast, [accessed September 7 2021].

¹⁴ Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 6.

of skin that contains the physical body is not a definitive boundary for all possible forms of relation and interaction. The same way that one can be moved by affective forces in a crowd that are felt but not seen, this too exists in other practices and processes — affective and therefore emotional transference is possible across a range of materials, surfaces and actions.

2.3 Materiality, Surface and The Imaginary

Dorsky has described his own process when making experimental films as a method of shooting without thinking. He creates imagery that he is drawn to in the moment and then when viewing the footage at a later stage, he discovers what is interesting to him. I practice a similar approach when creating photographic and filmic imagery. I will carry a camera with me and then create an image (moving or still) because it contains a feeling that I want to translate on the film. There is something important here about the action of light hitting a surface and making an impression. Other times, I will be present in a moment without a camera but something of the moment will stick to my body and in searching for a way to understand what this process is, I will later create a constructed image based on this feeling, the bodily feeling. The tendency I have towards analogue film and photography is tied up in materiality, surface and the imaginary. I am not drawn towards trying to create imagery that is as similar to the eye as possible, that mimics reality through its clear and crisp visuals. I use the film as a material to play with light, to inscribe the feeling contained in the affective forces of a given moment. Whether through grain or borders of the film (see ref. 14), I am interested in my work containing the presence of surface. A presence that is so intrinsic to both the shooting and the viewing of analogue film. I often imagine the surface of the film is like the surface of my skin, I embody the film and imagine the moment as an impression upon my body. Like Dorsky's union of seer and seen, in the way I create work, there is an interchanging or merging of bodies, film, boundaries and surface.



Visual Artist Tacita Dean is also known for her analogue film works. Regularly shooting with both 35mm and 16mm film in her practice, she has been a strong advocate for the preservation of analogue film production and processing. Deans relation to film stems from her childhood, growing up in the 1980's with 8mm family film at home. However the desire to work with analog film goes beyond simply accessibility and nostalgia, for Dean it is a medium of its own and not simply an alternative to digital film. When discussing her relationship with this material in an interview Dean comments:

‘My relationship to film begins at that moment of shooting, and ends in the moment of projection. Along the way, there are several stages of magical transformation that imbue the work with varying layers of intensity. This is why the film image is different from the digital image: it is not only emulsion versus pixels, or light versus electronics, but something deeper — something to do with poetry.’¹⁶

There is something poetic, even imaginary but perhaps also something real in the idea that the layers of emulsion on a film surface, much like the layers of skin on a bodily surface are sites of transference, that are capable of carrying affective forces and power. That in using this medium in artistic practices, there is a kind of embodiment of surface that acts as a way to connect and present ideas that goes beyond just the visuals of the projected image.

Within my film installation work *Other times the in between is felt* (2022) the footage combines super8 analogue film that I filmed specifically for the

¹⁶ Emily Eakin, 'Celluloid Hero', *The New Yorker*, (2011) <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/10/31/celluloid-hero>>[accessed 25 March 2022].

project and archive footage gathered from various sources, including insect documentaries and nasa imagery of space. This process was my first experience using analog moving image film and was a conscious choice because I believe the medium contains and carries emotionality and a bodily connection in its surface that digital film does not. I tested my ideas on digital film before settling on this process, however both the action of recording and the viewing of footage after did not enable the ideas I had to be expressed. As Tacita Dean describes, it is not even a comparison of 'emulsion verses pixels' there is a more felt logic, a logic or reasoning that sits in a bodily and emotional sphere. Analogue film is a material and a tool for capturing a series of still images at pace, it transports time in to collection of fragmented moments. Through my choice to show the work over six different screens with fast-paced editing, overlapping imagery and an untraceable narrative, I have exaggerated the fragmented nature of being in the world. Mimicking the range of inputs and experiences the body is processing, receiving and outputting all of the time, a process that can be all at once mesmerising, consuming and difficult to keep track of.

The decision to use archive imagery and the mixing of different types of media is a link to the eclectic nature of affect and the unfixed nature of this notion, not drawing upon any one single source but a kind of mixing pot of moments. Using archive footage is similar to Deleuze's difference and repetition in that it takes something from around us in the world, shapes it in to a new context and repeats it. The footage of course changes, when it is placed and used in the new adaptation. The installation also includes fast cuts between imagery so that just as the viewer begins to grasp one image or one feeling, another appears. It is not possible to fix or define what the imagery is at times. Like affect, just as you begin to name what you can see or feel it has become something else. Each filmic loop on the six screens is a different length, so each time the imagery appears it is down to chance what images appear on the other screens at the same time. The relation

between the images is therefore changing constantly, encouraging the viewing to be less about understanding the imagery in terms of representational objects and linear narrative, but rather a more imagined, felt or poetic experience.

Curator and Writer Eloise Sweetman describes a kind of physical merging of self and space in descriptions of her curatorial practice, she notes ‘My eyes become my entire body and my body becomes my eyes (...) Often, I pretend to be an art work, by standing in its future position, and move my body in ways I think the artwork might do.’¹⁷ Sweetman imagines, she uses bodily knowledge to feel her way through the art works, the space and the bodies around the work to understand how they might interact and relate. Imagination plays a key role in the process, a kind of mixing of the real and imaginary makes way for new possibilities. This is similar to the way that I am unable to view any of Nathaniel Dorsky’s films because they only exist in analogue form. I have been left to piece together the limited still imagery available online along with descriptions from the artist or viewers to form an idea of this work in my imagination. Dorsky’s work then becomes just as real in my imagination as it is in its physical existence, the gap between the two is swallowed up. Within my own approach to film and photography, the imaginary becomes a way to access some of the most real, both as Sweetman practices with bodily imagination and through a process of visualising usually unseen, but felt moments.

A similar account of the in between, where the imaginary and the real intertwine can be felt in Max Porter’s 2019 novel *Lanny*¹⁸, where we are introduced to the character Dead Papa Toothwort without explanation or apology. This being, although non human, has a bodiliness, drawing us in

¹⁷ Eloise Sweetman, *Curatorial Feelings*, (Rotterdam: Shimmer Press, 2021), p. 13.

¹⁸ Max Porter, *Lanny*, (Faber and Faber: London, 2019).

last glass then bed, blocked drains,
Iranian or something, piggyish ginger son who bullied our
coming in and out like the wind,
Sheila's salted caramel rice pudding sweet Jesus I died and went to heaven
nine English pound,

he swims in it, he gobbles it up and wraps
himself in it, he rubs it all over himself, he pushes
it into his holes, he gargles, plays, punctuates and
grazes, licks and slurps at the sound of it, wanting it
fizzing on his tongue, this place of his,

The real is here. Through the words that this character ingests and spits back out. Through the physicality of their being in time, space and place, their movements dragging and dripping with feeling. We know the real, we access the real and yet there is open ended ambiguity about exactly who and what this thing is. We can not make sense of it in terms of logic and reason. Papa Toothwort is totally submerged in the world, they are the trees, the soil and the bricks but they are simultaneously outside of it, looking onwards with some distance.

To accept the fluidity of boundaries between bodies, energies and environments quickly leads to a less fixed idea of where the real and imaginary begin and end. Although, this is a place full of creative potential and in my opinion, can lead to new types of knowledge, welcoming this level of boundary-less-ness could be seen critically — that if unfixed meaning and fluidity is accepted fully, we can quickly loose track of any idea of what makes sense. There is arguably still a need to create frameworks for understanding to be digestible and relatable, naming thoughts and feelings is not a problematic activity in its self. However loosing sight of the continuous moving nature of both things in the world and understanding that has been formed, can lead to a limitation and even discrimination of knowledge, power and possibility.

2.4 The trouble with language and slippery subjects

I have always had great difficulty finding ways to use language to effectively describe what I am discussing within my practice, the photographs I am making, the videos I create or pieces of writing that I construct. This can of course be a common and shared frustration amongst artists, the need to be able to succinctly and clearly describe the ideas behind our work is an understandable hounding presence, particularly in the structures of educational and artistic institutions. In the hierarchy of suitable forms of expression, linguistic meaning still wins. This meaning is expected to be categorisable, to be contained and packed in to the neatest box possible. I never found this easy, not just through lack of practice or as a generalised frustration with the need to explain everything, the issues I encountered go beyond this. Much like affect, the core of what I am exploring is in its nature unfixed and unfixable, it is a moving, undulating force that resists categorisation. Any word or combination of words I could construct always fell short of containing this concept in its wholeness. Others would suggest words and I would say ‘yes it is that but it’s also this and this other as well, all contained and yet moving constantly’. The space the ungh exists in is messy, with an overflowing commingle of feeling and sensation. When confronted with the limitations of language to reach what I was looking for, I created a new word — UNGH.

