

SCULPTING WITH OBJECT-GESTURES:
AN EVERYDAY WORKING GESTURE AS AN ARTISTIC
PROPOSITION AND A SPACE TO REIMAGINE MATERIAL
RESONANCES

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DECLARATION

This research project represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the research project.

During the period of registered study in which this research project was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this research project has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.



Anja Borowicz Richardson

15 September 2021

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ABSTRACT

I set out to re-think material engagement and manual labour, making the disappearing activities visible again. I see gaps in the way we describe physical engagement, in our understanding of what happens in the moments of material exchange.

My research came from my interests in the politics of labour, embodied thinking, and material practice. It was further inspired by changes to our material engagements, recognising that the range of movements at work and play is becoming smaller, and material exposures shifting towards immaterial. Manual labours that are disappearing from our awareness, being outsourced, replaced, or hidden away.

I focus on the act of everyday work as an in-between space where bodies and matter engage as equal participants of the action, where object compounds with subject through gesture. I propose to call this moment object-gesture. Object-gesture describes an action that already exists in the world — whether in a hair salon, on a building site, or in a science laboratory. By focusing on what happens at the interfaces of different object-gestures, I search for overlaps and resonances across the bodies at work. I look for fluid and inclusive ways to describe these interfaces, which move away from thinking embedded in language, categories, or classifications. This investigation needs to be done through practice, it requires practising or performing the conditions.

What is the (expanded) methodology to talk about a practice that deals with physical engagement and material exchange in more fluid and inclusive ways? Can these approaches speak for other working bodies and material practices? Can this working gesture-inspired thinking become a form of self-development, resisting or extending our bodily engagement? Can it increase our connection and empathy for other bodies, both material and immaterial? Can it inspire new awareness and lead to new or different meanings?

I explore different sensual modalities of object-gesture events, re-articulating their textual, auditory and visual dimensions. Drawing from the everyday and un-choreographed, from street encounters, archival recordings, and YouTube videos, I montage films of recorded gestures, dissect the language of instructions and explore sounds of physical impacts. These transcriptions act as experiential elements of the thesis.

Building on my multimodal explorations, I stage affective situations (Gesture Labs), where audiences are invited to respond to visual, aural, and textual materials of body labours. Gesture Labs expose object-gesture as a multimodal event. They do not aim to represent but rather seek to perform the conditions of material engagement. Gesture Labs are a space where I bring different academic disciplines into the conversation.

While acknowledging Fordist and post-Fordist discussions and traditions of Marxist thought, I focus on labour as an ontological proposition and as labour of living fire (Bruno Gulli). I refer to cognitive semiotics and neuroscience knowledge of auditory and motor systems, to consider ways of extending techniques of the body (Marcel Mauss, Maurice Merleau-Ponty) and enhancing empathy with other bodies. The notion of impassionate acting (Micheal Lambek), feelings and desire are recognised for their potential as affective spaces of resistance (Rosi Braidotti). Sound theories and body movement techniques (Frank Gilbreth, Rudolf Laban), object-oriented and material-semiotic thinking (OOO, Karen Barad) all form a ground that this research builds from.

I refer to artistic practices that engage with everyday objects (Richard Wentworth), the meaning of work as effort (Ehmann/Farocki's *Labour in a Single Shot*, Francis Alys' interventions), and those that explore analogue and liveness (Robert Ashley, Yvonne Reiner). These references function as points of departure, as means to explain further the differences in my enquiry.

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Prologue

0__ *overview of the thesis*

BACKGROUND — QUESTIONS — METHODS — WHO OF THE RESEARCH
— HOW OF PRACTICE — MODE OF WRITING — LAYOUT

[background or why I am doing the research]

This research came from interests in politics of labour and embodied and material practices. It was further inspired by increasing immaterial engagement.

As an artist with a background in sculptural practice and making objects, I perform material engagements that are physical and embodied. Making is a form of manual labour, and there are parallels between the material exchanges taking place in art practice and other forms of work — the physical exchange, the body and effort, gestures and sensorial information.

At the same time, manual labours are disappearing from our visibility, outsourced, replaced or hidden away. I wish to re-think material labour, bring these disappearing activities into our awareness.

This feels even more relevant as our range of movements and our exposure to materialities is shifting — gestural movements at work and play are becoming smaller, materiality is becoming increasingly digital. Artistic practices are also increasingly impacted by new technologies, 3d scanning, virtual objects and artificial intelligence. With the move towards more virtual engagement, I see this research as an important investigation in 'how we can extend material action under immaterial conditions'.

Yet I see gaps in the way we describe and understand material engagement, in the way we articulate what can happen in the space in-between bodies and matter, the physical and imaginary resonances. These are limitations in our understanding of material exchange that are embedded in language and habitual approaches.

I propose that this gap can be explored by looking at the material (sculptural) art practice through the lens of manual labours. I want to give agency to the working gesture, subject and object.

I set out to negotiate the tension between ethics and aesthetics through thinking of labour as ontological.

[research questions]

Thinking through this lens, I began re-thinking my practice as engagement of material and body in production processes, as a site of exchange more than a sculptural commodity. What started as a hunch, through looking at artworks and of re-thinking of practice, led to an idea I call, *object-gesture* both a mode of thinking and practice. I asked the following questions:

- What is the (expanded) methodology to talk about a practice that deals with physical engagement and material exchange in more fluid and inclusive ways?
- Can these approaches speak for working bodies and material practices other than those of the artist?
- Can this working gesture become a form of self-development, resisting or extending our bodily engagement with the world?
- Can it increase our connection and empathy for other bodies, both material and immaterial? Can it inspire new awareness and lead to new or different meanings?

[methods]

My approach mixes taxonomies and looks across disciplines.

I explore ways to describe *object-gesture* interfaces, which move away from existing thinking that tends to be embedded in categories and disciplines. In order to do this, I ask: What are gaps or blind spots in current methods of classifying and describing material labour/practice? What is missing from theories of politics of labour, semiotics, neuroscience, sound theories and new materialism, and current Marxist thought?

I look to disrupt categories and taxonomies while seeking different forms of connection across disciplines and modalities. These investigations need to be done through practice, they require practising or performing the conditions. My contention is that, if I explore this through art practice, we can see new arrangements between gesture and labour. These glimpses of new approaches could help articulate the relationship between labour, gesture, language and action.

[who of the research]

This research is located within the field of art practice, aesthetics and theory of art. It is directed primarily at those within the field of art practice who deal with material engagement. I further envisage that *object-gesture* as a mode of thinking can have relevance to other practices the cross over into embodied and physical engagement.

[how of practice]

I explore different approaches to describing the *object-gesture* through using multimodal transcriptions. I do this by utilising three experimental iterations of textual, visual and aural modes, which were developed as methods of performing the conditions of material engagement. I propose an approach or approaches, which explore the modalities of *object-gesture* events, expanding their textual, auditory and visual dimensions.

I found that techniques of the body could be further extended by artificial stimulation of different sensual modalities through synthetic media generating metaphoric texts, gestic sounds, visual movement, ASMR experiences — re-articulating them and filling in gaps in visual, sonic and linguistic habits

These transcriptions, present in the thesis, establish themselves as a foreground for future explorations, inspiring further investigations through practice and writing. Focusing narrowly on manual acts to disperse metaphorically through mixing taxonomies, modes and tools, including feelings and sensuous aspects, and writing through the body of Sisyphus.

[mode of writing and layout of thesis]

I wish for the structure of the thesis to consider the notion of modalities, to reflect the multimodal performance of *object-gesture* but also different modes of thinking about *object-gesture* and writing, from critical propositions to metaphorical speculations.

The writing mode is characterised by repetition and returning to the same ideas, concepts, thinkers but from a different angle, or for a different function. It is returning to the core of the *object-gesture* to unravel another thread of ideas.

The thesis is therefore divided into three parts — Reasonings, Transcriptions and Expositions.

Reasonings set out a term object-gesture in ___ *proposing object-gesture*; speculate on labour as ontology in ___ *labouring body of Sisyphus*; and interrogate different approaches that influenced my practice in ___ *exploring models of living fire / entering impassionate space*

Transcriptions section ___ *towards multimodal approach* — acts as a pause in the thesis for the reader to explore multimodal transcriptions. The reader is directed to digital link to experience the visual, textual and sound material, setting the mood and laying ground for Gesture Labs.

Expositions ___ *Gesture Labs* — expose the object gesture through the practice of GestureLabs, shared affective spaces, where varied publics may encounter the project. Expositions expose object-gesture as a multimodal event.

Conclusion ___ *on analogue liveness, attunement and collective potential* — returns to the discipline of sculpture and material practice. It argues for material action as a form of analogue liveness and material attunement.

Reasonings

1___ *proposing object-gesture*

This section focuses on the reason I developed the term object-gesture, I explain why I arrived at it as a more accurate term to articulate my observations. Here, I set up why I think other approaches or categories are lacking and do not fully describe the contingent relationship between, material, the body, gesture and language. I define my shift of focus from 'working' objects to 'working' bodies and therefore I foreground embodied and emoting gesture, over language and semiotic interpretations of materials. I explain how the project understands objects (bodies/things) and gestures (movement/action as a form of meaning-making).

LABOURING OBJECTS — OOO — OBJECT WITHDRAWAL — HIERARCHIES OF MEANING — LATOURIAN HYBRIDS — INSERTING BODY — TRANSIENT HIEROGLYPHS — MATHEMATICAL METAPHORS — PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTENTIONS — WORKING GESTURES

_____The idea of object-gesture came to me gradually and then suddenly_____

The gradual path to *Object-gesture* was arrived at through investigations into what I call *labouring objects*. These objects are defined by me as packaging, estate agent signs or fabric care labels. I see these objects as performing labour, not as working tools directed by the human agent but rather taking on the role of working agents themselves. In the practice I tested different contexts by reusing, reassembling and reappropriating these 'working agents'. Discarded and found signposts were spliced to create provisional structures while the parts of them such as the Correx print was removed and transferred onto other surfaces and fabrics. Packaging was flattened into nets, layers of cardboard pulled apart into separate skins, backed with fabric and offered as wearable propositions. I recorded the objects and their agendas in their journey across different settings and explored other imaginary possibilities through photo-essays.

[mundane objects]

My images drew on artist Richard Wentworth's photographic collections of mundane objects, of small gestures and quiet demonstrations. Over a period of 30-years, his project *Making Do and Getting By*, managed to create elaborate stories and reveal larger patterns of objects in the world. A decrepit pale blue car, its drooping bumper bandaged with brown carpet as if wounded, a white electric tape holding it from unravelling, a claw hammer with the v-shaped part acting as a door stopper while its long handle is leaning gently against the door as if it was a relaxed body taking pause from its labour, a pencil acting as a pin pushed through a staple of a padlock to stop the hasp part from popping up, its yellow narrow shape looking quite feeble against the silver mass of metal, slices of a cob bread squashed sideways into a makeshift bread rack between a tree trunk and a wooden stake supporting the sapling, the oblong shapes collapsed between the two solid shapes in a study of browns. His portable vignettes become both an evidence and a compositional bracket of everyday objects.

By ascribing human-like qualities to the non-human, Wentworth's objects become figures *standing-in* for the human figure. A form of anthropomorphism takes place, the stage seems to be given to the objects, yet a strong presence of the subject persists. The images

carry echoes of human agents who placed (acted on) the objects and they also reflect the subjective framing and aesthetic selection as made by the artist. The initial focus on the object is upended in the process; the balance of power between the subject and the object is insufficient to overturn the anthropocentric condition. When I look at these works, the words of Jean Baudrillard continue to echo in the background:

We have always lived off the splendor of the subject and the poverty of the object.¹

In this process of *standing-in*, Wentworth's objects are capable of substituting others as well as themselves in a form of a 'double displacement'. I see the objects taking on the role of props.² The use of prop-objects, with their connotation of staging and theatricality, is applied in particular to highlight the props' capacity to enact social agendas.³ In Wentworth's images though, this prop-like appearance has less of a social focus. Instead, I see the object overtaken by the aesthetic process, by selections, compositions and edits — it is the artist's perspective, what the artist has done with the objects, that I am appreciating rather than the objects themselves. I am offered a glimpse into a particular moment in the life of an object, a moment which has been selected by Wentworth to form his own aesthetic territory and logic system, his way of viewing these objects.

This aesthetic territory can only emerge through acts of repetition⁴ and accumulation. Individually, the impact of Wentworth's objects and gestures is less insignificant — they act on a micro-level as singular objects standing in for a human figure. Yet, I propose that in their accumulation over time they form a temporal macro-object, which starts to act beyond a singular nature or locality, entangling itself with other objects/bodies. The objects retain their everyday quotidian micro-status but together they operate as a macro-object.⁵ And, at

¹ Jan Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, trans. by Philip Beitchman (London: Pluto Press, 1999), p 11.

² The application of the term prop is traditionally twofold: 1) as an object used to aid the telling of a narrative in a theatre, 2) as an item to literally support something else.

³ During the 2007 Showroom Gallery Conference: *Props, events, encounters: the performance of new sculpture*, Jan Verwoert discussed how the use of props for staging of social situations reframes theatricality away from Michael Fried's seminal critique. Andrea Philips explored the prop capabilities in the art market and the shifting forms of agency of 'ownership, support, use-value, circulation, disaggregation'. Jan Verwoert, 'Make the Prop Talk – on Putting Performance back into Sculpture', in Ogg, Kirsty, ed. *Showroom Annual: Props, Events, Encounters* (London: The Showroom, 2008), pp. 30-34, and Andrea Phillips, 'Prop-Objects', in *Showroom Annual*, p. 27.

⁴ "This strategy of repetition or reappearance of the object – with a Beckettian feel to it – has the effect of suggesting invisible, ungraspable logic threaded through his work as cognitive systems that are non-verifiable yet are accepted as possible." Mercedes Vicente writes about Gabriel Kuri's work though she might have written these words about Wentworth's practice.

Mercedes Vicente, 'Five views of something hidden', in Kuri, Gabriel, et al. *Gabriel Kuri: and Thanks in Advance* (New Plymouth, N.Z.: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2007), pp 18-19.

⁵ It is Alfred Gell who comes up with a proposition of macro-objects (though it needs to be noted

this macro-level, they are exposed to the world in a process of creative feedback, like in Wentworth's slide show lectures, which became an integral part of his working process. The presented images would initiate conversations, which would result in more images being created in an ever-ongoing adjustment of focus. These loops and adjustments make connections over large time zones and the neuroscientist Mark Lythgoe sees these connections as something that comes back from our evolutionary past and that 'universally lights up the same area of our brain'.⁶ This universality of connection is something I would like to hold onto in my investigations, however, in my work I wish to find this state of understanding/ perception in the individual encounters with objects.

How can I find this universal logic in the object-subject interaction? Is it about a different form of meaning-making? In Wentworth's practice, the meaning arises through the logic of taxonomy,⁷ which he describes as linguistic traces that connect the images:

It doesn't take very long to realize that some are warnings, some repairs, some reminders, some adjustments. And some of them are kinds of subsections: you would use a word like jamming and others are wedging. There's a hell of a lot of resistance to gravity, and I think my work has a lot to do with gravity...⁸

Therefore, Wentworth's objects are meant to operate as semiotic signs.⁹ It is Peircean semiotics I see here, which extends the structural linguistics of Saussure to images, lectures and monologues. Yet I would disagree that this semiotic approach allows us coded access to the object as Peirce would have us believe.¹⁰ Even if the object is understood as existing

that that his macro scale is minute when compared with hyperobject ontology). Gell asks ontological questions about the agency – its nature, spatiality and temporality – and uses the example of an artistic practice. The work of a painter, for example, is inherently temporal and localized. Numerous sketches will pre-empt the finished piece, which in turn will become a study for future work. Taken together, these works of art 'form a macro-object, or temporal object, which evolves over time'. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 256.