Ungh, when spoken, involves pressing the back of your tongue against the roof of your mouth and letting out an utterance of sound. You feel the word through vibrations in your throat and taste the moment as it leaves your mouth. The physiological action of the throat, tongue and mouth in making this sound with the body is as much a part of it’s identity as the way it is heard audibly. The word came about intuitively, moving my hands in fast circles, searching for some way to express the thingness of this

concept, coming from inside — the sound I made was unnnnggghhhh. The ungh acts as a kind of semi-solid frame on which moments, memories and feelings can be hung. It acts as a linguistic container but one that has the flexibility to move and grow. I began to think about other sound that exists within the structure of language but are not explicitly fixed in their meaning, the ooohhh's and ahhhh's and ummmm's that are malleable and contain widely varied meanings depending on the context of their formation and expression.

When a felt and embodied approach to language can be embraced, its possibilities to access the in between open up immensely. In a collection of essays titled *Reading/Feeling*²⁰ that considers affect in relation to art and culture, Artist and Academic Emma Cocker uses the notion of affect to discuss an embodied and felt approach to reading that is flowing and active. In her essay *Reading Towards Becoming Causal*,²¹ Cocker speaks not only of the impossibility of assigning a singular definition to affect, but of the limitations of language in describing affective experience. Cocker notes: '(...) attempts towards a language for articulating affect are always somehow frustrated, for as soon as it is named it is no longer.'²² To try and grasp affect in any fixed state is a futile endeavour, it slips right through your fingers, continuing to move along, filling all the available nooks and crannies. To be able to hold it still and see its solid form means that it has become something else, something namable — an emotion or a memory perhaps. Grabbing at pieces of language to hold this notion still is a kind of reaching and taking, in a sense dominating, is a hurried approach that aims

²⁰ *Reading/Feeling*, ed. By Tanja Baudoin and Frédérique Bergholtz (Amsterdam: If I Can't Dance I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution, 2013).

²¹ Emma Cocker, 'Reading Towards Becoming Casual', in *Reading/Feeling*, ed. By Tanja Baudoin and Frédérique Bergholtz (Amsterdam: If I Can't Dance I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution, 2013), pp. 21-24.

²² Cocker, p. 21.

to be the final and most eloquent way of presenting a concept. The tendency of language and theory to be used in this way, has the tendency to push experiential and bodily ways of being in to unhelpfully solid and definitive states.

Whilst raising the potential issues with language and slippery subjects, I do not underestimate the power and possibility of language to explain reality or to tap in to and create imaginary worlds. It is not a criticism of language as a tool to understand and share knowledge or as a creative medium, but a questioning of the semiotic framework and structural restrictions in which much of language is digested when expressing or describing the in between or moveable, changeable sensations. This does not mean that language can not reach experiences of nuance, but that the dominant systems through which one relates to and understands language can inhibit it's potential to be a ductile material. Perhaps we cannot rely on language alone to get to the essence of these kinds of ideas, we must approach language with other qualities, with embodiment and softness, with a sense of openness that has to come from a form of unlearning of what we already know. I am looking to question what happens when language is approached with a gentle but firm affective attentiveness.

This brings us back to affective worlds — as a place to understand the unnamable. It is no mistake that the word 'slippery' has been used when describing the nature of affect on multiple occasion both in Cocker's essay²³ and in *The Affect Theory Reader*.²⁴ This slipperiness goes beyond its resistance to language, simultaneously describing that state and movement this concept can hold. Within the framework of affect, the idea of the individual self, the contained body both physically and conceptually comes

²³ Cocker, *Reading Towards Becoming Casual*.

²⁴ Gregg and Seigworth.

in to question. There is a slipperiness of boundaries in almost every way. If one was to think of affect in linear terms, it would be at a stage before conscious thought has recognised and labeled a feeling or understood the implications of an event or moment, before the cognitive brain forms an understanding and the body acts upon this thought. In this pre-labeled state, the world of affect is a swimming sea of overlapping creatures and beings, the borders and boundaries between bodies are soft. As described in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ‘With affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself — webbed in its relations — until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter.’²⁵ That is not to say that the body in its self does not exist as a solid form but that it is not as separate from other bodies and spaces as one may assume. This idea leads to the claim that the mass of interrelations that are constantly at play between bodies and spaces makes the tendency to define what a body experiences independently and what happens collectively, a contradictory endeavour.

It is important to note that this approach to thinking of bodies and feelings as individual and contained is not a universally shared notion. It is a framework that has emerged from western and capitalist structures. To return to Teresa Brennan and her book *The Transmission of Affect*, it is crucial to see how she describes: ‘non-Western as well as premodern, preindustrial cultures assume that the person is not affectively contained.’²⁶ So in fact the suggestion to consider the relational behaviour of bodies and the energetic forces they contain as connected and overlapping is nothing new, it has historically been an assumed part of many cultures. This draws attention to the culturally produced ways in which identities are developed and how when a dominant theory becomes widely spread it is accepted as a kind of truth or reality. In addition, it reinforces the problematic nature of

²⁵ Gregg and Seigworth, p. 3.

²⁶ Brennan, p. 2.

using theory and the development of ideas as way to fix or define. The frameworks one creates to enable better understanding of concepts must be contextualised and also understood as having soft and movable edges.

A similar approach is necessary when thinking of the ungh. To comprehend ungh in fullness is to reject the separation of emotions, memories and physical sensations, both within ones self and in relation to another. It is not possible within the experiential state of the ungh to be either an entirely self contained being or for the containments within oneself to exist in isolation. These separate components exist as a soup, colliding and overlapping with one another, bobbing to the surface and falling to the bottom but ultimately being held together by the body. The ungh is a moment experienced within the self, but is a product of a concoction of external and internal influences. It is the moment when the affective forces of the environment and of other beings stick to the body and have a short period of pause, the energy sits for a second and the moment can be felt to contain so much, that nothing can be labelled, it just is.

In the the concept of both affect and the ungh, movement is essential to the way in which these forces are able to interact, connecting bodies, moments and spaces together. So much of the language surrounding affect such as: flux, flow and slippery are all suggestive of a liquid-like state, something that if released in to a space will move in to whatever shapes are available. As defined by Seigworth and Gregg in the introduction to *The Affect Reader*: 'Affect is persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms'.²⁷ Meaning, that the body is part of something, it exists in a constant state of negotiation with that of the world around it — a world that is active, moving and rhythmical.

²⁷ Gregg and Seigworth, p. 1.

3. The Materiality of The Voice and the Taste of Sound

Where does it start?

My mouth is moist

I run my tongue over the edges of my smooth, hard teeth and
swallow saliva

As their face creases up, a surge of energy outpours from from
within, the desperation to explain how they feels, what they mean,
is urgent.

In order to understand, I am not listening to what they are saying, I
am hearing the tone of the sounds that emerge from them and
following the way the gestures are performed. I am nodding and
grabbing it and feeling, I've got it. Then it slips away, I've got it
again. Searching for the place in my body to hold it and store it for
a moment, to understand their experience, to be engulfed in the
words being shared.

3.1 Materiality and Meaning

Giving material form to seemingly immaterial things allows them to be understood more easily in relation to the world. The voice is not visible, at least in the optically visual sense²⁸ and does not appear to contain a material form or state. However, let us consider, as Philosopher Alice Lagaay points out through Roland Barthes, of the voice as a material much like any other physical materials²⁹ such as cloth, stone or clay and imagine the formation of the voice in the mouth as a kind of sculptural process. The noises are sounded by vibrations in the throat, coming through the mouth, moulded gently by the gums and the tongue, given a shape and a form. I imagine that, as it is pushed out in to the world — the material of the voice travels, it is malleable and takes on different forms depending on the surfaces or objects it comes in to contact with. Yet, what happens before the mouth, the voice is a thing that comes from a body, from within. Does it whirl around, tracing different parts of our bodies before finally taking the form of as noise, sound or words? Coming from the energy of the speaker who created them, these sounds swim in and amongst the bodies and spaces. The physicality of both the speaking and listening bodies becomes relevant in this process, highlighting the impossibility of detaching the voice from a bodily realm of experience. Lagaay asks us to think of the voice as ‘(...) not just as a mere carrier of linguistic meaning but as a ‘material’ in its own right, with its own substance, individual “grain” (Barthes 1977), and unique dynamic by which the physical,

²⁸ Rahel Spöhrer und Joshua Wicke, ‘Haptic Entanglements, Organs of Touch, A mail conversation with Laura U. Marks’, *Schauspielhaus Journal*, (2021) <<https://www.schauspielhaus.ch/en/journal/20831/haptic-entanglements-organs-of-touch-a-mail-conversation-with-laura-u-marks>> [accessed 20 March 2022].