⁶ Richard Wentworth and Mark Lythgoe, 'The Prehistoric Smile', in Groom, Simon, ed., *Richard Wentworth (Art Catalogue)* (Liverpool; New York: Tate Publishing, 2005), p. 53.

⁷ Kevin James Henry, 'The Textual Photograph: Emergent Stories in an Emerging Social Sphere' (presented at the 4th ELIA Teachers' Academy NATFA, Sofia, 2009) [accessed via ELIA Library on 3 May 2017]

⁸ Kevin James Henry, 'Parallel Universes: Making Do and Getting By + Thoughtless Acts (Mapping the Quotidian from Two Perspectives)' (presented at the College Art Association, New York City, 2007) [accessed via ResearchGate on 2 February 2021]

⁹ For an object to be seen as semiotic it needs to be able to refer in the absence of that which refers and be capable of deception.

¹⁰ Saussure's semiology defined semiotics as 'role of signs as part of the social life', 'articulating' culture through language. Peirce extended Saussure's structural linguistics to concerns about representation, images, codes, media, and culture in everyday life. Like Saussure, Peirce believed that signs allow coded access to an object, but in Peircean semiotics signs can be material as well as mental/psychological. For Peirce logic and semiotics are the same thing. See: Webb Keane, 'Semiotics and the Social Analysis of Material Things', *Language & Communication*, 23.3–4 (2003), 409–25.

in its own right, any signification that assigns it with meaning comes from and through the subject. I believe it is the perspective of Wentworth, it is how he views the object and its function or de-function, its use or misuse, and what relations it forms with other objects in his collection that creates the meaning experienced here. I would go further and say that this new meaning is therefore subjective rather than objective, even if it wishes itself to be so. Wentworth's process of accumulation prevents this from occurring. I think that what remains objective are the objects themselves. I started to create different meaning and understanding for myself as soon as I began interrogating Wentworth's images, including learning new vocabulary like the names of various padlocks and their parts.

The meanings produced begin to operate in a hierarchical manner.¹¹ Or rather different properties of the object are assigned different hierarchies; some exposed and highlighted, others pushed to the background and trivialised. We end up with objects that have multiple hierarchies of meanings, dependent on the perception of meaning-making subjects.¹² Objects are perceived through selected contexts while hiding away their other aspects. Thus, objects conceal their different qualities from different subjects.

How can I push beyond the things concealed? One problem here is connected to the limits of semiological understanding of materiality. In Wentworth's images, the notion of the collection, through the sheer accumulation of so many instances, generates quiet recognition. At the same time, this recognition sediments the meaning, creating in effect a closed system of interpretation — by us as subjects — of the signs created by the capturing of everyday objects which are out of place. Instead of creating a potentially closed territory around the object-subject interaction, I wish to open up the multiplicity of perspectives. Instead of an accumulation of specific properties, I propose to overlay different taxonomies and modalities in the understanding of material encounters.

So, my research is motivated by a need to understand how materiality and thingness are negotiated in the making of artworks.

¹¹ Jakob von Uexküll expands on the object and meaning through the lens of biosemiotics. For him meaning is a use, or purpose to which a subject puts an object. Therefore, such meaning only exists for those subjects. By contrast, an object is something that exists in its own right without dependence on a subject. For example, from ontological perspective a translucent glass bowl has no hierarchy of its properties, yet when a subject relates to the bowl meaningfully, its properties become graded, with some being pulled into the foreground and others pushed into the background. Morten Tønnessen, Timo Maran, and Alexei Sharov, 'Phenomenology and Biosemiotics', *Biosemiotics*, 11.3 (2018), 323–30.

¹² Subjects here can be individual, groups and institutions.



Fig. 1 Richard Wentworth, *Islington, London, 1982*
(*Making Do and Getting By*), photograph. © Richard
Wentworth. All Rights Reserved. DACS/Artimage
2015.

[things and objects]

Firstly, there is the issue of the slippage between the definitions of materials and materiality.¹³ Materials can be touched, they have surfaces that have varying degrees of flexibility, permeability and even different temperatures. One cannot touch the materiality of an object; the surface of materiality is an illusion. I am thinking back to the works I call my *labouring objects*. Although I can bend the cardboard of a box, and I can caress the silky surface of a sewn-in care label, at the same time, I cannot touch the materiality of packaging or instructions or the printed matter, nor can I process their agency, functionality or spatiality through my senses. I can only experience these through my imagination. Whereby the materiality of a traffic cone in Wentworth's photograph plays out cognitively rather than through the desire to handle the material of the cone itself, to feel the hardness and volume of plastic mould and roughness of paint. Yet we cannot take leave of the material realm, enter it at will and then exit for the world of cognitive experience. Instead, we are submerged in an 'ocean of materials',¹⁴ which encompasses humans and non-humans, organic and inorganic. Matter of different shades and forms is in constant flux, in a process of transformation and creation, dispersal and coagulation. These different materials meet and interact through their surfaces, it is where the stone encounters air, where skin softens in water, where the eye rests on the computer skin. Through the production of artworks, I wish to think of matter as an anchor.

Then there is also a slippage between object-ness and thing-ness. In particular, I think of Heidegger's notion of the thing, which he develops to navigate the problem of our subjective relationship to the world, of relating through our perception and from our own subjective position. The Heideggerian thing launches itself into the world by being 'at hand'. This handiness is used, it is worked with. When the thing becomes unusable, obsolete or broken, it also becomes 'objectively present' in the world.¹⁵ The quality of objecthood or object-ness, as opposed to Heidegger's thingliness or thing-ness, is, therefore, the quality of thing that is created by us as perceivers. The object-ness of an object is internal to us, constituted through the reference and relevance, through its name and use. However, in thing-ness things are purely out there, unmediated. Then Bill Brown

¹³ Tim Ingold, 'Materials against Materiality', *Archaeological Dialogues*, 14.1 (2007), 1–16.

¹⁴ Ingold, 7.

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein Und Zeit*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 65-71.

expands on this object and thing difference — he believes that objects are with our perception, while things are below or above our perception.¹⁶ Things with a totem-like quality are above our perception. Things we use every day fall beneath our perception.

Yet both the Heideggerian tool that is either 'at hand' or 'objectively present', and Brown's things that are either below or above the perceptual, dismiss any states that are in-between. Many things do not break, they flex and bend. The estate agent sign laying on the pavement occupies the in-between space of function and dysfunction. It is a potential material for another structure, but it can easily spring back into action. It suggests ownership but yet is abandoned. It offers itself up in multiple options. They invite bodily and sensory engagement that may trigger subconscious responses. And they require a perspective that can account for the degree of that flexing and for affective responses like the sympathy I feel for the 'bandaged' car bumper.

How can I allow for these in-between states? To what ends — what is the problem? Can I discover the power of these material objects if I was to hold onto them?¹⁷ Wentworth does not 'follow the thing',¹⁸ he does not try to unpack its social trajectory, whilst I wish to understand the object more, to empathise with, to give space to the social agency that emerges from the object encounter.

How could I achieve a subtler understanding of degrees of object-ness, and why is that useful?

¹⁶ Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28.1 (2001), 3-5.

¹⁷ I am thinking of Ian Bogost's tiny ontology, both pragmatic and aesthetically minimalist. Bogost thinks ontology should be simple to recognise and reflect that an act of being is simple. He wants an aphorism that "can be rendered via screen print on a trucker's cap". This desire is somehow echoed by Jane Bennet whose 'target is not the macro-level politics of laws, policy, institutional change but the micro-politics of sensibility-formation.' I somehow think about throwing a stone and causing ripple across the water surface.

Ian Bogost 'Weird Media and Tiny Ontology' (2010)

<http://bogost.com/writing/blog/weird_media_and_tiny_ontology> [accessed 5 May 2017].

Peter Gratton, 'Vibrant Matters: An Interview with Jane Bennett'. *PHILOSOPHY IN A TIME OF ERROR* (2010) <<https://philosophyinatimeoferror.com/2010/04/22/vibrant-matters-an-interview-with-jane-bennett/>> [accessed 4 May 2017].

¹⁸ The method of 'following the thing' drew on actor-network theory to trace socio-material networks through which specific commodities move. It has been appropriated as an approach to investigate different objects (from commodities to data) by tracing them back to their origins. This includes objects that hide, might be objects unfollowable, their trajectories highly changeable and punctuated by numerous ruptures.

Ian Cook, 'Follow the Thing: Papaya', *Antipode*, 36.4 (2004), 642-64.

[hybrid objects]

What followed was a period of reading the theories of object-oriented ontologies (OOO) and speculative realism. This helped me consider intuitive approaches and other ideas relevant to practice-based research. This includes metaphoric thinking, from the micro to the macro, as well as those that create challenges to interactions with materials, objects and things. This raised questions of ethics, desire and, labour. I particularly aligned with Bruno Latour's desire to reveal hybrids that exist in the grey zone between the polarities of subject and object,¹⁹ a zone of quasi-objects and quasi-subjects.

The hybrids²⁰ would address the oppositional thinking about subject and object and open up any potential enquiries. These are hybrids imagined as events of cross-fertilisation, mixing and fusing, where bodies become porous and therefore infected by the ecology of materials and surroundings. Objects too are affected, they change the shape, bend or stretch, are smoothed out and polished by the oil of the skin, they 'become real' in the way the toys in the children's book *The Velveteen Rabbit* become real — through the attention, affection and touch.²¹ The hybrids therefore result from emotional engagement, from an exchange of information or exchange of material residues. These affective states change the perspective of the human subject but also of the non-human, as both are repositioned, morphed physically and relationally. The degree of these affective impacts depends on different aspects of the object — the paper cup of coffee will be forever changed structurally by both the liquid and the pressure of our fingers. The dough formed into bread undergoes an alchemical-like transformation and so does the subject enhancing her manual dexterity, molecules seeping through their surfaces, perception becoming more subtle and slower. There are moments when both subject and object become a new entity

¹⁹ Bruno Latour regards the mixture of poles as universal and proposes that segregation of the non-human (science) from the human (politics) may take place in theory but needs to be undone in practice. This results in appearance of hybrids: quasi-objects and quasi-subjects. There is no subject and object, only the relation between the two and the degree on the polarity scale. Objects or subjects take on a role of pure form (disregarded), intermediaries (not worth studying) or actants (participating in the network only as nodules).

Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Clarendon Lectures in Management Studies (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁰ Hybrid comes from the Latin word *hybrida*, meaning the offspring of 'a tame sow and a wild boar', or the 'child of a freeman and a slave'.

Andrew Colman, 'Hybrid', in *A Dictionary of Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 2015) <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199657681.001.0001/acref-9780199657681-e-3874>> [accessed 20 October 2016]

²¹ Real is not how the objects (toys) are made but it's a thing that happens to them, and it involves being deformed in the process. Real is a process of change but also of being gradually revealed. Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit: Or How Toys Became Real* (London: Puffin, 2005), 14-15.

altogether, coupled or entangled in each other before separating again to carry on the echoes of that encounter. Some of the awareness stays behind, rising with the bread in the hot oven or becoming a mental note to buy more flour, organic or fair trade if one's budget allows for such choices. It echoes through the empathy with the baker around the corner and the one across the globe. It morphs into momentary considerations, which are both functional and prosaic to imaginary and global.

[withdrawn objects]

I returned to thinking about objects concealing their qualities or, as described by Graham Harman, objects withdrawing from direct human and non-human contact. How could this withdrawal be accounted for or exposed in various relationships?²² Manuel DeLanda stipulates non-hierarchical relationships²³ by thinking through process ontology and proposing that objects have actual and virtual dispositions,²⁴ which are 'real but not necessarily actual if they are not currently manifested or exercised'.²⁵ These complex propositions contributed to the way I began to envisage, what I call, *labouring objects* as involved in a wider network of economic and social relationships. What happens when they become entangled with other objects/bodies? These labouring objects are in hybrid relationships with people who take part in designing, making, delivering, and selling them, but also with those who use, clean, dismantle, and scavenge them.

Theories of OOO led me to seek out moments that were more complex and ambiguous,

²² Harman expands beyond the dynamic relationships formed between objects or objects and subjects, drawing attention to the veil around the private interior of the object. Whether it is Heidegger's tool-analysis of real objects or Husserl's perceptual experience of sensual object, Harman argues that 'objects withdraw into a shadowy subterranean realm that supports our conscious activity while seldom erupting into view'. This withdrawal negates the possibility of exhaustive introspection. Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, Reprint edition (Zero Books, 2011), p. 37.

²³ DeLanda provides, through recourse to Deleuze's body of work, a process ontology that allows for non-hierarchical structures. His processes (like interaction, meshing, dispersal, segmentation etc.) transform different materials and are therefore of particular interest to this project.

Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2006).

²⁴ DeLanda expands on Deleuzian ontology and defines the identity of actual objects as a combination of actual properties and virtual dispositions. DeLanda divides virtual dispositions into two kinds. 'Tendencies' are dispositions that can be considered inherent to something, such as the tendency of iron to melt at 1,538°C. 'Capacities' are more contingent dispositions that something needs to acquire through exposure to other assemblages, such as iron's capacity to roll if it has been worked into a sphere.

Manuel De Landa, *Assemblage Theory*, Speculative Realism (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 180.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

moments where multiple connections, gestures and taxonomies were already embedded within the object-subject relationships rather than arising through accumulation and authoring into a new aesthetic system. Describing these moments so they can be seen again and again in all their contingency. I began to think about my working objects as entangled in networks — consumptive, affective, logistical, which adds to the frustration I felt between their materiality and aesthetics. They are constantly framed and re-framed, repackaged in many contexts without being regulated by them — in their working motion and stoppage, placement and transit, initial meaning and destabilised purpose. One can follow objects trajectories, their in-between states, one can allow for multiple perspectives.

I became aware of the limited perception of the object that OOO eventually leads into.

[post-human objects]

Yet in spite of wishing to open a post-humanist mode of thinking about objects, OOO offers a rather limited perspective compared to other philosophical concepts that became important to the project, such as the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, Spinoza's philosophy of substances or libidinal economy of Lyotard.

Firstly, Bruno Latour's proposition of objects being active or 'acting' in social networks (Actor Network Theory) promotes a certain form of anthropomorphic perception of the objects.²⁶ Anthropomorphising might be inevitable, to a certain extent, as it enables sense-making of one another.²⁷ It may also be desirable as it allows one to relax into similarities between one's 'body-and-its-operations and the bodies-of-things-outside'.²⁸ The anthropomorphism (or a bit of anthropomorphism as called for by Jane Bennet),²⁹ in order to point one's body in new directions. Yet it can also lead to surface deep analogies. Our body and its operations are not the only reference point and our perception of our bodies

²⁶ As already discussed, anthropomorphised perception of the object, standing in for human figure underscores Wentworth's images.

²⁷ Ian Bogost talks about the inevitability of anthropocentrism in his book *Alien Phenomenology* 'all objects are thing-centric, and all must make sense of one another through metaphors of self'. Peter Gratton. 'Ian Bogost: The Interview', *PHILOSOPHY IN A TIME OF ERROR*, (2010) <<https://philosophyinatimeoferror.com/2010/04/26/ian-bogost-the-interview/> [accessed 4 May 2017].

²⁸ Jane Bennet clarifies that 'bodies' do not equate to things that are injected with personality but that humans participate in thing-like tendencies, capacities, and qualities.

Gratton, 'Vibrant Matters: An Interview with Jane Bennett'.

²⁹ Jane Bennett however refutes anthropocentrism whilst she calls for "a bit of anthropomorphism – the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature" Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, xvi.

is limited. We often forget that we consist of a multitude of elements (bacteria, minerals, etc.) and have a limited overview of the connections between them.³⁰

At the same time, OOO wishes to deny the subject. So, there is a strange paradox taking place, anthropomorphising the object through assigning it human-like agency while abandoning the human subject, Yet the human subject is important as we experience everything from a human position. Rosi Braidotti believes the difference lies in the starting point³¹ — we can have multiple perspectives, but we cannot divorce ourselves from the bodies we inhabit. Our embodiment is our limit and the morphology of the body is the limit of our perception. This is therefore where we should start imagining from, from which point we can speak about distributed conditions and extended minds. For me OOO is disembodied, it is wanting to speak from nowhere. And in this denial of the subject, OOO returns to the dialectical as it still refers to the principle of duality — situating the object and the subject as opposites. The desire to break with subject-object dualism results in a form of subjectivism. Removing the subject leads potentially to depoliticising the object as they are made or influenced by human subjects.³²

I believe that OOO is a useful tool that supports the way I think about objects in relationships and it has enabled me to expand the categories of working objects in the practice element of this work. It also allowed me to expose a gap in object-subject encounters that I wished to capture, an approach that accounts for poetic, embodied and affective aspects. I recognised that looking at more ephemeral couplings of objects and subjects and recognising the body in these relationships would widen the perspectives and allow me to capture the different nuances of the object-subject relationship. My research no longer saw the object solely as either a 'thing' or 'matter' BUT also as a process or an action. This recognition led me to introduce the notion of working gesture to the research. It was a way to investigate the moment of interaction between the labouring object and the subject. It has enabled me to expand on Latour's object categories, which I saw as too prescribed.³³

³⁰ Gratton, 'Vibrant Matters: An Interview with Jane Bennett'.

³¹ Timotheus Vermeulen and Rosi Braidotti, 'Borrowed Energy', *Frieze*, 12 August 2014 <<https://www.frieze.com/article/borrowed-energy>> [accessed 31 January 2021].

³² Carolyn Shapiro raises that point during a philosophy forum "On Objects." *On Objects (the Forum)* (London School of Economics: Forum for Philosophy, 2017) <<https://www.lse.ac.uk/philosophy/events/on-objects-fep/>> [accessed 25 April 2022].

³³ Latourian hybrids disregard pure forms of subject and object, remaining detached from human, from bodily, from sensuous perception and instead focused on semiotic fabricated actants. His

To think about an object through its use and misuse.
Through sensuous engagement that may fall outside immediate perception.
Through its cultural and social trajectories.
To dig under the surface of 'the above' or 'the below' perception.
To scratch through the hierarchy of meanings.
To dive into object-ness yet hold onto the subject-ness, as I agree with Shapiro that
abandoning the subject risks depoliticising the objects.
To observe it when merging and separating from the subject.
To explore the temporal connections, different perceptual and conceptual openings.
To keep going back to some form of material and physical.
As a sculptural object to expand on, from, around and through it.

[everyday objects]

These subject-objects encounters are rooted in the everyday. *Everyday* is the quotidian of Marxist thinker Henri Lefebvre that stands for both the mundane and the repetitive.³⁴ It is the material presence — presence and matter — in François Lyotard,³⁵ put forward as a problem that encourages thinking and that resists reducing all to the logic of capital.

exemplary hybrid object would be the kilogram of platinum in a vault of the International Bureau of Weights and Measures outside of Paris which could be defined as: 1) a standard, 2) a material object, 3) an institution, 4) a metrological model, a perfect reference point for all other copies. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 228.

It is more Manuel DeLanda, who uses neuro-scientific perspective to investigate how hybrids can be theorised without appealing to the pure categories of object and subject. His text "Meshwork or Hierarchy" gives examples of blurring of the boundaries between the natural and the human: hormone injected fish, genetically modified crops or cryogenics of embryos. DeLanda explains that the interaction between subject and object in these cases is direct and non-hierarchical. The gap between the two becomes so small and we witness the emergence of true subject-objects. Manuel DeLanda, 'Homes: Meshwork or Hierarchy?', in *Nomadic Trajectories*, ed. by John Sellars (Coventry: Dept. of Philosophy, University of Warwick, 1998), pp. 15-25.

³⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (London ; New York: Verso, 1991).

³⁵ Peter W. Milne, 'Exceeding the Given: Rewriting Lyotard's Aesthetics', *Cultural Politics an International Journal*, 9.2 (2013), 113.

Everyday is understood within the traditions that merge daily life with the aesthetic. Beginning with Arvatov's concept of *byt*, it rethinks everyday relationships to commodities and objects, namely thing-based relations between producers, and social-based relations between material things. *Byt* rejects the notion of things as passive and static, a condition which drives the bourgeois concept of material consumption.³⁶ Instead, *byt* views objects as active and productive, as the Constructivist objects that connect 'a co-worker with human practice'.³⁷ For Arvatov 'the melting of artistic forms into the forms of everyday life'³⁸ becomes a responsibility of artists, writers and engineers. This melting of artistic forms as a transfiguration of everyday life is taken up later by Avant-garde movements of the 1920s. It becomes a utopian drive for Dada and Surrealism, and an injection of craft and functionalism into the Arts and Crafts movement, Art Nouveau, the Bauhaus, and de Stijl.³⁹

Everyday fosters different models that produce subjects in the conceptual practices in 1960s. It includes Lefebvre's writing on the everyday which the Situationist International drew connected to the politics of class.⁴⁰ It is a shift of focus away from aesthetics to meaning of everyday life for Alan Kaprow. His model of daily enactment through an everyday material practice of ideas, actions, experiences, senses and intuitions is executed as Happenings —collaborative performances in everyday spaces. It morphs into different conceptual models, such as situational, operational, self-referential, political or educational among others, exemplified as Baldessari's map piece, Beuys's sit-in or Ruscha's format of a police report.⁴¹ Finally, *everyday* becomes the quotidian objects of Richard Wentworth; it is the labouring objects and subjects in my practice, which I reimagine across public and private daily settings, which reoccur in daily lives.

Starting from these conditions and histories allows me to disrupt presumed taxonomies of tools or classifications of labour. Working objects will be disrupted by thinking through a

³⁶ This shift in perspective to *byt* means being able to direct and transform the material relationships, to turn a conservative force into a progressive one.

³⁷ Arvatov, 'Everyday Life', 126.

³⁸ Roberts, John, 'Philosophizing the Everyday: The Philosophy of Praxis and the Fate of Cultural Studies', *Radical Philosophy*, 98 (1999), 21.

³⁹ Doug Singen, 'The Historical Avant-Garde from 1830 to 1939: L'art Pour l'art, Blague, and Gesamtkunstwerk', *Modernism/Modernity Print Plus*, 2020, <<https://modernismmodernity.org/articles/singen-historical-avantgarde>> [accessed 1 April 2021].

⁴⁰ Roberts, 'Philosophizing the Everyday', p. 24.

⁴¹ Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. by Jeff Kelley, Lannan Series of Contemporary Art Criticism, 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 130.

difference between the easily identifiable category of work-tools such as a forklift track (fixed) as opposed to self-labouring objects such as an estate agent sign (fluid). Similar thinking will be applied to the working actions — highlighting the demonstrating-gesture of instructions and presentations versus the use-gesture of the tool-body of habitual working action. This proposed shift in perspective allows me to suspend the relationship between object and subject by seeking gaps in the habitual perception, trying to break through the linguistically constrained reality to return to the experience. I imagine this experience, after Lucretius, as fluid space where matter flows together, weaves and diffracts off each other, continually folding and unfolding in a subtle dance. When folded tightly they appear solid, when folded loosely they seem unstable, gaseous and liquid.⁴² Disrupting categories, taxonomies, perspectives and habitual thinking — they all become Lucretian folds that will enable me to investigate what happens in these moments. I am trying to name that folding.

⁴² Thomas Nail, 'Lucretius' Material Ecology', *Philosophy of Movement* (2020) <<https://philosophyofmovementblog.com/2020/02/07/lucretius-material-ecology/>> [accessed 6 April 2022].

___ *Then the idea of object-gesture appeared suddenly* ___

While commuting on an overground, I observed railway workers arranged in a tableau-like manner working alongside a rail track. It was a rather simple and mundane image taken through the window of a moving train. Yet the richness of associations offered by the scene led to the decision to firmly place the working body in the investigation and refocused the project towards working gesture. I continued to record images of working bodies combining these with textual responses.

___ *An exhibition intern wearing blue cleaning gloves, squatting awkwardly while holding up a transparent image lifted partly from a photographic tray. The image is lit up by a blue fluorescent light strip lying on the floor beyond the tray.*

___ *A juice seller in a street in Istanbul. Folding table displaying two types of fruit: passion fruit and grapefruit. Sweet and bitter; bittersweet. The juicing contraption with a long lever placed proudly in the middle. The man's face and clothes dissolved and merged with the surrounding. I scan the memory image in vain — only hands come back into focus. The moment of the arm hovering, the pause before the pressing. Each pull of a lever extends beyond itself into self-conscious demonstration. He-I in private performance. The juicing is done.*

Yet these 'mini photo-essays' seemed not enough — they were missing something more elemental and universal that existed in those moments of object-gestures. I felt a need for a method that could capture the material as much as the imaginary and associative, the embodied as much as the cognitive.

As with labouring objects, I began to perceive limitations in the way we describe physical engagement, in our understanding of what happens in the moments of material exchange. There has been a significant amount of research done into the bodies of musicians and dancers, their interactions with materiality of instruments and space. The studies of working bodies derive mostly from an economic perspective where the purpose is functional, the focus on ergonomics and efficiency. Or they focus on social and health aspects, looking at body damage and occupational hazards. Both approaches treat the body as a human

motor.⁴³ The turn to craft drives discussion focused on material skill and knowledge, while increased use of digital technologies (Blender or Oculus) zooms on limited aspects in virtual design, simplifying the material engagement to haptics.

Yet art practice that engages physically with another materiality is a form of manual labour — there are parallels between the material exchanges taking place in art practice and other forms of work. The physical exchange, the body and effort, the gestures and sensorial information. Our bodies operate in the same way irrespective of the activity, the range of movements are explored within the constraints of the same muscles, ligaments and axis. The basic actions — reaching, grasping, retrieving, folding, bedding, shifting weight, pushing or pulling and so on and so forth — are the same whether they are performed at home, on a construction site or in a laboratory. Richard Serra puts forward his own articulation of the basic actions in his *Verblast*:

to roll, to crease, to fold, to store, to bend, to shorten, to twist, to dapple, to crumple, to shave, to tear, to chip, to split, to cut, to sever, to drop, to remove, to simplify, to differ, to disarrange, to open, to mix, to splash, to knot, to spell, to droop, to flow, to curve, to lift, to inlay, to impress, to fire, to flood, to smear, to rotate, to swirl, to support, to hook, to suspend, to spread, to hang, to collect—of tension, of gravity, of entropy, of nature, of grouping, of layering, of felting—to grasp, to tighten, to bundle, to heap, to gather, to scatter, to arrange, to repair, to discard, to pair, to distribute, to surfeit, to complement, to enclose, to surround, to encircle, to hide, to cover, to wrap, to dig, to tie, to bind, to weave, to join, to match, to laminate, to bond, to hinge, to mark, to expand, to dilute, to light, to modulate, to distill—of waves, of electromagnetic, of inertia, of ionization, of polarization, of refraction, of simultaneity, of tides, of reflection, of equilibrium, of symmetry, of friction—to stretch, to bounce, to erase, to spray, to systematize, to refer, to force—of mapping, of location, of context, of time, of carbonization—to continue.⁴⁴

Verblast is simultaneously an artwork, a drawing and a language-based system. Influenced by Judson Dance Theater avant-garde collective⁴⁵ of 1960s and their attention on everyday

⁴³ Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

⁴⁴ This language-based system, constructed as ‘a series of conditions’, allowed Serra to focus on a process of working with a material rather than on the outcome. Richard Serra, ‘2001 Belknap Lecture in The Humanites: Reflections’, in *Richard Serra: Drawings*, ed. by Richard Slovak (Fergus McCaffrey, 2021), pp. 15-16.

⁴⁵ Serra was especially influenced by Yvonne Rainer and her ‘No Manifesto’ Sean O’Hagan, ‘Man of Steel’, *The Observer*, 4 October 2008, section Art and Design <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/oct/05/serra.art>> [accessed 18 April 2022].

movement, Richard Serra constructed 'a series of conditions', which allowed him to focus on a process of working with a material. *Verblist* references muscular processes as well as aspects of material, mass, gravity, ground and so on. I want to expand that thinking across different spaces of labour — the material engagement, the context and the intention are different, but the physical action behaves in the same way.

At the same time, there is a loss of physical engagement. Technology that is replacing the manual tasks, from domestic (non-iron fabrics) to public (automatic doors, sensor-controlled hand dryers). Manual labours disappear from public view, through automation but mostly through outsourcing it to other countries. Covid pandemic added yet another perception to the exposure to other materialities that is coloured with the quality of danger.

What if some of the gestures of material engagement disappear? How could I hold onto the memory of these, how could I embed another person in the encounter, in the expanded sensorial and cognitive perception? Why do I feel that the approach towards virtual reality is lacking in many aspects of this encounter, that is it not a replacement but a different material engagement, impoverished in some aspects and enriched in others? But what of those aspects are lost? What do we lose, what forms of knowing and embodied knowledge are not formed? Are we able to fill in the gaps by re-engaging with material resonances? I believe that gap can be explored by looking at the material (sculptural) art practice through the lens of manual labours.

I propose object-gesture. ⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The very first definitions of object and gesture appeared in the project at this point:

OBJECT as MATTER or PROCESS

- Matter that gestures / Gestures that matter
- Process that gestures / Gestures that process

GESTURE as FUNCTION or ACTION

- Objects that function / Functions that object
- Objects that action / Actions that object

[gestures and objects]

The compound object-gesture describes an action that already exists in the world — a moment of material engagement during the act of 'everyday' work — whether in a hair salon, on a building site or in a science laboratory. It is the moment of engagement with another materiality. It is an action that is embodied and material, that involves interacting with physical characteristics (weight, vibrations, temperature) but also the affective qualities (expectations of a hairdressing client, risk of handling corrosive material) and the conceptual/imaginary (personal experiences, cultural associations).

A working gesture is seen as a visible manifestation of the object-gesture, it is alive (it has liveness to it), it is temporal, and it is performing and performed (it is active in the moment). It discloses itself in particular when it is performed in distinctive ways like manipulating objects (through work), acting out work gesture (demonstrations) and remote working gestures (telematic).