²⁹ Alice Lagaay, *Voice in Philosophy: Between Sound and silence. Reflections on the Acoustic Resonance and Implicit Ethicality of Human Language*, (Bremen University) <https://homepage.univie.ac.at/arno.boehler/php/wp-content/Lagaay_POS3.pdf> [accessed 3 March 2021]

rhythmical, musical and individual character of spoken communication are perceivable.’³⁰

As a material then, the voice does not simply carry the linguistic intention of the speaker, nor is it simply a manifestation of the physicality of the body in which it is shaped — there is something further, something more nuanced and specific about the experience of hearing a human voice. It has the power to carry something *of* the person that is to do with the rhythm and tone, but still goes beyond these textural qualities. Alice Lagaay makes an interesting suggestion about the role of an inner human being and their relation to voice, stating:

‘could it be that there is something sensual and rhythmical about human consciousness or indeed conscience itself? And if so, could this sensuality of conscience (which here takes the form of an inner voice) be connected to the idea that there is a silent dimension that is in fact intrinsic to the nature of the audible, acoustic, physically resonant, noise-like, sounding human voice?’.³¹

This description is discussing the role of inner and outer voices, and the differences in acoustic sounding that these two types of voice may contain. However I would like to focus on the idea that if the human conscience could be ‘sensual and rhythmical’, this also has connotations of materiality and therefore implications upon the role of consciousness within bodily relations. If the voice is a material form of something inner, a person, a bodies making — and this person or body has a conscience that is sensual and contains feeling and movement, this would explain (at least partly) how the voice has the power to contain something that seems to be so

³⁰ Lagaay, p. 2.

³¹ Lagaay, p. 5.

authentically connected to the person speaking. The sensuality and state of one's consciousness is directly impacting upon the voice that is produced by their body. To go one step further, it is conceivable the same sensuality of consciousness is also at play within the bodies of receivers or listeners.

Perhaps this is an interesting place to consider the role of ungh. Ungh could be thought of as an energetic material, the energy or presence residing within humans, the essence of a being, unseen but felt — the ungh of the person. The ungh then, is intrinsic to the way in which the person exists and relates to the world around them, it shifts and changes constantly, moving and moulding, sometimes resting but eventually adapting in to a new state. Much like the voice, let us also give this energetic form material qualities and assume that it has a texture — how could this texture interact with the experiences of the bodies and spaces surrounding the ungh of the person? For example, if the ungh of the person is sticky and gloopy, the experiences that they have in that moment may get caught up in them, become attached and squashed in to the bodily space of the person. The voice in this scenario could enact as a manifestation of the materiality of the ungh. So the voice contains the intricate and personal details that the ungh of a person holds. As a material in the world, the voice interacts with other material forms. This is why, when a sounding voice is spoken and heard by another, it resonates and interacts beyond the linguistic meaning of the words, and beyond the tonality of the voice and intuition of the speaker, it carries with it the 'unique' energetic ungh of the person and the moment, having the stent power and potential to bridging the physical, emotional and spiritual realms of both speaker and listener.

I often consider the role of the sounding voice within my own artistic practice. One of the works I created as part of this research, titled *Pupa* (2022), was a spoken recording of a description of my mother planning and designing her own coffin made from felt, followed by an account of my

memory of carrying her body on the day of her funeral. The choice to share the work as a recording of my own voice rather than a piece of printed writing was instinctive. Even time I shared the work with somebody else, even if I had the words as printed text, I chose to read out the story. Somehow the quality of my voice sharing the words contained a much more personal experience, but more than that it placed the words more directly in to the listeners imagination. There was not a physical object to visually home in on, like there would have been with a printed text. The voice was kind of suspended in time and space. Beyond this though, the speaking voice added a bodily element to the interaction with the work, because the textual nature of the spoken voice speaks of the textural nature of the speaking body. For such a personal topic, this felt particularly pertinent, but additionally — the text also speaks so directly of bodies, their physicality but also their emotionality. Therefore to share my speaking voice, one that contains its own particular ‘grain’ and presence was a way to connect my body and emotionality in the space.

3.2 Fluidity and Fixation

It can be difficult as a listener of a voice, not to get entangled in the contradictory states of fixed meaning and textural fluidity. Alice Lagaay describes the role of *Voice in Philosophy*, noting that ‘When I focus on the fleshy, melodious noise of the words as they are formed in a speakers mouth and resonate through his or her body, I tend to lose track of their meaning.’³² Meaning in this description is referring to the role of the words being spoken as carriers of language, part of a semiotic system of symbols and associations that form logical understanding. This type of meaning, this way to hear and process the voice, can never be fully separated from the sounding nature of the words. However, to consider the way the spoken voice is experienced and mediated *through* bodies and to feel the sensuality of the words, it can be necessary to move beyond a relation to words as simply carriers of linguistic meaning. As Lagaay points out, as soon as the textuality of spoken words is in focus, ascribed meaning already begins to fade.

The speaking voice is, as we have discussed, a sounding material that can manifest as words, sound or even noise. However it is important to acknowledge that the voice is inevitably tied up in language (as well as many other structural systems e.g. political, geographical). I do not believe that a full disentanglement of linguistic meaning and the sounding texture of the voice is possible or useful. Instead I am asking; how must the voice be considered to think of its capabilities in affecting bodies? I do not disregard the semiotic value of words and I acknowledge it is not possible to discuss voice without some overlapping references to language. However, I believe that even through a consideration of the varied and ever changing

³² Lagaay, p. 5.

cultural and historical context of speaker and listener, there is still, a (partly) fixed nature to the structure of interpreting spoken words as part of a linguistic system. Of course the meaning of words is not fixed, far from it, but there seems to be a conflict in states between this and a more embodied and felt approach to spoken words. Focusing on the texture, tone and fluidity of the voice encourages the process of listening to be more about movement and materiality.

Let us take the word (or sound) ungh - this invented word was formed in part, as a chance to try to understand the connection between seemingly disconnected things. Ungh does not have a fixed and stable definition, and in fact it is this very quality that makes this word fit for its purpose. Ungh does however still carry meaning but its meaning is wrapped up in its sounding capacity, in its relation to bodies and its felt quality. It was created because there was a need to provide a container or frame for the feelings and ideas being expressed. A linguistic structure was required, but one that was more of a sound than a text. A sound moves with its environment and is uniquely adapted to the bodies that both make and hear the vocalisation, it is more active than stationary text, in a sense it is performed. Other words that I knew of or could research (limited to the English language) to be used to describe ungh, already had meanings that did not fully describe the full capacity of this notion. That is, the words in a linguistic framework were already taken with meanings that were not flexible enough to be used in this context. Therefore a new word was created, one that did not carry a restrictive bag of meaning with it, but that also exists as a sound, a sound that must be made through a body.

clean forgot milk

talking to old Peggy

every last mouthful,

weird time to be alive,

how are your knees, it's an astroturf-burn not cancer

autumn's a brutal surgeon,

Dad's livid, more gin than tonic,

Dead Papa Toothwort exhales, relaxes,
lolls inside the stile, smiles and drinks it in, his
English symphony,

rooks quacking, laminate the rota,

year 9s lost control,

Agnetta's piled on the pounds,

a sign up at Elm House,

quick
kick-
about,

original windows, nip into town,

my trusty friend Diarrh

old people die,

satsuma peel down the street like a treasure trail,

littleshit,

interesting light,

Special Delivery and Signed For are not the same thing,

What are the key experiential differences between written text and spoken voice and where do the two intersect? To return to Max Porter's 2019 novel *Lanny* in which the text on the page of the book is experimentally and playfully laid out (see ref. 32). Porter's writing is uncategorisable, moving between poetry, song, a play and a novel, unable to be fixed in any one format. In an interview about this style of writing Porter commented 'I wanted it to be sound, not text (...) to spill over the printed page.'³⁴ Here we are faced with one of the key features of a sounding voice — its material ability to move and flow. 'To spill' denotes liquid form, something that must be contained to be kept still. And yet there is a contradiction here as printed text is so still in its nature. Perhaps this still form can be moved by intention, if the framing and desire of the author is to create a sounding voice through the words, this seemingly fixed text becomes flowing and lyrical. Reminding us that to embrace the fixed nature of language with fluidity and feeling creates the possibility for more bodily relation to words.