___ object : as material/physical manifestation, whether organic or inorganic, human [e.g. massaged body] or non-human [e.g. building scaffolds] with its physical, affective and conceptual qualities. It draws on ideas of OOO and new materialism.

___ gesture : as an act of handling, manipulation, physical engagement, movement across the space, gesture :: physical manipulation (engagement, handling, across the space but also in time). It also describes something that gestures, that stands for other things > interaction, exchange and overlap between spaces and disciplines. It draws on theories of meaning-making and embodiment.

An adjectival version of the word *gesture*, *gestic* as a term, is open to exciting interpretations. It encompasses forms of visual communications using physical materials. It suggests a relation to bodily movements or gestures, the word having its origin in obsolete *gest* deportment or Latin *gestus* movement of the limbs.⁴⁷ When extended to the context of theatre, the body becomes an acting material, which holds true also in the Brechtian acting technique of *gestus* that combines the physical gestures with a *gist* i.e. attitude.

⁴⁷ *gestic* (n.d.), *Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary* (2010) <<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/gestic>> [accessed 20 October 2016].

When applied in embodied space of mathematics, the *gesture* can become frozen or transfixed as a *diagram*, which is what Gilles Châtelet⁴⁸ proposes. The human agency is not even necessary to produce a *gesture* — materials and objects can gesture without human agency. The term *gesture* can be extended to psychological nuances and conceptual positions e.g. an artistic gesture of resistance, a conceptual gesture of transcendence or a social gesture of collaboration.

Francis Bacon dreamt of finding mankind's original language, the universal tongue that existed before the Biblical catastrophe of Babel. Seventeenth-century physician and natural philosopher John Bulwer followed this desire by proposing gesture as a 'transient hieroglyph' being key to Bacon's search.

John Bulwer states that the hands' range of expressiveness is actually greater than that of words, for with our hands we

Sue, entreat, beseech, solicit, call, allure, entice, dismiss, grant, deny, reprove, are suppliant, fear, threaten, abhor, repent, pray, instruct, witness, accuse, declare our silence, condemn, absolve, show our astonishment, proffer, refuse, respect, give honor, adore, worship, despise, prohibit, reject, challenge, bargain, vow, swear, imprecate, humour, allow, give warning, command, reconcile, submit, defy, affront, offer injury, complement, argue, dispute, explode, confute, exhort, admonish, affirm, distinguish, urge, doubt, reproach, mock, approve, dislike, encourage, recommend, flatter, applaud, exalt, humble, insult, adjure, yield, confess, cherish, demand, crave, covet, bless, number, prove, confirm, salute, congratulate, entertain, give thanks, welcome, bid farewell, chide, brawl, consent, upbraid, envy, reward, offer force, pacify, invite, justify, contemn, disdain, disallow, forgive, offer peace, promise, perform, reply, invoke, request, repel, charge, satisfy, deprecate, lament, condole, bemoan, put in mind, hinder, praise, commend, brag, boast, warrant, assure, inquire, direct, adopt, rejoice, show gladness, complain, despair, grieve, are sad and sorrowful, cry out, bewail, forbid, discomfort, ask, are angry, wonder, admire, pity, assent, order, rebuke, savor, slight, dispraise, disparage, are earnest, importunate, refer, put to compromise, plight our faith, make a league of friendship, strike one good luck, take earnest, buy, barter, exchange, show our agreement, express our liberality, show our benevolence, ask mercy, exhibit grace, show our displeasure, fret, chafe, fume, rage, revenge, crave audience, call for silence, prepare for an apology, give liberty of speech, bid one to take notice, warn one to forbear, keep off and be gone; take acquaintance, make remonstrance of another's error, weep, give pledge of aid, comfort, relieve, demonstrate, persuade, resolve, speak to, appeal, profess a willingness to strike, show

⁴⁸ Gilles Châtelet expands on the Merleau-Ponty's embodied space of mathematics and, in particular, the scope of the diagrams in relation to gesture. Gilles Châtelet proposes that diagrammatic and gestural spaces are inherently knotted; that diagrams and gestures support and extend each other's internal logic.

Gilles Châtelet, *Figuring Space: Philosophy, Mathematics and Physics*, trans. by Robert Shore (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000).

ourselves convinced, present a check for silence, promise secrecy, protect our innocence, manifest our love, enmity, hate, and spite; provoke, hyperbolically extoll, enlarge our mirth with jollity and triumphant acclamations of delight, note and signify another's actions, the manner, place, and time, as how, where, when, etc.⁴⁹

This proposition is in stark contrast to the decision of 1880 the International Conference of Deaf Educators in Milan to ban gestural communication in schools for the deaf. The President of the Convention, the Abbé Tarra denotes the gesture as incontestably inferior, in that it speaks to the senses rather than the intellect. I am not interested in interrogating gesticulation as movement accompanying speech — as a muscular transfer of sound structures — but it is the notion of transdisciplinary universality of the gesture that I wish to echo.

It is this argument of connection to intellect I would like to pursue. Cognitive understanding and gesture in mathematical thought are researched by Rafael Núñez and George Lakoff as well as Gilles Châtelet. Mathematical instruction is seen as connected to the 'sensible matter'⁵⁰ of the body, relying on 'motion metaphors'⁵¹ to describe values such as approach, run through, converge towards. Mathematical metaphors call for performing with the whole body:

I want to be able to do it quickly: as quick as I think; as quick as I talk. I want to be able to teach with my whole body, use gesture, employ pause to illustrate nuance, become as one with the board; become, in those rare moments of flow, both dancer and dance⁵²

⁴⁹ John Bulwer's gestic research also systematised the muscular movements by performing 'dissections'. These 'dissections' analysed and named the muscles that govern the range of head movements and facial expression. They included 'Muscles of Rejection' or 'the Arrogant paire or the Muscles of Disdainfull Confidence', while facial expressions were controlled by 'the Muscles of Wonder or Admiration', and 'the Muscle of Staring Impudence' among others. John Bulwer, *Chirologia or the Natural Language of the Hand and Chironomia, or the Art of Manual Rhetoric*, ed. by James W Cleary (Carbondale; Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974), p.20.

⁵⁰ Châtelet, *Figuring Space*, p. 18.

⁵¹ George Lakoff and Rafael E. Núñez, *Where Mathematics Comes from: How the Embodied Mind Brings Mathematics into Being*, 1st ed (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000), p. 73.

⁵² Phil Beadle, 'You Can't Dance in Front of an Interactive Button', *The Guardian*, 28 October 2008, section Education <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2008/oct/28/whiteboards>> [accessed 25 April 2018].

Châtelet puts forward that, although the gesture itself is insubstantial, it amplifies and expands through its relationship to other gestures.⁵³ It initiates other gestures. Gesture is not an action and it is more than instruction — it is enacted and enactive. Gesture is more than spatial displacement — it is a modality of movement. It is not predetermined as one is infused with a gesture 'before knowing it. Gesture can collapse on itself, and circle beyond itself never becoming exhausted nor captured by a formal grammar.⁵⁴

Then there is a phenomenological intention of gestures explored by Vilem Flusser in his book *Gestures*.⁵⁵ Eighteen essays on writing, planting, listening to music, among others, associate each gesture with a particular kind of consciousness. In *The Gesture of Shaving* barber's tools are compared to those of a gardener, grass to a kind of beard, gestures of cosmetician and to that of city planners. Beard is seen as both part of the body and something that is expelled by it, and it shifts its ontological status from organic to shaver. The beard joins one with the wider world overnight while the morning shave creates a boundary between a man and the world through the exposed skin — skin that is no-man-land.

The goal of shaving is not to make a connection with the world but to distance oneself from it and assert oneself in it. That is achieved by uncovering the skin that divides man from world. When young people grow beards, it is not to hide but just the opposite, to cast doubt on the difference between the self and the world. Beards are rejected attempts at identification.⁵⁶

Flusser's gesture becomes triangulated between various points, self-witnessing and experienced by others, often situated within a context that is neither historical nor sociological but of the gesture itself, unfolding over time and developing through space.

⁵³ Châtelet, *Figuring Space*, pp. 9-10.

⁵⁴ Rotman, Brian, 'Foreward', in *Mathematics and the Body: Material Entanglements in the Classroom*, by Elizabeth de Freitas and Nathalie Sinclair (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014)

⁵⁵ Flusser, Vilém, *Gestures* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014)

⁵⁶ Flusser, *Gestures*, p. 109.

Geste — deportment
Gested — accompanied with gestures
Gestening
Gestic
Gestical — having to do with bodily movement
Gesticulant — making or tending to make gestures or gesticulations
Gesticular — characterized or accompanied by gesticulation
Gesticulated
Gesticulator
Gests
Gestual
Gestural
Gesture
Gestured — to make or use a gesture or gestures
Gestureless
Gesturer — one who gestures
Gesturing

It is within this expanded physical and metaphoric notion that the phrases *gesture* and *gestic* will be applied to the sculptural practice in this project. I will imagine ways to transcribe physical experiences of object handling into an affective communal experience, where one can participate in another's body action. I propose that the idea of object-gesture will allow me for such investigation. I will use it as way of thinking about physical engagement in art practice but also as a method to explore and describe the interfaces of material exchanges.

I would like now to return to the frozen gesture in my image.

___ Railway workers between Blackhorse Road and Gospel Oak. The situation reveals itself momentarily, fleetingly but long enough to arouse the interest. The image remains buried under the eyelids. Lines of thought scan across the memorised surface, pausing on pixels that trigger associations, bringing forth other images and imaginings.

The first pause is on the arrangement of the uniformed bodies, unchoreographed and frozen in a tableau. Neon uniforms as work-tools, unifying and objectifying, more functional than aesthetic. Andrea Zittel or Varvara Stepanova designs.

Working bodies (per)forming a spatial diagram, suddenly connect to the diagrammatic notations on the support beam below. Chalk instructions against the black paint like equations on a classroom blackboard. Châtelet embodied space of mathematical instruction where diagrams and gestures intertwine and extend each other.

Jump back to work-gestures, now amplified through the relationship to other gestures, awakening the memory of other acts, accumulating and looping beyond itself. Turkish dervishes, Rosas dancing, Four Movements. Bodies that become subjects/objects that/of labour. Slowed down, slow motion.

Sudden awareness of temporal dimension. Transitional space of labour, transitional space of viewing, their non-planar plane enabled through the glass pane of the train.



Fig 2 Anja Borowicz, *Untitled* (from the *Overground Train between Blackhorse Lane and Gospel Oak*), 2016, photograph.

2___ *labouring body of Sisyphus*

This section uses the archetype of the working body of Sisyphus as a way to weave through the political and poetic consideration, the corporeal and incorporeal aspects. It acknowledges the historical debates surrounding labour while thinking its way through the tensions between the political and the aesthetic. It positions body labour as an ontological concept and an embodied event of living fire. It layers and loops across different registers, while being held together by the seemingly simple premise of Sisyphean task of a never-ending repetition. The chapter also introduces some thinkers, practitioners and concepts that will be explored further in the thesis.

SISYPHUS — MANUAL LABOURS — BODY AS A SITE OF POLITICS —
TASKSCAPE — *NEITHER/NOR* — VALUE+COMMODITY — LIVING FIRE —
INCORPOREAL — IMPASSIONATE ACTION — EXCHANGE OF ENERGIES —
AFFECT — *MEANING-MAKING*

[prologue]

Why Sisyphus? I have very little in common with the figure of the former king, his masculine archetype, who obviously offered little consideration to the lives of females and other subjects. I do not find him relatable. He is conceited, prideful, arrogant, underhand. His offence is not Promethean — he was not championing mankind but his own self-interest. One could imagine he learned humility, but this is irrelevant. I am not interested in his character. It is the duration of his punishment, the no-parole clause, and the finality that will not allow for any regrets or self-growth. It is the mundanity of that labour, its absurdity. Resilience of the body and mind even if giving up or even suicide is not an option.

Yet for this project, it is the basic structure of the act — the simplicity of its elements (body, rock, mountain), pronounced physical effort, the crude network of connections that inspires the use of Sisyphus's figure. It is the potential of testing the concerns on an unsophisticated scenario before complicating the discussion. Growing from the core — the vertebrae-like structure of the project with the invisible information cords inside and rhizomatic nerves outside.

I could have used an example of a hairdresser. Hairdressing can be seen as a cross between manual and affective labour, with an added aspect of design aesthetics. It is precarious work, frequently contracted as a freelancer, supporting their income with gratuities (there is a fundamental assumption of gifting and gratefulness). It is a form of gig economy, relying on an association with recognised names of trainers, salon associations and clients. Yet there is a space of promise during a hairdressing act, when the gesture meets the object. When handling the organic matter, rising awareness of body, merging of organic borders and dissolving of borders of the body occur. It is an event of spilling over or leaking,⁵⁷ of connecting and feeling. There is a strong physicality of the act itself, which involves standing, bending, moving around, lifting, stretching, and handling objects that are sharp, corrosive, hot. There is affectivity with the inherent duty of care, building a rapport, being an organiser of the mess.⁵⁸ It is a form of aesthetic therapy. A hairdresser creates a design, an image at its most creative.

⁵⁷ Tim Ingold, 'Toward an Ecology of Materials', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41.1 (2012), 438.

⁵⁸ 'BLAST No. 1, the Vorticist Magazine', 25.

Or I could have described the concerns through one of the caring jobs, like that of a waiter. This is further complicated by how waitressing is viewed differently in different cultures. The pride associated with the role in countries like Italy, the expertise required and the strong elements of performativity, while in England it becomes devalued de-classed (there is the issue of class here). Or even the job of cleaning, which can be thought of as dealing with the condition of permanent dirt and de-cluttering of human excess. Dirt here becomes a category of distancing. There are elements that these works share. Gifting of your own affectivity, of the experience to the patrons. Aesthetics and impermanence.

Yet I am drawn to the image of the hairdresser in their complex, seductive in its self-choreographed dance. More complex in the affective relations of their performed gesture. They are one of the cornerstones of this project. The protagonists. Sisyphus is, by degrees, the anti-hero. The antagonist whose archetype allows for emotional distancing and enables metaphoric thinking about the concerns of this project.

[at the bottom of the mountain]

A body at the bottom of the mountain leans on the rock and then surrounds it with his arms. Sisyphus flexes his muscles and wedges his knee against the stone. Memories of the past flowing back. He was one of the most memorable heroes of ancient Greece, applauded by Homer as 'the craftiest of men'. A strong king who promoted commerce and navigation, but his mortal foibles were many. He violated the laws of hospitality by killing his guests and he grew in wealth by stealing. At his worst he took revenge through rape, there was also the seduction of his niece, plus some plotting to kill his brother Salmoneus.

Ironically his demise, his being now at the bottom of the mount in Hades, did not come from his ill-treatment of other mortals. It was his daring to act out against the Gods. When he applied his famous cunning to bend fate in his favour, cheating his way out of the Underworld to live out his life on Earth (what now seems like a rather brief reprieve against this eternal punishment). Persephone was rather furious at the time. Then he committed the ultimate offence when he revealed to the river god Asopus the whereabouts of his daughter, kidnapped by Zeus under one of his many disguises. The punishment was swift and maddening in its simplicity. He is to push this boulder to the top of the hill, but the rock is enchanted to roll back down each time when Sisyphus is about to reach the goal. Enchantment and trickery, aimed at his presumptuous confidence in own cleverness. Unending frustration of useless effort.

Sisyphus sighs at these unnecessary thoughts, he believes he has been long forgotten (little does know his fate reverberates throughout the ages until today). Momentary pause is over, and he starts rolling the rock uphill.

HIS IS MANUAL LABOUR. *Manu* from Latin meaning hand. Work done with muscles and bones of the body. Many jobs that comprise manual labour such as fruit picking, material handling, and manual assembly can be done easily by skilled or semi-skilled workers. Yet simplifying the relation between manual labour and skill has led to claims of lower intelligence and developed into a spectrum of discriminative approaches from stigmatisation and caste systems to subtler forms of inequality.⁵⁹ Thinking in absolutes

⁵⁹ It is worth noting that this is one of the arguments at achieving a successful classless society. Willingness to recognise that manual labour can involve skill and intelligence. Recognition of the dignity and intelligence of traditional blue-collar worker and their civic equality with white-collar workers. The models that seem to be more successful include professional sports teams that encompass different roles while recognising that talents of individual team members are not equal

serves solely one purpose, which is to sustain and promote social disadvantage. It is reflected in a lower social status of manual workers over the course of history (from slaves and serfs, to wage slaves and domestic servants). In our urbanised societies, work has become so abstracted from our means of subsistence that it has further degraded our appreciation of manual labour.⁶⁰

This is further underpinned by an ongoing desire for cheap labour, with economic competition driving the objective to secure work at the lowest possible cost. Avoiding overtime, full-time contracts in favour of part-time and contingent work of temporary workers, freelancers, contractors, and zero-hour employees are on the rise. This is accompanied by the trend of continuous training and apprenticeship, manifested as skill revisions in jobcentres or work-study programmes. They are all sources of bodies at a discount.⁶¹

SISYPHEAN LABOUR IS OF A PARTICULAR KIND, SITUATED ON A NEGATIVE GROUND. Not producing anything, positioning itself within the context of penal work yet it has no productivity objective. Sisyphus's labour cannot be therefore viewed through the lens of Fordism. Even if it was performed within a modern economic and social context, it is not the labour of mass production or any production for that matter. Neither is it labour of consumption. The objective is not to improve productivity as nothing is produced. A better technique of pushing up the boulder will not improve the overall efficiency (though it may reduce the internal energy he expends). Sisyphus's conditions will not improve, he will never become a consumer of his effort.

Sisyphus's labour cannot be considered under post-Fordist conditions as it is not located in the service or gig economy. No emotional abilities are required to perform the work. There is no skill that can be developed further for economic return; there is no complexity to the range of gestures. No opportunity to outsource the labour, however, it could easily be outsourced. No reason for innovation as the working body of Sisyphus is still cheaper than

yet complementary. On the other hand, absolute equality denies hope for meritocratic recognition. Nowadays, economies constantly compete for different tendencies that can be placed In-between these extremes of absolute equality and absolute class.

⁶⁰ I wrote these words before the Covid lockdown exposed further complex issues – from the body as problematic, even undesirable at times, to rethinking of what tasks and jobs are taken for granted (hairdressing), and redefining of key workers (delivery drivers), to mention few.

⁶¹ Even military employment between mandatory service and voluntary service is a way of employing labour at a discount or lowest cost (as a side-line contributing to construction of archetypes of masculinity). The penal system also seeks to benefit from easy access to productive labour.

technological solutions.

The labour of Sisyphus is about punishing the human spirit, an everlasting entrapment. Sisyphus was a king and ruling could be understood as a form of top-level multi-skilled management. Pushing the boulder becomes the lowest level, unskilled un-contracted worker. The polarization between the unskilled and multi-skilled workers (which reduces the scope for unions and collective bargaining) is reflected in one body. In a futuristic scenario, Sisyphus could become an interface worker like one of the 'node workers' in the film *Sleep Dealer*. It imagines a situation where physical labour in the US is accomplished without the physical presence of the worker, who labours on the Mexican side of the border. Interface implanted into the worker's body connects his nervous system into a vast network that operates robots performing labour in the United States. The robots execute a wide range of jobs, from welding tasks on building sides, to housework and babysitting. During twelve-hour shifts the node workers build, clean and preserve cities they have never and will never see. They suffer a loss of equilibrium through the deficiency of certain physical qualities, through the limits of conscious movement which 'gives the colour to life'.⁶² Maintaining a flow of movement in our functions and actions releases our inner tensions.⁶³ As explained by the director Alex Rivera:

The problem is that the worker comes with a body. [...] That body needs health care and gives birth to children that need to go to school. So, keep the body outside of the United States. Suck its energy and leave the cadaver or the problematic shell out of the picture.⁶⁴

The body becomes a problem. Yet can it be about more than that?

[climbing]

*Labour is the living, form-giving fire; it is the transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time.*⁶⁵

⁶² H. B. Redfern and Rudolf Laban, *Introducing Laban Art of Movement* (London: Macdonald & Evans, 1971), p. 4.

⁶³ Redfern and Laban, *Introducing Laban Art of Movement*, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Jason Silverman, 'Injects Sci-Fi Into Immigration Debate', *Wired*, 23 January 2008 <<https://www.wired.com/2008/01/injects-sci-fi-into-immigration-debate/>> [accessed 5 June 2021].

⁶⁵ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy: Notebook III* (London: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1993), p. 361.

AGAINST APATHY. Sisyphus is in danger of accepting hopelessness, of falling into a state of apathy. This diminished state affects in particular those who suffer more acutely from higher demands on their individual resources. Feminist thinker Helen Hester points out how unfair social infrastructures like access to education, poverty, caring responsibilities limit to various degrees the level of political involvement and ability to mobilise.⁶⁶ This can lead to learned hopelessness.⁶⁷ Furthermore, accepting a state of powerlessness can be extended to a wider social context. When a wider political action fails, the perception of the collective ability and scope to act suffers. We, therefore, need to expand our understanding of what it means to be 'meaningfully political'.

Helen Hester proposes 'Promethean' politics as a politics that opposes the illusion that change doesn't require concentration of effort, as well as being against melancholy that mourns rather than desires change.⁶⁸ Promethean is a politics of technologically minded rebellion, or intervention to overcome limits. Hester acknowledges 'that many people experience diminished personal freedom' while pursuing collective freedom and self-development and we need to recognise that technology in itself cannot address all barriers to emancipation. A technologically driven gender politics should incorporate social changes and cooperative approaches.⁶⁹ She uses the example of a phenomenon of domestic realism that organises and individualises life into small dwellings, a model so deeply entrenched in our life structures that it is difficult to imagine different forms of organisation. Reorganisation of domesticity through different forms of collective (I am thinking here of Grand Domestic Revolution project)⁷⁰ or monetary recognition as

⁶⁶ Helen Hester, 'Promethean Labors and Domestic Realism', *e-Flux Architecture* (2017) <<https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/artificial-labor/140680/promethean-labors-and-domestic-realism/>> [accessed 2 November 2020].

⁶⁷ Neuroscience has demonstrated that the default state of brain is to assume the control is not present i.e., state of helplessness and it is helpfulness that is learnt.

⁶⁸ Hester after Alberto Toscano. See: Alberto Toscano, 'The Prejudice Against Prometheus', *STIR*, Summer (2011) <<https://web.archive.org/web/20131006173459/http://stirtoaction.com:80/the-prejudice-against-prometheus/>> [accessed 25 April 2022]

⁶⁹ More radical positions, like that of the feminist writer Shulamith Firestone, imagine that emancipation from 'gendered oppression' can only be achieved through technology. Yet even Firestone recognises the need for cooperation and cohabitation, in particular with regard to reproductive labour.

Hester, 'Promethean Labors and Domestic Realism'.

⁷⁰ Grand Domestic Revolution (GDR) was initially proposed by Dolores Hayden and later developed by Casco — Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht as a multifaceted project and 'living' research to reimagine ways of living and working in common. See:

Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), and Binna Choi, Maiko Tanaka, and Casco, Office for Art, Design, and Theory, *The Grand Domestic Revolution Goes On* (Utrecht; London: Casco; Bedford Press, 2010).

championed through Wages for Housework or Universal Basic Income.

These approaches, though limiting capitalist exploitation, do not overcome the 'obstinate primitiveness of household labour'.⁷¹ Even with technological revolution, many barriers can persist as the change can bring new drudgery or the technological progress is constantly moving forward and never fully completed. This is where Sisyphean thinking can also challenge the melancholy-based acceptance. Realising that self-determination within existing conditions is ultimately absurd, it is looking to self-management and creating resources and skills from limitations. In that respect it seeks to create a space of agency, even if that space is carved out by the change of directions of the boulder rolling back.⁷² There is a need for balance — questioning the necessity of drudgery, rejecting inherited infrastructures by looking for emancipatory alternatives. If cognitive therapy and a healthy regime (exercise, sleep etc) can improve an individual's self-esteem then a different approach to labour may be a form of cognitive work therapy.⁷³

The critic Marina Vishmidt confirms that the notion of creativity as exceeding the capitalist law of value can no longer provide sufficient resistance within contemporary labour politics.⁷⁴ In his writing on libidinal economy Jean-François Lyotard proposes that there are libidinal rewards that make the worker complicit in her own exploitation.⁷⁵ It may however be possible to suspend the law of value at the affective level. Ben Highmore's writing on cultural feelings sees moods and feelings as material, therefore they could be performed as a part of material labour.⁷⁶

Sisyphus enacts his agency by performing moods or feelings. Tinkering between sinking into a self-detached mood and rising through moments of pleasure.

⁷¹ Hester, 'Promethean Labors and Domestic Realism'.

⁷² Stephen Shukaitis, 'Sisyphus and the Labour of Imagination: Autonomy, Cultural Production, and the Antinomies of Worker Self-Management', *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action* (2010) <<https://ojs.library.queensu.ca/index.php/affinities/article/view/6148>> [accessed 2 April 2022].

⁷³ Benjamin N. Greenwood and Monika Fleshner, 'Exercise, Learned Helplessness, and the Stress-Resistant Brain', *NeuroMolecular Medicine*, 10.2 (2008), 81–98.

⁷⁴ Marina Vishmidt, 'Situation Wanted: Something about Labour', *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, 19 (2008), 29.

⁷⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, Theories of Contemporary Culture (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

⁷⁶ Ben Highmore, *Cultural Feelings: Mood, Mediation, and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

IT IS ALL ABOUT VALUE, OR IS IT? The alternative to labour as a commodity should not be seen as non-labour or something else than labour but labour as an activity that is part of life itself. David Graeber cross-pollinates this approach, observing that a majority of human behaviour is made up from actions that are neither consumption nor production.⁷⁷ The value of these is in meaning-making. This *neither/nor* approach to definition was particularly close to John Duns Scotus, a medieval Franciscan philosopher.⁷⁸ He spoke about the *neither/nor* with regard to being — being neither finite nor infinite, neither created nor uncreated. It is neutral, akin to Taoist thinking. I wish to think of working gestures as neutral — the *neither-productive-nor-unproductive* expressions.

I apply here a traditional understanding of productivity, measured as an economic output in a form of a product or service, where efficiency is a related measure. While unproductive labour becomes divorced from the outcome, and is inefficient. This dichotomic perspective has become complicated by shifting spectrality of value, away from production of objects to production of Subjectivities as discussed earlier. The concept of value is a social construct, and a cultural bias is encoded in the fabrics and mechanisms of modern economy. The *neither/nor* thinking could be therefore useful to avoid getting caught up in theories of value. One also needs to be wary of language; the field of anthropological linguistics exposes how terms and meanings are caught in the networks of economic processes and ecologies. *Neither/nor*, the double negative is a good starting point.

The labour of Sisyphus holds no economic or creative value unless that of being a powerful metaphor extended in interpretations over the ages. I propose to look at his labour as something else — as a task that does not align with the separation between work and action in the way the philosophers Giorgio Agamben and Hannah Arendt employ Aristotle's distinction. As a gesture that collapses that distinction to create a new meaning like a task-based choreography of the dancer Yvonne Rainer's. I propose Sisyphus' task as a non-consumptive-non-productive meaning-making gesture.

⁷⁷ David Graeber, 'It Is Value That Brings Universes into Being', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 3.2 (2013), 219–43.

⁷⁸ Alexander Broadie, 'John Duns Scotus', in *A History of Scottish Philosophy* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 7-33.

FORM-GIVING FIRE. We may look at it through Marxist definition of capital and capital's relentless need to subsume, accumulate or transform labour as a mode of production. This is what Bruno Gulli does when he asks: If everything is subsumed under capital, if nothing is left outside, is this nothing really nothing? What is this 'not-capital' labour? And I ask: What is this labour of Sisyphus? Thinking that this 'not-capital' labour is simply its opposite, the counterpart, namely unproductive labour, would be incorrect. Both productive and unproductive labours are a category of capital and political economy; they belong to the science of capital. They are therefore subjected to the same logic deprived of creative and subjective powers. Capital is a process, which accumulates *dead labour*. Yet there is labour that escapes from being subsumed by it, that is neither-productive-nor-unproductive.

It is more universal. It is *living labour*, it is *the fire* that feeds new forms that come out of the relationships between 'human and nature or human and technology'.⁷⁹ Gulli is therefore re-reading Marx to think about labour that is more than a political or economic category, but something ontological. Ontology, that sub-field of philosophy that deals with the nature of being, is something I wish to hold onto.

Sisyphus is performing living labour. His task, physical effort and internal mediations become a form-giving fire. There is no need for his effort in the system of need relentlessly created by capital. His unnecessary labour becomes a surplus, a waste even in economic terms. His is a labour of excess. It exceeds his ability, it exceeds any normative understanding of punishment, it even exceeds his lifespan (or any time span). It exceeds the capacity of capital. It returns to immediate being 'for the itself of labour'.⁸⁰ This exit from the system of need allows for new subjectivities to be formed. This excess creates a space of becoming, full of resistance (or rebellion if one follows Camus' proposition) and potential.

LET US THINK OF IT DIFFERENTLY. Sisyphus's *task is indeed simple* : to roll the rock to the top of the mountain. A task. It is a neutral description as opposed to labour. At least this is what Tim Ingold would suggest as a solution to negative language that presumes an unskilled effort. His term 'task' encompasses 'any practical operation' carried out as a part of everyday life.⁸¹ These tasks come together as a landscape or rather awkwardly named

⁷⁹ Bruno Gulli, 'The Labor of Fire: On Time and Labor in the Grundrisse', *Cultural Logic: A Journal of Marxist Theory & Practice*, 2019, Vol 4 (1999) <<https://doi.org/10.14288/CLOGIC.V4I0.192189>>

⁸⁰ Gulli, Bruno, 'The Labor of Fire', 30.

⁸¹ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (Taylor &

'taskscape', as an array of related activities. They reveal neither form nor 'final product' as 'an object of contemplation' but performance, process and 'the actual work'. The notion of 'taskscape' invites us to reflect on our everyday activities as an investment of our interlocking physical, emotional and intellectual energies. It invites us to rethink our understanding of conscious life. Sisyphus's task becomes therefore a performance, a process, an exchange of energies.