How then, do material bodies come in to play with the material spoken sound? Bodies are inseparable from the experience of both a speaking and a listening voice. A voice does not occur without a physical body to produce it or to hold it and such occurrences are even suggestive of ghostly or paranormal activity, something unexplained or out of this world. One does not necessarily need to visually see the body in question, but there is an implicit understanding that voices belong to somebody, come from somebody are spoken by *a body*. The voice as a material, travels, it contains movement and has the capability to reach others without physical touch and yet it still carries the possibility or potential to induce a physical response. In this sense, the behaviour of the voice is comparable to the way affective forces move between bodies, but perhaps the voice is a more

³⁴ Waterstones, *Max Porter: The Waterstones Interview*, online video recording, Youtube, 23 February 2019 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjpqVchFrsl>> [accessed 03 March 2022].

tangible way to grasp the possibility of an (invisible) transference. This sounding material too, has an affective power, one that incites response and that can activate another internally, having an intrinsically unique textuality and an overwhelming ability to contain emotionality. This is why I look to the voice and its material qualities to consider its relation to embodied experience — I believe these considerations of the voice interweave with an understanding of sensorial, emotional and spacial forms of bodily being.

In a world where everything is moving and overlapping, the voice acts as a kind of wave for the body to ride, something to carry one through a moment to reach an other, another place, person, feeling or experience. Something that simultaneously contains structure *and* fluidity, a connecting bodily force. My artistic practice also contains and regularly returns to methods that reference a coexistence of fluidity and fixation. Still photographic images speak of a kind of pause, a stillness of a moment that has the potential to contain a multitude of possibilities. However there is an understanding in this type of process that both before and after the moment of creation, there was movement, activity and change. Therefore images, like spoken words are a kind of container, sites of pause that enable understanding or relation to a moment but this moment is only temporary, it cannot be fixed for very long before forces, both affective and otherwise, will move things along. Using photographic methods, both still and moving image, to explore things of the world that are so absolutely not visual is a bit like using the imaginary to explore things that are the most real. These processes are methods of accessing feelings and experiences that are difficult to contain, almost impossible to define but that speak of something definite nevertheless.

A List of things that mouth's do

A	L	T
B	Laugh	Tut
Bite	Lick	U
Blow	M	V
Burp	Murmur	Vomit
C	Mumble	W
Chew	N	Whistle
Choke	O	Whisper
Cough	P	X
Cry	Pout	Y
D	Q	Yawn
Drink	R	Yell
E	S	
Eat	Scream	
F	Sing	
G	Speak	
Gasp	Spit	
H	Smile	
I	Shout	
J	Suck	
K	Salivate	
	Slurp	

3.3 Mouth(s)

If the body is the source and the container for the voice, when thinking of where in the body a voice comes from, we are quickly brought to the mouth. The place that moulds and shapes this noisy material in to words and sounds. Acting as an exit point for voices to be distributed in to the surrounding space, the mouth is the site through which the voice is formed. This subchapter will focus on Artist and Writer Brandon LaBelle's 2014 Book *Lexicon of The Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and The Oral Imaginary*³⁶ in which LaBelle discusses how the significance of the mouth as a site has been overlooked in considerations of the voice, linguistics and embodiment. When discussing the mouth, he argues: 'It is a meeting point, a contact zone where language performs as a powerful agent, yet one that also spirits so many oral imaginings and poetics, where surfaces and depths continually interweave in feverish exchange.'³⁷ This description vividly exposes the multiplicity of ways in which the mouth behaves and acts and how the linguistic interpretations of the voice are only one of the ways in which it speaks. The use of 'feverish exchange' also draws upon the kind of frantic comings and goings that can occur in this bodily space, somewhere that is full of activity, where things are entangled. Ultimately LaBelle leaves the reader with an argument that is difficult to dispute as to why the mouth is so key in considerations of bodily relations by stating 'I would highlight the mouth as an essential means by which the body is always already put into relation.'³⁸

³⁶ Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of The Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and The Oral Imaginary* (Bloomsbury Publishing: New York, 2014)

³⁷ LaBelle, pp. 1-2.

³⁸ LaBelle, p. 1.

I often get the sensation when looking at surfaces that contain an appealing or interesting texture, to lick the object, to touch it with my tongue. Aside from the obvious sexual connotations this observations contains, it draws upon the mouth as a place to feel and discover. The mouth is a primary site of bodily knowledge stemming from our earliest needs and developments as babies to survival-based behaviours like eating, drinking and breathing. But beyond this, the mouth is a playful and exploratory space that is deeply personal and intimate. One is faced once again with a contraction of states, the mouth is all at once extremely personal and completely of the world. Architect Juhani Pallasma describes the need for sensorially and bodily engaged approaches to spacial design, commenting that 'A delicately coloured polished stone surface is subliminally sensed by the tongue. Our sensory experience of the world originates in the interior sensation of the mouth, and the world tends to return to its oral origins.'³⁹ Pallasma's comment draws on the need to continually return to the mouth as a way of engaging, a way of a body being in the world and understanding its relation. Even if it is not conscious, the mouth plays a key role in a bodies censorious interaction with objects, spaces and experiences it comes in to contact with.

What does it mean that the mouth is a place of so many activities, gestures and actions? The forming of sounds is just one of many functions the mouth has, and the reasoning and intention of those sounds are equally as vastly varied. One cannot not entirely separate the experience of all of the occurrences that happen in and around the mouth: we eat, drink, spit, kiss and scream from the same site in the body. The mouth literally and metaphorically connects the outer world with the inner body. Brandon LaBelle eloquently describes how '(...) the mouth is so radically connected to both language and the body, desire and the other, as to provide an

³⁹ Juhani Pallasmaa, *Eyes of The Skin, Architecture and The Senses*, (John Wiley Sons Inc: Chichester, 1996), p. 59.

extremely pertinent education on what it means to be— and to create oneself as —a subject.⁴⁰ To be a space of so many core and essential functions and actions places the the mouth as a bodily place of understanding through sensual and functional behaviours. As LaBelle comments, these overlapping forms of knowledge that occur through the mouth result in an essential understanding of the body and the self as a ‘subject’, a individual entity that is in constant connection with its surroundings. Because so many happenings occur here and it is so fundamental in connecting the material world and the poetic world at the same time, it is a space that is essential in the understanding of a bodies relation role to it’s environment *and* to its self.

Within the film installation I created titled *Other times the in-between is felt* (2022) I included footage of moving mouths. By isolating the mouth as the only part of the body that the frame of the camera is showing, the textural qualities and moving abilities of this bodily site are emphasised. The mouths we see in the film are speaking, there is sound coming from them but we do not hear it. The mind then begins to think of the other actions and behaviours of a mouth, bringing sensual and even slightly comedic connotations. Seeing this space in its connecting, playful and exploratory form. We are faced with this kind of moving creature that is know to be part of a body but is almost surreal when cut off from its context.

As LaBelles states: ‘The voice is such an effective and sensual material precisely because it comes from the mouth (...) we experience the voice by feeling it in *our body*’⁴¹ The voice is formed in, and exists from the mouth, and the mouth is a site of deeply sensory and sensual engagement. The voice is therefore inseparable from it’s sensory qualities, it is a bodily

⁴⁰ LaBelle, p. 2.

⁴¹ LaBelle, p. 4.

material through and through. Author Max Porter really stretches the possibilities of the materiality of vocal sound through the way in which one character in his book relates to human voice. Porter vividly describes: ‘Dead Papa Toothwort chews the noise of the place and waits for his favourite taste to appear, but he hasn’t got to it yet.’⁴² How playful and yet relatable to return to the mouth as a place not only to create sound but to taste it too, to ‘chew’ it and ingest it in to our bodies.

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⁴² Porter, p. 8.