[nearing the top]

The young innocent Little Girl Marx says: you see, I am in love with love, this must stop, this industrial and industrious crap, this is what makes me anxious, I want the return to the (in)organic body; and it has been taken over by the great bearded scholar so that he may establish the thesis that it cannot stop, and so that he may testify, as the counsel [...] to his revolutionary conclusions; so that he may perform the obstetrics of capital; and so that he may give, to her, this total body he requires.⁸²

ENCOUNTER WITH MATERIALITIES. By now Sisyphus is nearing the top of the mountain. Let us imagine the effort the Sisyphus must make. His strained body, his grimacing face, cheek pressed against the stone, chest and shoulder braced against the hard surface, knee pushing against it to stop the stone rolling backwards. Does he vary his technique, is he ever playful and allows the rock just to roll back mid-way?

Stone gives the warmth back, retaining the heat of the Mediterranean sun, tempering the hot body with its cold core stored after the night. Expanding energy though far less dramatically than Francis Alÿs when he was pushing the ice block along the street of Mexico City.⁸³ Alÿs' body radiating warmth through palms and slowly melting the cold surface away. Cooling the fingers and nerve endings; stiffening the tendons, muscles and thoughts. Sisyphus's hands smoothing the stone surface then the fall scuffing it back to roughness. Solid, yet after millennia of being pushed up the hill, it would wither away slowly into a pebble. The stone dust settled as sediment, blown away by the wind. The remaining pebble is carried in the palm of the hand.

Francis e-Library, 2002), p 195.

⁸² Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p 98.

⁸³ Francis Alÿs, *Paradox of Praxis 1 (Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing)* (Mexico City, Mexico, 1997) <<https://francisalys.com/sometimes-making-something-leads-to-nothing/>> [accessed 20 August 2021].

OR UNRULY DISPLAY. His breathing has become strained, his face red, muscles overtly defined. Sweat mixed with dirt is covering his upper body. There is a pungent odour about him. His body is no longer a well-groomed disciplined body admired in Western society since ancient times. No longer a normative body that is well-presented and poised, nourished and clean. The loss of control over his formerly disciplined body is a form of excess.

Over the centuries scientific knowledge and social norms have fluctuated, and so have perspectives on acceptable smells, yet the desire to smother the odours remained unchanged. Body odour becomes problematic, is seen as asocial, creating distance. Separating good sweat of dancers or sportsmen from bad sweat of construction workers or cleaners. Work that is embodied, physical is to a great extent equated with effort, perspiration and dirt. It is yet another site of excess.⁸⁴ Excess of the working-class body can be further tied to what disability theorists refer to as unruly corporealities. The unruly displays of internal self should be contained away from public spaces, hidden in private domains. They challenge the control of social order, its moralities and perceptions. Unruly bodies create anxiety of contamination with their porous bodily boundaries.

Subversively, this desire for a clean and controlled environment leads to preferences for types of work that carry their own pollutants and stressants. Customer support office work with its affective voice labour, dealing with customer complaints, monetary negotiations, timed objectives of resolution — they all lead to an emotional load and stress stored as muscle tension. Internal conflict between improving operational efficiency of response time and feedback levels is compounded by the physical impact of equipment, pressure of the headsets, monotonous and repetitive gesture of data input and phone handling, sitting posture. They result in low self-esteem, lack of social support, excessive monitoring, lack of status, no tangible results, namely they are Sisyphean work.

The uncontrollable movements increase the higher Sisyphus climbs. The rock scrapes against the face of the mountain, pebbles randomly rolling down the hill, disrupt the silence. The involuntary sounds of the body, laboured breath, short gasps and powerful

⁸⁴ Contemporary philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues that excess as a form of disgust has been used throughout social history as a marker to exclude certain groups and persons, and it continues to be the case under neoliberal workfare regimes. Karen Soldatic and Helen Meekosha, 'The Place of Disgust: Disability, Class and Gender in Spaces of Workfare', *Societies*, 2 (2012), 139–56.

exhalations.

WE ARE ALL BODIES. It was Greek and Roman Stoic philosophers, who saw the universe as material or corporeal, made up of bodies or things. Even the qualities of the bodies as bodies themselves. That includes light, whiteness and warmth. 'Voice is a body, since everything capable of action and influence is a body'.⁸⁵ Even virtues or vices were in Stoics' opinion bodies. The warm energy of the Sisyphus hand that meets the cool stone is, therefore, a body. So are the grunts and sighs, his anger and release. Body with its tensions, actions, qualities and states — the whole being is corporeal.

Bodies interact with other bodies, actively or passively. They act or are acted upon. They juxtapose (still discernible from each other) fuse or totally blend with each element thoroughly mixed with elements of the other). In those interactions, bodies may affect or be affected, like the body of Sisyphus is affecting other bodies on that mountain. It is acting out his force, his will, his touch. At the same time, he is acted upon by those bodies — the rock, the slope of the mountain, the hot sun. By the divine will. His body is both active and passive, each state and quality pushed to the extreme.

[the boulder rolls back]

To think through material aspects of Sisyphus's action is to think in terms of materialism. Yet it would be a poor consideration to reduce ideas to material aspects (as it is hasty to reduce manual work to a low skill category). There is more to Sisyphus's engagement than the encounter of physical matter because to think through his material action is to engage with other dimensions. But how does materialism understand such immaterial aspects as space or time? How does it account for meaning-making? How does the materialist framework describe affective dimensions as emotions and passions? In short, how does materialism tend to idealism?

It is a dance of philosophical thought where the material and the immaterial are implicated with each other and their relationship changes so that one dimension becomes more relevant or appears to be so.⁸⁶ Feminist thinkers like Elisabeth Grosz think the solution to

⁸⁵ Elisabeth Grosz, *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics, and the Limits of Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), p. 24.

⁸⁶ Narrow materialism sees matter as passive, regulated by mechanical principles. Marx, Darwin or

the conundrum is to seek forms of materialism that refuse to abandon idealism. Going back to Stoics and tending to that, which is 'irreducible to the material',⁸⁷ returning to corporeal to address the incorporeal. I already talked about this. I feel I can find some help from Rosi Braidotti's argument for sustainable ethics,⁸⁸ which champions ethical thinking by linking it with desire, and its political connotations. She follows Spinoza's view of passion as giving rise to a desire to act and to self-express, and therefore passions can never be excessive. This desire to act and intra-act,⁸⁹ is at the core of human fulfilment and freedom.

I am reminded here of studies in motion efficiency carried out by economist Frank Gilberth and choreographer Rudolf Laban — the desire to make working motions more time-efficient, the vision of working gestures that reflect effort capacities. Such propositions allow for individual rhythms and embodied preferences, they match them with appropriate working actions to enable flow and happiness potential. Finding flow in manual action enables certain acceleration, or one of Spinoza's positive affects, which transposes me into a 'state of a greater perfection'.⁹⁰

MAKING IT VISIBLE. There could be an issue of treating manual labour through a lens of nostalgia — it needs to be recognised how many of such activities had a long-term physical impact from minor injuries to long-term conditions and mortality. There is also a different impact on contemporary labour activities that lead to other forms of forming embodied trauma and psychological impact of stress in 'electronic panopticons' like call centres⁹¹ or amazon warehouses.⁹² Yet there is also a space for joy from being in the process, labour of living fire, of being able to both work in an embodied way and cognitively. This proposition goes beyond the physical abilities to include sensibilities that expand our daily habits and culture, the so-called 'habitus' of Marcel Mauss. After the philosopher Catherine Malabeu, it extends the idea of seeking a new balance of pleasure

Nietzsche challenge the relationship between the material and ideal. Then recent additions of new feminist materialism, object-oriented materialism or new materialism are all pushing forward the significance of matter.

⁸⁷ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, p. 18.

⁸⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006).

⁸⁹ After Baradian's term intra-action. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁹⁰ Spinoza, Benedictus de, *Complete Works*, ed. by Michael L. Morgan, trans. by Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub, 2002), 284.

⁹¹ Peter Bain and Phil Taylor, 'Entrapped by the "Electronic Panopticon"? Worker Resistance in the Call Centre', *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 15.1 (2000), 2–18.

⁹² Marina Vishmidt, 'Holding the Position', in Romana Schmalisch, *Notes Sur Les Mouvements #2* (Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, France, 2013), 14-20 <http://www.leslaboratoires.org/sites/leslaboratoires.org/files/notesslmouvements_last_final_print_bd_0.pdf> [accessed 20 January 2019].

not just to the mind but to the brain itself.

Moreover, the disappearance of physical labour from social visibility that followed the outsourcing of many manufacturing centres away from Western countries should not be confused with an ontological change in labour politics.⁹³ It is a geographical displacement and, although restaging the unseen struggles can lead to these being fetishized,⁹⁴ revealing their hidden status can be a more effective statement.

As the immaterial forms of value accumulation took over, from financial data, information system or customer experience, so have the material conditions for the (re)production of life been 'de-valorised'.⁹⁵ Labour as the production of discrete objects gave way to the production of Subjectivities, to intimate relationships that incorporate knowledge, affects, and tastes. Consequently, the discourse of manual labour with its historical and social narratives (predominant especially during the 1970s as Work as Art) has been pushed to the background to in favour of conversation around technology, immateriality, data, post-colonial or environmental concerns. The manual labour still persists even if it became less visible through outsourcing. It also continues to exist in our everyday lives — in domestic sphere but also through new technologically e.g. supermarket self-checkout. Under these considerations, the ongoing act of making manual labour visible can be seen as political.

[back in the valley]

LET US RETURN TO OUR ABSTRACT HERO. It is Sisyphus's passion for life that led to his demise. His torturous punishment and his passionate desires become at the end embodied in his material effort, from his shoulder braced against the rock to his foot wedged against the mountain slope. The release at the top when the stone starts rolling down the face of the mountain, the pause in the strenuous act when Sisyphus is walking down to retrieve it. The alchemical transformation that takes in the moment, from being enslaved by the action, to becoming fully aware of the absurdity of the situation. Returning to the proposition of Spinoza, the forming of a clear and distinct idea of the passion, the knowing of a painful emotion such as sadness or grief, signals an increase of power. Or in Camus'

⁹³ Marina Vishmidt, 'Situation Wanted: Something about Labour', *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, 19 (2008), 29.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

words, Sisyphus 'is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock.'⁹⁶

Sisyphus is a hope-less here, hope is removed but this removal does not lead to nihilism. Hope was at the bottom of Pandora's box, Zeus locked it there with other forms of suffering. Schopenhauer speaks against the hope that can torment, which in religious thought focuses the human effort towards the life after.⁹⁷ Such a delay of a reward, a delay of gratification underscores the capitalist interplay between pleasure and desire.

Instead of hope, our Sisyphus finds release in the awareness of the present.

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile.... The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 109.

⁹⁷ Jennifer Michael Hecht, *Stay a History of Suicide and the Philosophies against It* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 208.

⁹⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p.111.

3___ *exploring models of living fire / entering impassionate space*

The section spotlights the historical methods and aesthetics that influenced the development of the project. It highlights the issues and/or gaps with regard to current methods of classifying and describing material labour and material practice. It interrogates them through the lens of seeking passion in action, searching for flow and living fire in labouring body. It uses selected examples to indicate the tension between political and aesthetic concerns

FRIEZES — ENACTING TASKS — CHRONOCYCLEGRAPHS — INHERENT RHYTHM OF THE BODY — TECHNIQUES OF BODY — MATERIAL PLEASURE — PASSION IN ACTION — EMOTIONS AS METABOLIC PROCESSES — AFFECTIVE DEMONSTRATIONS — SHARED FEELING STATES

How can we imagine Sisyphus happy? Or rather what would enable him to become happy? What tools, approaches and models, what form of thinking would enable him to feel those moments of living fire. Sisyphus's figure, although useful to think through as a labouring body, is nevertheless a simplified archetype. I need examples that return to the everyday, so I can probe the rich nuances and complexities of object-gestures.

I am thinking again about the hairdresser, about her self-choreographed dance around another body, the one-to-one performance, the gaze negotiated through the mirror, the hairdressing chair as a stage of spectacle.

____ *The images of bodies are frozen in their gestic movement. They show poses taken by a mobile hairdresser when performing a haircut (on my daughter). And a similar movement of a neuroresearcher setting up (me as) a subject for an EEG recording during a motor adaptation test when using a robotic arm. Hairdresser becomes one of the 'gestic professionals', as approved by the Blast Manifesto, an organiser of the mess.⁹⁹ Neuroresearcher, on the other hand, is a gestic performer who is untrained, or rather self-trained, in her activity.*

The object [whether this object is electrodes or hair], the hand and body alignment:: as a scientist would have it > physio-dynamic features and joint rotations. Though I rather prefer to think of structures and cranes > with bones, ligaments and muscles forming axis and levers. The first-class lever is rare; it is the scissor-like joint between the head and first vertebra. The second-class levers work like a wheelbarrow and are those of a rising movement. The third-class levers are like a shovel > these are the levers in wrists, forearms and hands that are activated in the gesture of reaching.

[making bodies visible] ____ MODE : STATIC REPRESENTATION

How can I reveal this gestic choreography?

There is limestone in the Brooklyn Museum Collection carved with a hairdressing scene from Ancient Egypt. Only the upper body of the image remains — arms bend upwards, elegant fingers, strands of plaits. The inscription literally means 'hair-maker' or 'doer' of hair, as hair skills in addition to styling would include the making of false hair. There are no hairdressers nor barbers in Sykes' sixty-foot-frieze for the Sheffield Mechanics' Institute

⁹⁹ BLAST! is The Manifesto the Vorticists produced is their journal BLAST, in June 1914.

though there is a painting at The Trades House of Glasgow of Incorporation of Barbers. A tableau frieze freezes a working body into an aesthetic pose, it celebrates or appreciates it, but at the same time, it makes it into an aesthetic image. The homophonic connection of 'frieze' and 'freeze' rings somewhat true, with the latter suggesting an act of holding in a fixed state.¹⁰⁰ There is no action, no gestic echoes, no smell of materials. The bodies are static, the gestures become like sculptural objects presented on a plinth. The physical choreography feels stilted so does the material exchange.

The notion of choreographed dance is captured closer in a tile designed after John Caldwell's etching. It depicts a male hairdresser directing a powder at the hair of an older gentleman. The man is sitting in an awkward pose in a wooden chair, his arms propped on the armrest as if ready to leave at any point. In contrast, the hairdresser is frozen in a dance-like pose, agile and thin. The powder cloud captures some of the heat processes of the hairdressing. Although the visual representation still focuses on the aesthetic aspect, there is an emerging sense of the moment of engagement.

The challenges of visual representation are covered in depth by Tim Barringer's *Men at Work*,¹⁰¹ and Kristina Huneault's *Difficult Subjects: Working Women*.¹⁰² Barringer's analysis of the iconography of the labouring male body wishes to return artefacts to the historical discourses and to the moment of production. Huneault's exploration of the representation of working women follows the thesis that 'imagery is intimately tied up with identity'.¹⁰³ Both search for the complexity of social connotation beyond the aesthetic image through their writing. I, too, wish to go beyond the visual representation such as the aforementioned friezes. I recognise the potential of images to work historically, bringing awareness to different types of working bodies, yet they cannot fully capture the complexities of the material interaction, reveal the 'living fire'.

¹⁰⁰ Freeze also suggest preserving something at very low temperature while living fire is that of heat and flow.

¹⁰¹ Tim Barringer, *Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain* (Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2005).

¹⁰² Kristina Huneault, *Difficult Subjects: Working Women and Visual Culture, Britain 1880-1914*, British Art and Visual Culture since 1750, New Readings (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002).

¹⁰³ Huneault, *Difficult Subjects*, 5.



Fig. 3 *Hairdressing Scene*, ca. 2008-1957
B.C.E., limestone, pigment, 13.2 x 24.5 cm.
Brooklyn Museum, Charles Edwin Wilbour
Fund. © Brooklyn Museum. Shared under
CC-BY-3.0.



Fig. 4 Tile (ceramic glazed tile depicting a hairdresser), Liverpool (manufacturer), ca. 1775, earthenware, 0.08 x 12.5 x 12.5 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Presented by Mr and Mrs F. Hodgkin, 1939. Some rights reserved.

How can I unfreeze these complexities, how can I enact the object-gesture?

The dancer and choreographer Yvonne Reiner seemed to think so. She looks at an 'everyday movement' of a body, at the minute tasks and transforms them into a body that traverses both production and action. This results in a body that produces itself as an object and as a movement without end. For Reiner, mundane tasks are emptied of any purpose or context, they are revealed as a material refractory body acting onto other material refractory bodies¹⁰⁴ — for example, a dancer lifting a mattress, although it could also be a hairdressing student practising a particular stage of a haircut.

There is a fluid potentiality that Yvonne Reiner taps into when she takes on the idea of the task as her choreography. This notion of tasks evokes the way Hannah Arendt talks about labour in her seminal book *The Human Condition* when she describes three categories of labour, work/production and action.¹⁰⁵ In brief, labour is the inferior form of activity that meets life's necessities, work is focused on delivering results or products, while action is connected to thinking and is seen as the highest form of human activity.¹⁰⁶ Action enables the exchange of concepts, ideas, perspectives and so on and is therefore inherently political. It could be therefore seen that labour as 'bodily activity' is separate from political action, however, Paolo Virno updates Arendt's perspective for current economic conditions.¹⁰⁷ Virno highlights how modes of work like speech and thinking are nowadays employed as forms of labour, yet they are able to retain their political potential. Read from this perspective, political opportunities have been shifted to the realm of labour, including that of a bodily kind.¹⁰⁸ This conceptual shift of Virno enables me to see a working gesture as blurring the distinction between work and action, and to read Yvonne Reiner's task as shifting between a mode of being and that of being productive.

¹⁰⁴ Marina Vishmidt refers to the blurring of distinction between work and action in Yvonne Reiner's notion of task in her text Vishmidt, Marina, *Situation Wanted*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998)

¹⁰⁶ Hannah Arendt draws on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* for a distinction between production and action, or *poiesis* and *praxis*. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by W. D. Ross (Kitchener, Ont.: Batoche Books, 1999)

¹⁰⁷ Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series (Cambridge, Mass ; London: Semiotext (e), 2003)

¹⁰⁸ Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, 50.

Furthermore, Reiner's treatment of everyday movement crosses over from productive labour to more abstract objective, something that Marina Vishmidt calls a form of 'becoming-communist'.¹⁰⁹ Vishmidt sees the worker as a diminished subject performing repetitive movement, however, Reiner's dancer becomes an expanded subject. I become interested at this point in how to bring back this expansion into a working space, restore or regain some of this diminished potential of the object-gesture.

[in search of flow] ___ MODE : MOTION EFFICIENCY

How to restore or regain some of this diminished potential of the object-gesture?

In search of practical approaches, tools and models, I wish to return to studies in motion efficiency carried out by economist Frank Gilbreth and choreographer Rudolf Laban. Frank Gilbreth started with Taylorist management methods before developing his motion study innovations. After falling out with Frederick 'Speedy' Taylor, Frank worked closely with his wife Lillian Gilbreth, focusing on a problem of the 'human element'. Their motion studies became less about mechanical devices to improve efficiency, focusing instead on a set of principles, which can be internalised and expanded further by the workers themselves.

Gilbreth went on to develop an analytical tool and created a basic alphabet called therbligs,¹¹⁰ which reduced elemental working motions to 16 elements.¹¹¹ In order to record these therbligs, Gilbreth devised techniques of cyclegraphs and chronocyclegraphs —a small electric bulb was attached to a part of the body to be monitored such as a hand, or a finger, and the motion path was photographed as a series of still images. The speed was recorded by adding an intermittent power supply source to the bulb, with a frequency of 10-30 per second. The outcome was a dotted line of the working action, with spaces indicating moments of hesitation or awkwardness. By plotting these outcomes on simultaneous motion (simo) charts, Gilbreth could identify therbligs symbols against body parts and lapsed time, allowing to visually observe where, for example, one arm was

¹⁰⁹ Vishmidt, *Situation Wanted*, p. 33.

¹¹⁰ Gilbreth made up the name by reversing the letters of his surname.

¹¹¹ The effective therbligs were : *reach (or transport empty), move (transport loaded), grasp, release (release load), use, assemble, disassemble, preposition (for next operation)*. Ineffective therbligs included: *hold, search (including momentary action find), select, position, inspect, wait (unavoidable delay), wait (avoidable delay), rest (for overcoming fatigue)*. Therbligs *use, assemble and disassemble* could be further divided into detailed operations.

passive during the movement or overstretched while reaching for the tools. This would lead to redesigning the movement to activate both arms and relocating the tool's position.¹¹²

Lillian and Frank Gilbreth's desire was to improve the well-being of the workers, to reduce the inefficient movement and fatigue and create flowing motions and longer spaces for rest. A commendable objective though I cannot help but notice certain analogies to automation and the use of robots in manufacturing. The robotic arm is programmed to follow the shortest path-to-goal when calculating its movement. Can creating therbligs of hairdresser's object-gestures, redesigning the actions, enable robots to cut hair? Considering the robotic arm can perform surgery, I can imagine it technically possible though not financially viable to develop such solutions (unless there was a number of standard cuts to choose from, which would not be dissimilar to the North Korean state-approved choice of 30 haircuts). Amazon has just opened the first AI-assisted hair salon in London where artificial intelligence is used for hi-tech mirrors showing customers potential hairstyles.¹¹³ Chronocyclegraphs were an inspired aesthetic solution that was said to be able to capture complex and fast movements (although they did require a restricted set-up condition, not unlike the 3D motion scanning solutions available currently) so maybe they could have been used for a hairdresser to some extent. If I think of chronocyclegraphs as a method for describing object-gesture, they were an inspired aesthetic solution that revealed some of the hidden magic of the body rhythms. Gilbreth motion studies can be seen as a mode of thinking in a working gesture.

They do however come from the proposition of efficiency and standardisation which leaves little space for individual preferences, for passion, for the superfluous and capricious. The body becomes adjusted, self-disciplined, trained, morphed over the course of one's life. Working life dictates one's range and quality of movement, the range of gestures grows smaller the more digitalised the everyday life becomes.

Can a different approach offer the space for extending the scope of our movement?

¹¹² Brian Price, 'Frank and Lillian Gilbreth and the Manufacture and Marketing of Motion Study, 1908-1924', *Business and Economic History*, 18 (1989), 95.

¹¹³ Zoe Wood, 'Hair by Amazon? Tech Giant to Open Hi-Tech Salon in London', *The Guardian*, 20 April 2021, section Business <<http://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/apr/20/hair-by-amazon-tech-giant-to-open-hi-tech-salon-in-london>> [accessed 31 July 2021]

Name of Symbol	Therblig Symbol	Explanation-suggested by	Color	Color Symbol	Dixon Pencil Number	Eagle Pencil Number
Search	Sh 	Eye turned as if searching	Black		331	747
Select	St 	Reaching for object	Gray, light		399	734½
Grasp	G 	Hand open for grasping object	Lake red		369	744
Transport empty	TE 	Empty hand	Olive green		391	739½
Transport loaded	TL 	A hand with something in it	Green		375	738
Hold	H 	Magnet holding iron bar	Gold ochre		388	736½
Release load	RL 	Dropping content out of hand	Carmine red		370	745
Position	P 	Object being placed by hand	Blue		376	741
Pre-position	PP 	A nine-pin which is set up in a bowling alley	Sky-blue		394	740½
Inspect	I 	Magnifying lens	Burnt ochre		398	745½
Assemble	A 	Several things put together	Violet, heavy		377	742
Disassemble	DA 	One part of an assembly removed	Violet, light		377	742
Use	U 	Word "Use"	Purple		396	742½
Unavoidable delay	UD 	Man bumping his nose, unintentionally	Yellow ochre		373	736
Avoidable delay	AD 	Man lying down on job voluntarily	Lemon yellow		374	735
Plan	Pn 	Man with his fingers at his brow thinking	Brown		378	746
Rest for overcoming fatigue	R 	Man seated as if resting	Orange		372	737

Fig. 5 Ralph M. Barnes, *Symbols and colours for fundamental hand motions*, table revised from Gilbreth's therbligs chart, in Ralph M. Barnes, *Motion And Time Study* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1937), p. 96.

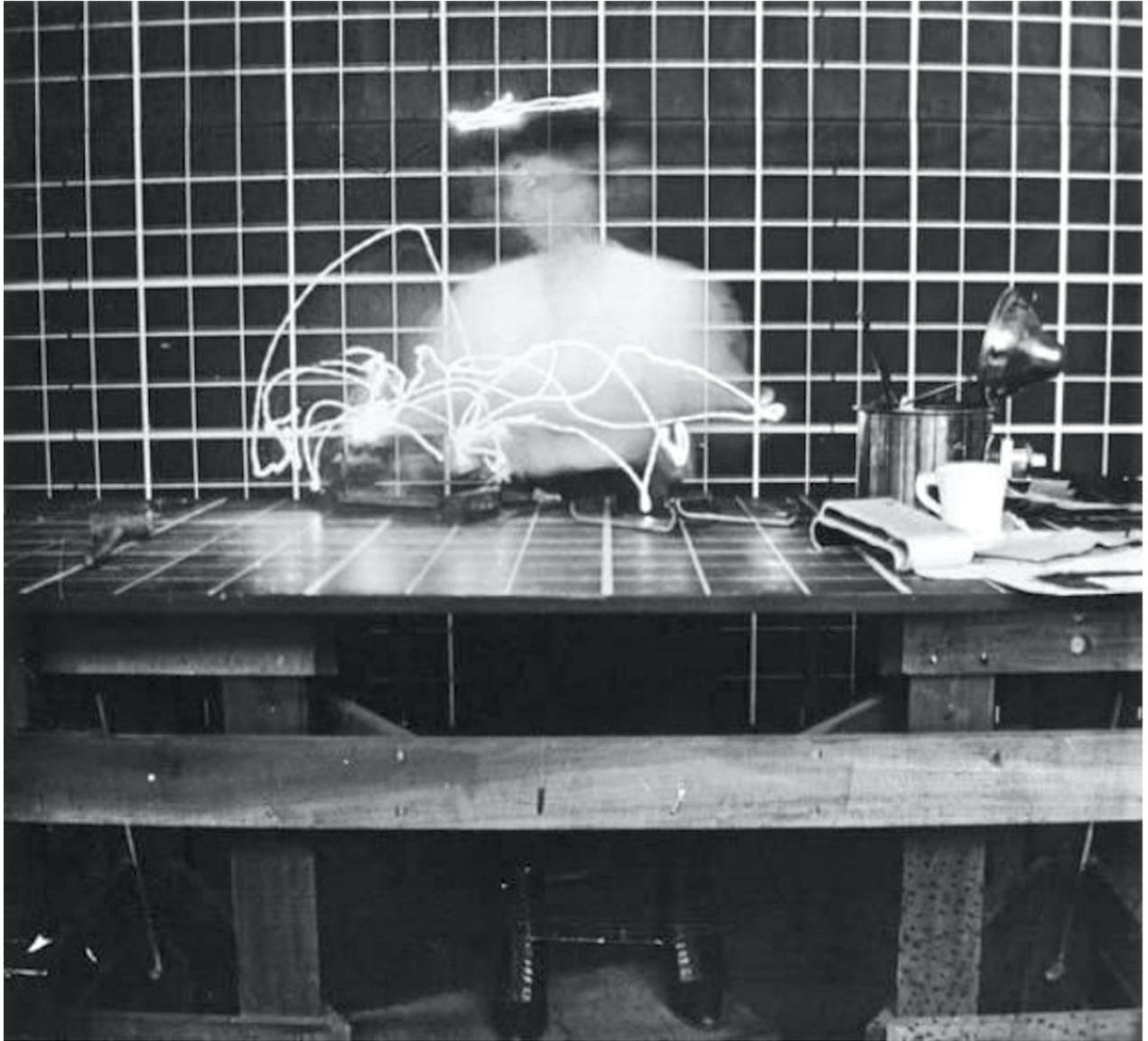


Fig. 6 Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, *Cyclegraph of woman doing light assembly work*, [n.d.], photo print. Frank and Lillian Gilbreth Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History. Some rights reserved.

[rhythm of a body] ___ MODE : GESTIC PLEASURE

The rhythm of man in his work and in his whole life should achieve the adaptation of the flow of material to the dance of life.¹¹⁴

The choreographer Rudolph Laban saw the body as alive with unconscious movement, but he felt it is the conscious movement that 'gives the colour to life'.¹¹⁵ A movement that is constricted, bound in its flow, limits the quality of life while, when the flow is free, the life becomes fuller with potential. He applied this belief to improve the movements of industrial workers.

Laban initially engaged with factories and workshops for his commission with the Crafts and Guilds of Vienna, leading to him staging a series of processions in 1929 when over 10,000 people performed their working gestures. He built on his initial observations at the Dartington Hall School in Devon, experimenting with uses of the choreographic notation to observe working bodies in fields and factories and suggest changes that could make the processes easier or more enjoyable. When World War II created a labour shortage, Laban was asked by an industrial engineer F.C. Lawrence to collaborate on improving the productivity of the wartime labour force. Women were successfully employed to cover the gap in factories and other industries, although concerns were raised about the more physically demanding tasks and fatigue.¹¹⁶

What is the connection between the dancer and the worker? The answer is very simple — movement.¹¹⁷

At a tyre manufacturing company Tyresoles, female employees, although successful at

¹¹⁴ One of the key concerns for the industrialisation was the reduction in a rich effort of life. Craftsmen and farmers engaged their whole mind and body at different times of the day, performing a wide range of activities from procuring the materials, transporting, production process and selling. Industrialisation reduced the working efforts to simple movement sequences that are performed repetitively. The sphere of mental interest involved in the tasks performed has also been reduced. These observations are echoed for example by William Morris in projects of Aesthetic Praxis. H. B Redfern and Rudolf Laban, *Introducing Laban Art of Movement* (London: Macdonald & Evans, 1971), p. 11.

¹¹⁵ Redfern and Laban, *Introducing Laban Art of Movement*, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ Similar concerns and attempts to resolve these were raised by Anson Rabinach in his writings on 19th century labour practices.