⁴³ Jo Hislop, *Other times the in between is felt*, 2022, super8 film, film still.

3.4 To Be Wrapped in a Voice

To accept that sounds can behave as if they have material form, let us imagine for a moment that a voice could be like a blanket: soft and flowing but with a reassuring weight. I often experience the voice of my mother like a shawl resting on my shoulders, caring and present in a kind of nonintrusive way. To hear the voice of this loved one is to be wrapped in them. It starts at the back of my neck, curving around my jaw and gently touching my face. It is warm, making me smile and exhale. The weight on my shoulders travels to the top of my arms and the upper part of my back. It is as if her voice is all over my skin. Poet Asiya Wadud says ‘The mess of the sounds fill me, slides all over me, a steady peace and disturbance.’⁴⁴

The voice has a unique quality that can be hard to pin down, to do with the detail of the way in which it is used and played with, the tone and texture of it is so specific. As referred to earlier in the chapter, a voice could be seen to contain the essence of a person. When some time has passed since you’ve seen a loved one, they might say how nice it is to hear your voice, because to hear a voice is to connect with them in some kind of bodily way. It is not the same as a picture of them, or written words from them. The voice contains all the rich ingredients that make up a person’s feeling and experiences in that moment. The vocal experience goes beyond the ear. The quality of the voice has the power to penetrate one emotionally. Through the materiality of the voice, emotionality can be carried, like the skin on a bodily surface and the emulsion on a filmic surface, there are textural happenings in this material too. The tactility it contains holds feeling and knowledge.

⁴⁴ Asiya Wadud, *No Knowledge Is Complete Until It Passes Through My Body*, (Nightboat Books: New York, 2021), pp. 115-116.

Stood on the creaky bottom stairs leading up the attic, the worn, ribbed carpet ridges pressing against my toes, I peer in to the bedroom. The familiarity of the way she said my name with that soft, motherly care mixed with a harsh Scottish accent, sits in the back of my throat. Her soft fleshy body is staring at me, a space that holds and holds. Asking if I would like to touch her breast, to feel the lump, I find myself paralysed. My arm stuck, unable to be lifted. To touch was to make real, the unimaginable. The feeling of being so close and so far consumes every part of me, stops me from being able to reach and outstretch my fingers. This moment will sit in me and attach it's self. Like bacteria it will grow with the warmth of my body and blood.

It happens again

Sat at the edge of the bed I watch my sister gently stroking the short fluffy hairs on her head. I want, so much to touch, to make contact and physicalise this feeling. I ache. It is rare to be confronted with such a final moment and be conscious of it. Feeling calm with relief but agitated with a kind of itchy pain. Love is pouring out of me, seeping from my skin and covering the room like vomit. My body came from her body and now her body is gone.

The possibilities of the voice as an emotional tool are intrinsically tied up with its force-full nature and it's ability to touch another. The opening line of *Lexicon of The Mouth* states 'Is not the voice always already intervening.'⁴⁵ This astutely draws attention to the active quality that the voice contains, something that with or without intention, interacts with the space around it on many levels from political to emotional. To intervene is a kind of disruption, something that cannot be totally ignored, as Aisya Wadud phrased it a 'disturbance'. Voices get involved, through their unique material qualities and their active behaviours, voices ignite actions and reactions in others. Perhaps there is a cross-over between affective forces that move feelings and bodies and the power and possibilities of the voice. They may move together, mixing and travelling, connecting one another in invisible but deeply affective ways. LaBelle goes further in this suggestions stating that 'a voice full of imaginary drive, and those animate and poetical expressions that turn our bodies toward other species, other material forms, or immaterial apparitions, as well as each other.'⁴⁶ This asks us to think of the voice and the expressions of the mouth outside of their roles in reason and functionality. The capacity of the voice to express poetry and imagination, fantasy and feeling is at the heart of why it is such a powerful connecting force.

⁴⁵ LaBelle, p. 1.

⁴⁶ LaBelle, p. 13.

4. Feeling through mouth(s) and tasting with skin

4.1 Unknowingness or Indeterminacy

What does it mean to touch? Images of a hand reaching out and gently pressing against the surface of another's skin come to mind, a physical meeting of bodies. A sensual act, where the warmth of another can be felt, where something pierces the threshold of the bodily space. Linguistically speaking, to be touched by something or to find an event touching can also refer to an emotional shift within oneself. Although no touch has occurred in the physiological sense, a physical sensation can be felt through the internal bodily response to this emotional change. Adrenalin surging, anxiety in the stomach, a welling of the eyes, a shaking of the hand. Touch then, could be described as an overarching term for a bodily response to contact with another person or event, where the border of the individual self is met with that of the broader world.

To consider what actually occurs in the action of touch I will draw upon the theory of Karen Barad, with a particular focus on their essay *On Touching — The Inhuman That Therefore I Am*.⁴⁷ As both a particle physicist and a professor in Feminist studies, Barad's work contains a unique meeting of science, philosophy and queer theory that creates a world through which notions of the ungh can be accessed. This merging of fields is indicative of the theory that their work contains, a space where divisions and differences become obsolete. In their own words Barad describes their approach to the topic of touch, commenting: 'I explore the physics of touch in its

⁴⁷ Karen Barad, 'On Touching—The Inhuman That Therefore I Am (v1.1)', in *Power of Material/Politics of Materiality* (English/German), ed. by Kerstin Stakemeier and Susanne Witzgall (Diaphanes: France, 2018), 153-164.

physicality, its virtuality, its affectivity, its e-motion-ality, whereby all pretence of being able to separate out the affective from the scientific dimensions of touching falls away.⁴⁸ The landscape through which Barad's theories can be accessed, a place that simultaneously welcomes multiple ways of being, that embraces overlapping sites and looks for the in between occurrences — this is a place where the ungh can be found as well.

Within traditional physics, the phenomena of touch is explained through electromagnetic repulsion theory. Based on the idea that when one is seemingly making contact with another surface through touch, there is no contact actually occurring. Instead, negatively charged electrons repel one another and create a kind of force. This theory already contradicts the very core of the sensation associated with touching, but if one considers this 'electromagnetic repulsion' as a form of energy rather than a form of physical contact, touch can be placed within a broader and less defined scope of sensations and actions, one the has blurred edges and can weave in to a whole range of emotional and physiological experiences. I imagine that this force explains some of the energy that is held in the power of physical touch, that to feel something is actually to feel it's magnetic or energetic capacity or state. Barad's area of research, quantum field theory, is in an alternative method for understanding the behaviour of matter. They explain that 'Particles, fields, and the void are three separate elements in classical physics, whereas they are intra-related elements in quantum field theory.'⁴⁹ This is striking, as even some of the most essential scientific theories relating to matter (bodies, objects, space) can be challenged through their placing of individual components in to some form of fixed separation. Through the entangled and interlaced landscape of quantum field theory, many forms of relation are thrown in to question, including

⁴⁸ Barad, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Barad, p. 4.

bodily and emotional spheres — allowing for more messy and less defined experiences to be validated and embraced.

To expand on this, let us consider the kind of structural space in which a notion like the ungh can exist. This notion describes experiences where emotions, memories, physical touch and the imagination can all exist simultaneously in an overlapping, meandering state and neither is given a more dominant position of validation. Due to this mix of sensations and experiences, to accept the ungh as a possibility involves letting go of the borders between the separate sensations a body and a mind can experience. The ungh of a person or the ungh of an experience is a kind of coming together, a collision or an attaching of these states in to a deeply bodily feeling. The ungh behaves in a way that is a product of the ever growing number of possible moments that can be experienced at once, where the boundaries between individual and collective bodies are blurred. A space in which, as Barad notes ‘Even the smallest bits of matter are an unfathomable multitude.’⁵⁰. Based on quantum field physics, multiplicity is embedded in in all forms of existence, beginning with the behaviour of the finest particles. This leads to a suggestion that to accept this theory, one must be open to what Barad calls ‘Ontological indeterminacy’, meaning that fixed definitions and clear, solid theories, not only challenge but are in total opposition to the core of matter, because all things are in an infinite state of movement, change and interaction. Perhaps determinacy is more often than not, an optimistic illusion.

‘Ontological indeterminacy’ is therefore the causality of multiplicity in the world. Meaning that the not knowing of things, vagueness or unfixed nature, is integral to the idea that everything is interconnected and has the possibility to be in a constant state of change. If there are infinite ways in which bodies, objects and other matter can behave and interact, any theory

⁵⁰ Barad, p. 7.

or findings about the nature of being, philosophical or otherwise are not stable determinations. To form ideas or conclusion on the meaning of being and life naturally has a hugely valuable role in the world, and these theories may of course contain valid and valuable information and but as Barad states: ‘What keeps theories alive and lively is being responsible and responsive to the world’s patternings and murmurings’⁵¹ meaning that ‘Theories are living and breathing reconfigurings of the world.’⁵² Theories should also be active and in conversation with the world, responding and adapting. Harking back to Alice Lagaay’s suggestion that consciousness is ‘sensual and rhythmical’ tied in with Barad’s thoughts that the world has ‘patterning and murmurings’ reminds us of the continuously active, connected and experimental nature of all beings, both human and nonhuman. As *On Touching* suggests — even the act of thinking is a form of theory or research and that doing theory should be embedded in the way of the world not as an addition to it.

The role of art comes in to it’s own here, as so often art is positioned as a suggestion, something that the artist wants to say, a gesture or expression but it is rarely considered as a form of hard fact. Does this make the knowledge that can be gained from art any less valuable than more scientifically based practices? Perhaps it is arts capacity to be suggestive and commentary like that is crucial to its power. By power I do not mean dominating power, but a strength in its existence or role in the world. In an essay titled *The Subversive Force of Unlearning*⁵³ (2019) we are reminded that the stories and questions that come from artistic practices are a way of producing knowledge: ‘(...) In art, we also produce knowledge by

⁵¹ Barad, p. 1.

⁵² Barad, p. 2.

⁵³ Grada Kilomba, ‘The subversive Force of Unlearning’, in *We Are Many: Art, the Political and Multiple Truths*, Edited by Jochen Volz and Gabi Ngcobo, Koenig Books London, 2019).

producing questions. (...) to bring questions and remember that you are also creating a new configuration of narrative and space where you are telling who can tell stories, which stories can be told, and with which layers these stories can be told'⁵⁴. In a way, the production of knowledge through science, art or otherwise is always a form of 'reconfiguring', a way to respond so the flow of the world through something that already exists. There can and will always be some newness in each iteration, but we are in a continuous state of layering and responding to something from before.

⁵⁴ Kilomba, pp. 40-41.

4.2 Surfacing Stories

Feminist Writer and Scholar Sara Ahmed's essay *Collective Feelings* discusses 'how the collective takes shape through the impressions made by bodily others,'⁵⁵ with a particular focus on the role of emotions. We are as people, as bodies, constantly having emotional responses to things. The formation of these emotions is a combination of bodily sensation and cognitive understanding of these sensations and their possible meanings. Emotions are in a sense then, everywhere, through the affective forces that are moving in and around the space, one then labels a reaction or sensation as a feeling — an emotion. Ahmed notes that 'It is through the intensification of feeling that bodies and worlds materialize and take shape, or that the effect of boundary, fixity and surface is produced.'⁵⁶ If, as Ahmed and suggests, these emotions are formed through contact with objects and others, it is precisely through our relation to others that one forms emotional dispositions. There is therefore an interweaving of self and other through emotionality, surface and sensation.

Once a feeling, that is induced by touch or otherwise, has been called an emotion, it has already been cognitively labelled. However if the origin of the construction of that emotion has been formed through our contact with other forms of matter, this suggests that emotions are intrinsically bodily in their nature. It is the bodily reaction and interaction with its self or its surrounding that allows emotions to be formed in the first place. Ahmed argues that these forms of relation are deeply intimate, stating: 'emotions are precisely about the intimacy of the 'with'; they are about the

⁵⁵ Sara Ahmed, 'Collected Feelings, Or The Impressions Left By Others', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 21.2 (2004), 25-42 (p. 27)

⁵⁶ Ahmed, p. 29.

intimate relationship between selves, objects and others.⁵⁷ *The Affect Theory Reader* also discusses the contradiction of how intimate it is to be a body in the world and yet simultaneously impersonal.⁵⁸ In that we are as bodies made up of a whole host of intimate interactions and experiences but we are always also part of something broader, more collective — bodies are *of* the world. Is having an awareness of this, being in tune with how intimacy is lined within the cracks of almost all of our experiences and how most acts or behaviours cannot be isolated — that they will undoubtedly have an effect on other bodies — is this a feminist issues? Does a feminist approach not essentially seek to acknowledge and value not just diversity of experiences but to take account of this interconnectedness? I wish to consider what intimacy can mean and how it is not explicitly a sexual term but in fact a form of relation that is intrinsically tied up within bodily being.

Feminist Writer Audre Lorde writes about a term that is often associated within a strictly intimate context, describing what she calls ‘erotic power’. Lorde believes that erotic power is a source of energy residing within all of us that is a systematically oppressed form of energy and strength. Even the understanding of the word erotic is tied up in dominating systems, associated with purely sexual spheres, one has been taught that it is a form of relation and energy that should only take place in one area of life. Lorde states ‘(...) we are taught to separate the erotic demand from most vital areas of our lives other than sex.’⁵⁹ However, this cordoning off of eroticism and erotic energy is constructed and unrealistic because like many other bodily and emotional dispositions it is not containable in this way, it leaks and spreads in to many other aspects of being and interacting. The categorisation of erotic energy in to purely sexual terms is a form of

⁵⁷ Ahmed, p. 28.

⁵⁸ Gregg and Seigworth, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Audre Lorde, ‘Uses of The Erotic: The Erotic as Power’, in *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*, (Silver Press: UK, 2017) 22-30, (p. 88).

suppression and to embrace the erotic as a form of energy within all of us that can manifest within many different contexts, is to acknowledge that this too is a powerful form of bodily knowledge. Lorde goes on to describe how 'As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and non rational knowledge.'⁶⁰ Knowledge can be found in all kinds of unusual places, and the ordering and hierarchy of these kinds of knowledge is an act that occurs to assert and maintain forms of power. The 'Non rational knowledge' that Lorde speaks of is still knowledge nevertheless and irrationality is not always a negative trait.

Perhaps emotionality is inherently tied up and associated within intimacy, or at least something personal, and intimacy, just like the erotic, has been socially and politically compartmentalised. It is unsurprising then, that emotions have fallen privy to the idea that as a personal thing, they should remain personal — it is somehow untoward or inappropriate to allow our emotional selves to exist outside of personal spaces. If we have come to 'distrust' as Lorde describes it, this source of knowledge — our emotional selves, seeing it as something that must be contained and controlled, then in a way, due to their interrelated status, we begin to distrust our bodies as well . It is only through a relearning of our own bodily space and the emotionality that is contained here that we can access the full realm of bodily knowledge available to us.

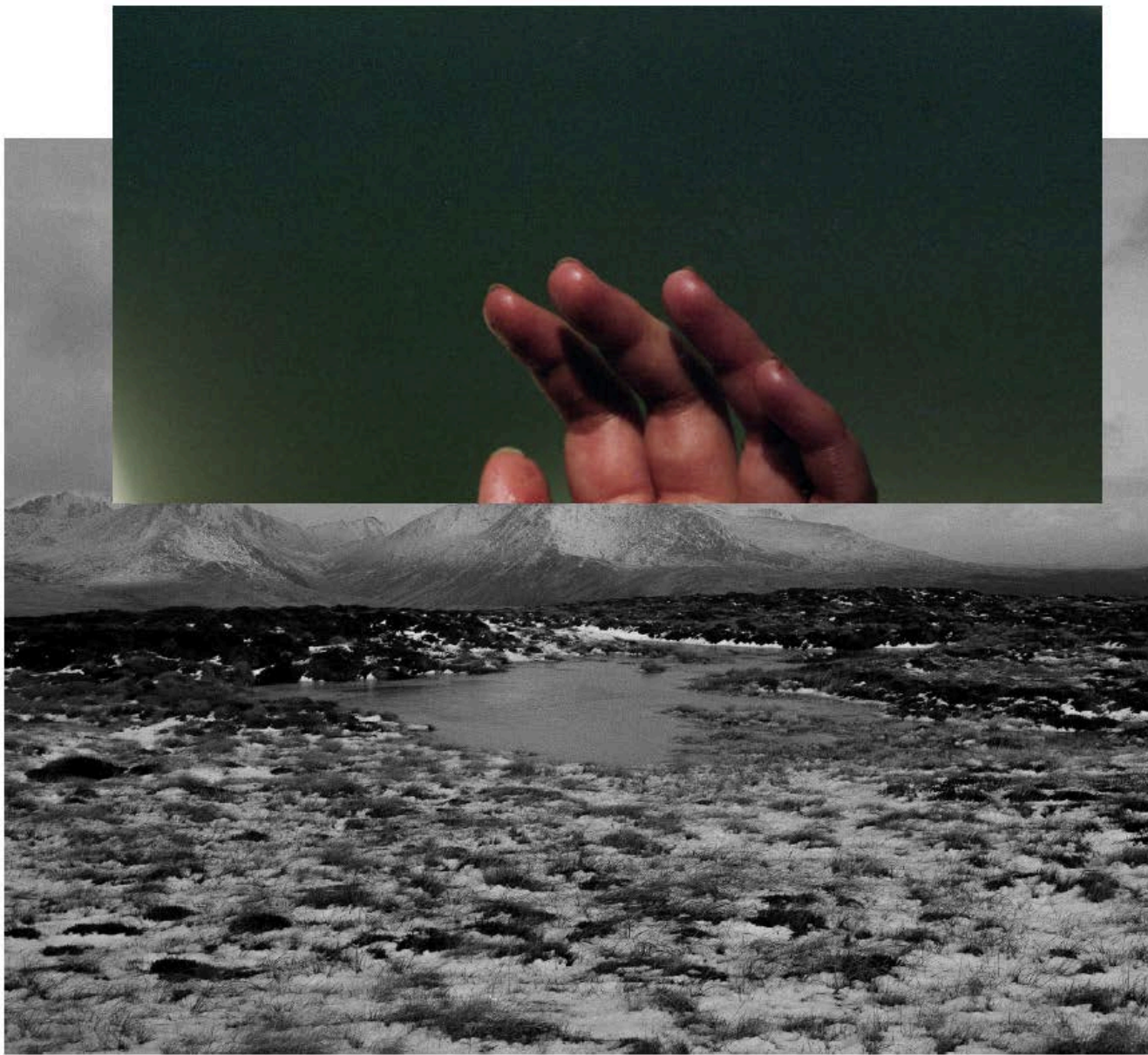
Where in our bodies do we experience sensations that ultimately lead to emotions and knowledge? Sara Ahmed considers skin, or at least our bodily surface as a key site. With reference to Freud's theories surrounding the ego, Ahmed argues that the understanding of the surface of our bodies forms a distinction between our inner and outer selves, stating: 'Crucially,

⁶⁰ Lorde, p. 88.

the formation of the bodily ego is bound up with the surface.⁶¹ This points to how it is through the movement of emotions, feelings and contact with objects and bodies, a sense of bodily surface is formed. In other words, it is how we feel about the experiences we have as bodies that actually contributes to forming understanding. It is through our feeling body, the sensation of touch and the emotions that we attach or associate with those sensations that one forms knowledge of their surroundings and a distinction between themselves as an individual and that of a broader collective world. This idea is then complicated a little when Ahmed acknowledges that skin has ‘contradictory’ status, it is something that both separates *and* connects. A space that is constantly gathering information, through sensation and emotion, as well as reading of the past, present and upcoming moments — connecting one with the other whilst simultaneously creating boundaries.

Through a photographic collage created as part of this research titled *Ard Bheinn* (2022), I played with the boundaries between the surface of the land and the surface of my skin. The work and the title features mountains on the isle of Arran in the west coast of Scotland. This part of Scotland has a deep family connection, a place I spent many of my summers as a child and is the place where my mother is buried. Going walking in the hills and mountains of Arran, usually with my dad, has become a sort of ritual for us. The land has an inescapable rawness to it. Squelching in to bogs and becoming entangled in the heather and bracken, our feet tread over this lively earth and our eyes take in the rugged hillsides surrounding. When I’m in that landscape, I am taken both outside of and closer to myself, I feel like I’m breathing it all in and like my body is connecting to personal and collective histories. The ungh of this moment is experienced through the surface of my skin.

⁶¹ Ahmed, p. 29.



⁶² Jo Hislop, from series *Ard Bheinn* (2022), risograph and archival photographic prints.

4.3 Touching with our eyes

I'm just sitting down, waiting to decide what I want to do next and then I feel it. It takes less than a second to notice where it came from. His eyes aren't just looking, they are penetrating. It is actually impressive how long he is able to stare without blinking. I look away and assume that it will pass and he will conform to some of the more welcome social norms, by getting on with his night. But he doesn't stop, he just stares directly at me without looking away for even a second. The intensity of his look reminds me of dogs when you're about to feed them. I stare back, hard and say out loud 'what?'. Nothing, he just keeps staring. 'Are you ok?' His mouth moves in to a fraction of a sideways smirk. I look away again and let a moment pass, but I can feel him all over me, it's like his face is millimetres away from mine.

The surface of his eyes and the feeling of his stare drip over me like putrid, sticky goo. It sounds so insignificant, a stare, how can we ask people not to touch with their eyes? But I feel undressed and depersonalised by his look, I feel powerless and trapped. It is non consensual, sensual, sense. To Feel together.

Without physically touching, eyes are capable of creating an impression upon one's skin. Carrying with them the memory that is held within the sensations of one's tissue, of our bodies. Past moments, of other people, spaces and objects have registered their presence, they have been processed and labelled.

Laura U Marks is a Media Art and Philosophy Scholar whose research surrounds intercultural film and media, encompassing topics such as: touch, embodiment and affect. Marks is known for her writing on a term called 'Haptic visuality', which she describes as 'synthesizing a theory of embodied, tactile, and multisensory visuality.'⁶³ A somewhat more sophisticated way of describing touching with our eyes. Although, Mark's theory surrounding haptic visuality does not simply integrate the role of touch in to the visual experience, it also involves a fundamental shift from the idea that sensory perception is made up of separate modes of experience. In this case, visuality is deconstructed and placed back together in a more multifaceted, bodily sphere that overlaps with other modes of sensory perception, but also integrates the role of the imagination, memory and empathy. By acknowledging the holistic role of bodies in forms of perception that have been isolated, we make way for more multi-sensory but also more body-centred experiences. One can take in and engage with a whole host of textualities in an experience that is traditionally considered visual (cinema in this case, but anything that involves looking). Beyond this though, we also broaden our capacity for feeling and being in the world. Practicing a way of relating to experience, bodies, objects and space that is engaged, embedded and sensitively attuned.

The theory Marks developed around haptic visuality took place during the 1990's and since the media landscape has shifted so dramatically in the

⁶³ Laura U.Marks, *Haptic Visuality* <<https://www.sfu.ca/~lmarks/styled-7/>> [accessed 08 January 2022].

decades since, it is worth considering where these ideas sit in a more contemporary backdrop. In an series of e-mail conversations with editors of the essay series *Haptic Entanglements* in 2021, Marks was asked to describe the term haptic visuality in the context of current times, she stated that ‘I still describe haptic visuality as a way of looking that does not isolate, master, or seek to identify what is beheld, but instead merges with it.’⁶⁴ At the core of this term is a way of engaging with our surroundings, or a form of perception that acknowledges multiplicity. I am interested here in the idea of merging, that instead of seeing the act of seeing as an on-looker, somebody on the outside or edges looking in, haptic visuality asks us to be intertwined within the visual experience. Perhaps we are already intertwined as bodies, but this term is asking us to acknowledge this, to bring awareness to the role of the broader body in the experience of looking. Creating a space where looking and touching are part of the same.

The body is a rich place full of experiential possibilities that are rooted in our sensory engagements with the world. To return to Spinoza, we do not really know and potentially will never fully know what the possibilities of the body are — this is an area of research that seems to contain perpetual discovery and possibility. When considering bodily reactions to the world, it would be an oversight not to acknowledge the work of French Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Writing during the mid 20th century, his theories and in particular *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) have paved the way for many philosophers, scholars and artists who consider topics around sensory perception. Merleau-Ponty stated: ‘My perception is [therefore] not a sum of visual, tactile and audible givens: I perceive in a total way with my whole being: I grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of

⁶⁴ Rahel Spöhrer und Joshua Wicke, ‘Haptic Entanglements, Organs of Touch, A mail conversation with Laura U. Marks’, [accessed 20 March 2022].

being, which speaks to all my senses at once.’⁶⁵ This statement describes how human perception involves multi-sensory engagements with the world and that this isn’t just a matter of two sensory modes crossing over, but a more holistic, all encompassing experience with ‘the whole being’. Our experience as bodies in the world is one that encompasses many engagements simultaneously.

To conclude and to consider sites of cross-sensory perception further takes us back to Juhani Pallasmaa, who suggests that all senses are in fact linked to the sensation of touch. Creating a possibility that touch and the skin are central in all of our experiences as bodies in the world, that they ground us and give us our most core and essential sense of being and or knowledge. Pallasmaa says: ‘There is a strong identity between the naked skin and the sensation of home. The experience of home is essentially an experience of intimate warmth’⁶⁶ To expose our skin, this container that holds us together as bodies, to make contact with ourselves or others through this surface is an action that is flowing with intimate, censorious, emotional and deeply felt knowledge.

⁶⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘4. The Film and The New Psychology’, in *Philosophers on Film from Bergson to Badiou: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Christopher Kul-Want, (Columbia University Press: New York Chichester, West Sussex, 2020) pp. 97-112

⁶⁶ Pallasmaa, p. 58.

5. Conclusion

In the earliest stages of embarking on this research, proposing the possibility of a space where the borders between experiences and bodies are blurred and soft, felt like a bold suggestion that in some ways sat outside of reality. I knew that the interests I had, lay in and around bodily sensations, sensorial experiences, emotional processes and spatial relations of self and other, but to tackle each of these individually only seemed to lead to an isolated way of thinking that never fully encompassed what I was seeking to describe. Through the unfolding of concepts like affect theory, quantum field theory and through artistic experimentation such as the use of moving image film, I have discovered a reality that holds the ungh with confidence. What all these approaches have in common is an acknowledgement of the ubiquity of interconnectivity and the overlapping nature of matter.

To return to the thesis title *The Ungh: Knowledge through emotional, sensorial and spatial forms of bodily being*, what underpins the modes of perception and experience that are listed here is *knowledge*. Throughout the research, I have been questioning how and where knowledge can be found in forms of bodily relation. From poetic to scientific, there have been many valuable ideas, theories and works that have emerged from the research and in some respects these elements have only become further entangled within each other. However, I will outline three key concluding subjects that intersect across the artistic and theoretical components of the thesis.

Indeterminacy

As a concept, the ungh still contains a significant element of indeterminacy. As outlined in the outset, it was never my intention to answer a question or define what the ungh is explicitly as this approach did not feel appropriate for the subject matter. The research undertaken has only further reinforced this — the ungh cannot be explained through one anecdote, art work or theory and the meaning of the notion will adapt and respond to the experiential viewpoint of the body interacting with the concept. This ambiguity or vagueness could be interpreted critically because not being able to definitively define what one means, feels or thinks is generally speaking, considered a form of weakness. However, through the discussions of artists such as poet Aisya Wadud and the theoretical findings of Karen Barad, I have learnt to welcome the indeterminate. Vagueness or the unknown are places full of knowledge in themselves, existing as important parts of any form of change, movement or development, they are synonymous with theories and ideas that are responsive and adaptive in their nature.

In attempting to understand the possible roles of artistic research, I encountered a conflict between the academic expectations/constraints of a thesis and the expressive more conversational approach of artistic practices. Through thesis specific lectures and courses I was required to attend, I was repeatedly hearing rules and structures that did not leave room for or contain, the broad possibilities of the way artistic research may function or exist. I appreciate that this may be common place in almost any academic institution worldwide. Out of this conflict, and through the words, wisdom and theories of the scholars and artists I have been studying, I was able to trust in the idea that to be asking questions and not necessarily answering them is in its self also a valid form of knowledge making. It is my view that

research and theory are living things and the ideas that emerge from these practices are contributions to an ever changing landscape of the world, rather than being positioned to dominate and take charge.

Interconnectivity

As a topic that I was aware of in the earlier stages of the research, interconnectivity or, the connected nature of seemingly disparate things and the less defined borders between bodies and other forms of matter, has resurfaced repeatedly within this thesis. I have been pleasantly surprised by how areas of research within philosophical, scientific and cultural fields all acknowledge and in some instances rely upon, the entangled coexistence of matter. There are limitations within the systematic categorisation of almost anything e.g language or emotions, and to acknowledge the connectivity also acknowledges the gaps, the places in between — a site where things easily become lost. This understanding is an imperative to the way I approach artistic research, seeing the in between as a never ending ground of potential and possibility that is at once both deeply intimate and inseparably in the world and connected to forms of other.

The weaving together of different components, manifests in multiple ways throughout the thesis. Firstly, to be able to access the breadth of the ungh and its possible iterations, required looking towards a broad range of sites and sources which carries with it both useful and problematic qualities. The breath brings diversity and varying view points but did not allow for any deep analysis. Secondly, both the theoretical and artists components of the thesis were undertaken simultaneously — interwoven within each other, they are both acts of research. The two processes were consistently feeding each other, the theoretical concepts and ideas I came across opened up the way in which I worked artistically and vice versa. I have therefore discovered a way of working in which an artistic and theoretical practice

are interdependent upon each other. Within the writing, the interweaving of personal reflections amongst theoretical discussions was a considered but also instinctive choice, something that came about intuitively. As the research evolved, this decision about the form of the writing became even more pertinent — reflecting the many ways in which the personal and wider world share the same space. Finally, within the artistic section of the thesis, the connectivity of separate sections existed across all of the works. There was a process of breaking down and putting back together again: through overlapping imagery in the the film installation, to the compartmentalised imagery of the pupa - it was impossible to see anything as a full whole without acknowledging the smaller components that make up its form.

Materiality and surface

The significance of materiality as a subject matter within my artistic work has only fully emerged through the process of this research. I have been creating work that has been directly and indirectly related to the ungh for several years, but through this research oriented theory/practice overlap, I have only just begun to feel like I am getting near to the core of my interests. Predominantly working with photography and writing, this project presented the opportunity to work with moving image analog film for the first time. This medium as a material and its inseparability from surface, movement and light has captivated me and opened up conceptual and practical possibilities in it's ability to speak on the ungh—connected to the symbolic and possibly real ways in which surfaces have the capacity to hold and transfer emotionality.

From the thoughts and work of Artist Tacita Dean and her relation to the material, analogue format, to Sara Ahmed's theories around bodily surface in the role of emotional relations—I have discovered how integral

materiality and surface are in discussions of bodily knowledge. Through the material possibilities of immaterial things *and* the role of actual surfaces in the formation of one's sense of self in relations to other, new links are formed between both the imagination, reality, physicality and emotions.

Limitations and Future Research

Many of the topics covered in the thesis have the potential to be broad and expansive areas of theory that could be researched in vast amounts of detail in themselves, for examples quantum field physics. My approach involved enquiring in to small sections of the theories or ideas that related to notions of the ungh, with the intention of building a landscape through which new ideas can emerge. However, it is possible that a narrower research topic would have allowed for a more in depth approach. The nature of the research topic (unfixed, merging borders etc.) risks opening up vast caverns of thought that are difficult to follow and lack structure. Although this proposed a significant challenge to the thesis process, working in an intuitively led way was important for this topic and made space for connections and expression that a more rigid structure may have limited.

In reaching the final stages of this particular body of work in which I explore the notion of the ungh, I feel more driven and energised to continue researching this topic than ever before. There are avenues of research that I discovered during this process that I was unable to uncover in any great detail due to the structural limitations of the thesis. Most notably: Affect theory, the work of Karen Barad, Performativity and the crossover between Philosophy, Performance and Poetics.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my supervisors: Maija for your encouragement and energy at the start and to Harri for your support in the final stages. Thank you to my Advisor Maarit for your kind, gentle and assuring presence and advice throughout this process.

Thank you to Camila at Helsinki University for kindly allowing me to borrow your caterpillars and to Baltic Analog Lab, Riga for allowing me to use your super8 film camera. Thank you Ana Margarid for your help with the octopus. For allowing me to film with you, thank you to: João, Hannin, Essi and Ana Margarida.

To Alys, Sidonie, Hannin, Amelie, Mike, Essi and Andrew thank you for your dear friendship. Thank you to my dad Mark and my sister Anna for your continued support. Thank you to João for your love and care and for making me laugh.

Thank you to my mum for her fierce love and support, always.



⁶⁷ Jo Hislop, *leaning* from series *Ard Bheinn* (2022), risograph photographic print.

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