Anson Rabinach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

¹¹⁷ Rudolf Laban, quoted in Romana Schmalisch, *Notes Sur Les Mouvements #1* (Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, France, 2013), 4

.<http://www.leslaboratoires.org/sites/leslaboratoires.org/files/notesslmouvements_last_final_print_bd_0.pdf> [accessed 20 January 2019].

most aspects of production, continued to struggle with stacking heavy transport tires.¹¹⁸ Laban has previously come across a similar challenge at a sawmill during his early explorations, where he observed that male workers struggled unexpectedly with the task of stacking small staves. He replaced twelve men with five women, aligned in gaps between the stacks and the truck, which resulted in completing the task in under half the time. The key was not only positioning the workers but teaching them a swinging movement, which they enjoyed greatly.¹¹⁹ At Tyresoles Laban proposed a solution of specially devised physical training to compensate for lesser muscular strength. These included rhythmic motions, relaxed actions of arms and legs, coordinated breathing, and focus on qualities of 'quickness' and 'alertness'.¹²⁰

Laban/Lawrence's collaboration on the Industrial Rhythm continued throughout the War, using Kinethography notation to develop *both* improved methods of working *and* corrective exercises outside work.¹²¹ I see their approach as different from Taylorist solutions, and that of Frank Gilbreth, which focused mostly on speed. Speed, though an important element, was extended by Laban to include other complex relations such as space-time and mass-energy.¹²² The worker was seen as a complex being with 'natural movement patterns' that either enhanced or diminished her productive capacity¹²³ and her affective state:

Bring that Swing and Lilt in Labour/Which Makes Efficiency a Pleasure.¹²⁴

The territory triangulated by these three movement-based approaches — Reiner's everyday tasks, Gilbreth's chronocyclegraphs, and Laban's inherent rhythm — activates the working body and reveals the complexities of a working gesture. Gilbreth's objective is to enhance well-being by improving movement flow and increasing rest time, offering the comfort of a pause. Chronocyclegraphs of Gilbreth are aesthetically unique, but the objective leaves less space for individual capacities or quirky body movements.

¹¹⁸ Carol-Lynne Moore, *Movement and Making Decision* (The Rosen Publishing Group, 2005), p. 25.

¹¹⁹ Redfern and Laban, *Introducing Laban Art of Movement*, p. 11.

¹²⁰ Whitney Elaine Laemmler, 'The Choreography of Everyday Life: Rudolf Laban and the Making of Modern Movement' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2016), pp. 94-95. <[https:// repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1823/](https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1823/)> [accessed 1 November 2020].

¹²¹ Laban and his assistants provided solutions in diverse settings such as canning factories, textile mills, and the assembly line hand wrapping Mars Bars for the British Army (an issue of military importance as the bars were part of emergency rations).

¹²² Schmalisch, *Notes Sur Les Mouvements #2*, 2.

¹²³ Nancy Murray, "Action Profile--Innate Motivation to Action in Decision-Making" (International Conference on Teaching Public Administration, New York, 1987).

¹²⁴ Laemmler, 'The Choreography of Everyday Life', p. 94.

Diminishing the discomfort potentially, but there was no space for joy in working action. Where Yvonne Rainer focuses on an actual task, she abstracts it into dance as a choreographic move. Rudolf Laban reverses this approach, applying his dance research to working actions. It is, in particular, his proposition to incorporate natural movement and increase gestic pleasure that I feel moves towards the living fire. The efficiency-based methods are nevertheless different forms of control. They also leave out the object of labour, they stop short of unpacking the interaction with another materiality.

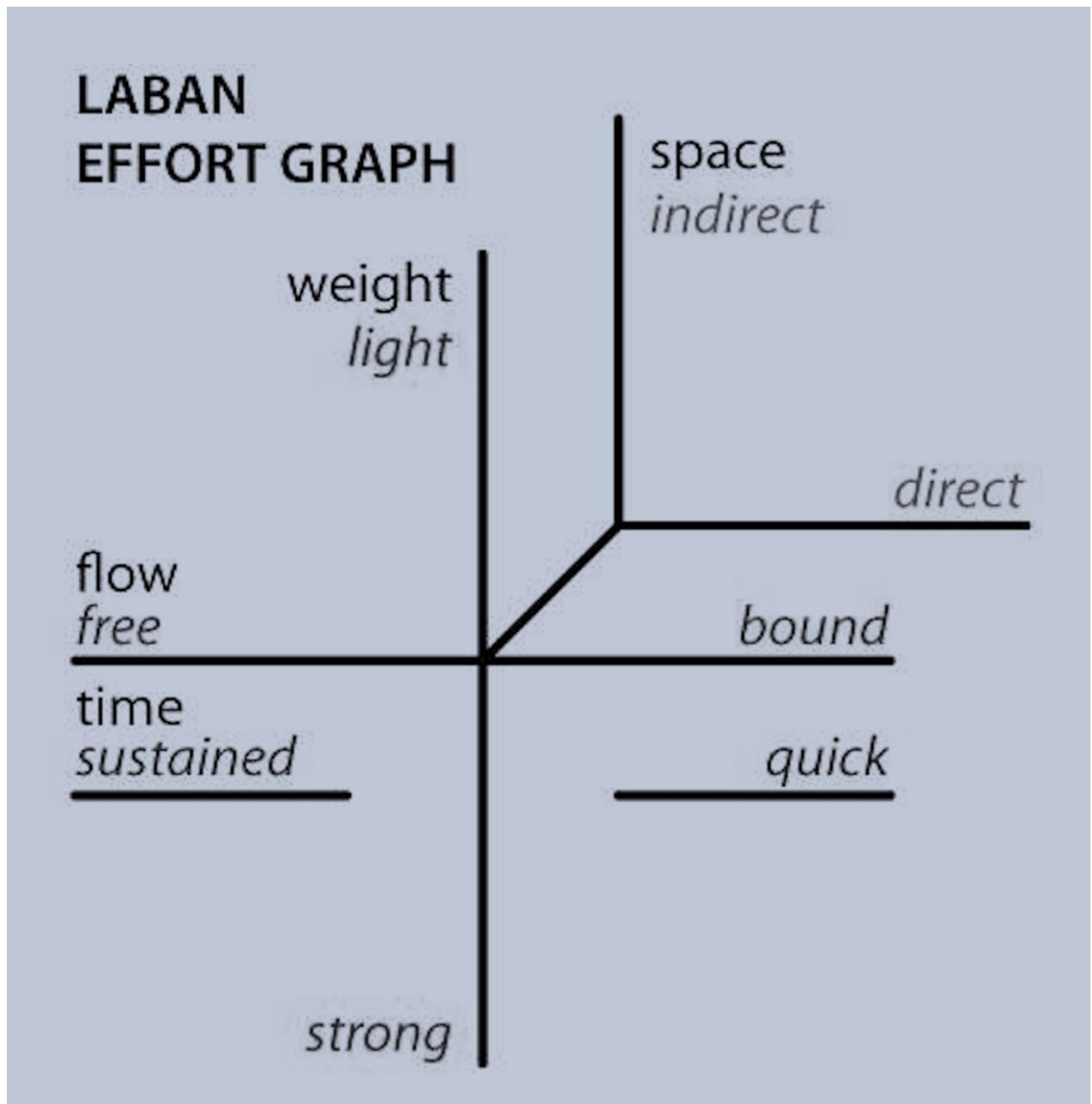


Fig. 7 Effort Graph. *Laban Movement Analysis*, 2010, digital image. Shared under Raphaël Cottin/Wikimedia Commons/CC-BY-SA-3.0.



Fig. 8 *Laban/Lawrence 'Industrial Rhythm' Training*, Manchester, 1947, photography: Roland Watkins. Collection of Mary Watkins, Totnes, United Kingdom. Shared under CC-BY-2.0 Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers.

[object of labour] ___ MODE : THINKING THROUGH INTERFACES

Can hair itself become an interface for enacting pleasure?

The first time I became interested in hairdressing as action was when I became a hair model for a student in one of the hairdressing training centres. The student already had basic knowledge and experience, her training was about raising the skill, refining the knowledge. It was a durational encounter of three hours, requiring stamina on both my and student's behalf, where each stage was referred back to the trainer. I observed ongoing adjustment of sections of hair, of scissors and fingers, the angle of hands and arm, the adjustment of stance and body weight.

As the writer Luigi Amara says: the superfluous issue of hair does not belong in the lineage of philosophy.¹²⁵ Mere dealing with such concern is an act of provocation or dissidence against the tradition, and the querent should be prepared to be labelled as a hunter of trivialities, a juggler of trifles. Talking about hair is to keep company with artists such as Margarita Gluzberg, whose hair drawing can be seen as dissidence in this context. Gluzberg in her own words does not draw the hair but rather translates material into the matter. The line becomes a hair, and the hair becomes a line, not imitating but constructing, accumulating lines and matter simultaneously.¹²⁶

Hair is the interface of the hairdressing object-gesture that enables metaphoric thinking. It is thinking 'through the skin' after Sara Ahmed¹²⁷ who sees skin as both a boundary and a point of connection, a place where both private experiences and historical, racial, sexual narratives play out — as the skin surfaces, the skin encounters and the skin sites. It is the phenomenological gesture in Flusser, where hair is imagined as a boundary between materials and bodies, being inclusive of body and simultaneously expelled by it — and therefore expanding into epidermis and cosmetology, gardening and city planning, labour, fascism and formalism.¹²⁸ It is the site of performance by the hairdresser as a 'blessed' protagonist from the Vorticist Blast Manifesto¹²⁹ — a site of a mercenary war on wildness,

¹²⁵ Luigi Amara, 'How Come We Don't Have a Philosophy of Wigs?', *Literary Hub* (2020) <<https://lithub.com/how-come-we-dont-have-a-philosophy-of-wigs/>> [accessed 31 July 2021].

¹²⁶ *The Digital Analogue* by Margarita Gluzberg (Drawing Room, 2016) <<https://vimeo.com/170276546>> [accessed 31 July 2021].

¹²⁷ Sara Ahmed, *Thinking Through the Skin*, 1st edn (Routledge, 2003).

¹²⁸ Flusser, *Gestures*, pp. 105-110.

¹²⁹ Promoting a vision of the Vorticist group, a British nascent avant-garde group, the manifesto 'blasted' institutions, which were seen as an obstacle to the group vision. At the same time it 'blessed' a selected

where one seeks a reconciliation with Mother Nature.

____ *A hairdresser performs a physical choreography — standing and bending, stepping forth and back, lifting and stretching while handling props that are sharp or corrosive. Her gesture extends physically to the organic matter of hair, the scalp and the skin surface of another body. She manages atmospheric conditions of moisture and heat. Hairdressing is a durational process of production and waste. It is a vehicle for personal and social meaning. Hairdresser makes personal connections, enters a social contract of trust, seeks beauty, provides therapy and bears the weight of expectations. She dances at the edges of living fire.*

[material pleasure + alchemical becoming] ____ MODE : WORKSHOPING

How do I move into the space of living fire? Space which includes the dance, the props and the hair itself?

In his study 'Disrupting Book Smartness'¹³⁰ Lars Gjelstad discusses the role of material pleasure and the capacities of artefacts as agents of change. He thinks through the ontological turn, in particular concepts of 'ecology of materials' (Ingold),¹³¹ forms of 'mattering knowledge' (Barad)¹³² and 'techniques of the body' (Mauss),¹³³ Gjelstad discusses the capacities of artefacts as agents of change. He compares artefacts of 'smartness' such as books, grades, diplomas, range of vocabulary to artefacts of 'vocational based knowledge', in his case based in a mechanical workshop, such as '[w]ork gloves, smells of oil, the click and clack of repair tools, and many other things [which] participate in the mattering of knowledge and persons'.¹³⁴

number of people (like the hairdresser) seen as exemplary to their programme.

'BLAST No. 1: Review of the Great English Vortex', London: Bodley Head (1914), 25

<<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/blast-no-1-the-vorticist-magazine>> [accessed 13 September 2017].

¹³⁰ Lars Gjelstad, 'Disrupting Book Smartness: Critical Ethnography and the "Ontological Turn" in Anthropology and Educational Studies', in *Critical Anthropological Engagements in Human Alterity and Difference*, ed. by Bjørn Enge Bertelsen and Synnøve Bendixsen (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), pp. 159–79.

¹³¹ Tim Ingold, 'Toward an Ecology of Materials', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41.1 (2012), 427–42.

¹³² Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28.3 (2003), 801–31.

¹³³ Mauss, Marcel, 'Techniques of the Body', *Economy and Society*, 2.1 (1973), 70–88.

¹³⁴ Gjelstad, 'Disrupting Book Smartness', p. 165.

In hairdressing, they include all-purpose shears and sectioning clips, the smell of styling lotions, sounds of brushing and scissor snipping, the heat of a dryer, to mention a few.

Technology and material actions influence the way an apprentice would move and adapt her body but also her way of thinking. There is a 'process of welding', which happens both 'to the metal and the consciousness'.¹³⁵ Artefacts have therefore both material and virtual capacities, transforming desires, expectations and hopes.

Instructions, tools, technicians, test spaces and workshops, my and other bodies, abilities, knowledge all form a network of relationships.

Artefacts of material processes entangle concepts into bodily engagement, meshing together 'sedentary, mentalist, abstract, individualist' approaches with 'practical, physical, bodily, sensuous, and desirous ones'.¹³⁶ This overlapping is akin to Karen Barad's thesis that knowing comes from a direct material engagement with the world. Overlapping different approaches and interfaces allow us to participate in matter flows that otherwise, we would not have encountered. Object-gesture is at the interface between materials (tools, artefacts) and bodies, it is an event where mattering takes place. All these elements — the gloves, the smells, the click clacks — participate in evolving perception, and in the transformation of the body (after Marcel Mauss).¹³⁷

___ I observe the transformation of capacities and affective relationships in action and feel myself being transformed. My focus on an aesthetic outcome expands into a connection with the other body and tools, all bridged through my hair. I begin to think of my own sculptural practice, of the materials and tools, and how my body moulds around them, perceiving my own range of movement in a different way.

Franco 'Bifo' Berardi writes that pleasure, not desire, could be a way out of capitalism.¹³⁸

He refers to Catherine Malabou and her writings on brain plasticity and sculpturing of the

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Mauss, 'Techniques of the Body', 70–88.

¹³⁸ Berardi bases his understanding of the difference between desire and pleasure by drawing on the exchange between Michel Foucault and Giles Deleuze. Foucault was disgusted by the word 'desire' while Deleuze felt disdain for the word 'pleasure'.

Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, 'Desire, Pleasure, Senility, and Evolution', *e-Flux Journal*, #106 (2020), 1 <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/106/312516/desire-pleasure-senility-and-evolution/>> [accessed 24 February 2020].

self.¹³⁹ Loosely quoting Malabou, Berardi asks how the brain (not mind, or at least not just mind) can find the new balance of pleasure in the current historical moment, which he sees as transitory in human evolution. Berardi understands desire as the engine of capitalism, which is built on 'permanent excitement of desire' and 'an endless postponement of pleasure'. Overcoming that endless postponement through pleasure is a form of alchemical becoming.

The sites of presentations, demonstrations, testing and workshopping are particular spaces of exposition of object-gesture. They are effectively spaces for growing, for acquiring and 'practising' knowledge, for changing the plasticity of the brain and morphing of the embodied self. Their settings disrupt our habitual perceptions; slow down the experience. Whether I am learning a skill in a metal workshop or observing a hairdressing student trying out a particularly challenging cut, I savour the actions broken into elements. These moments of understanding the instructions, of skilful handling of the tools are, as Gjelstad suggests, a form of pleasure. They are Berardi's moments of shifting the balance from desire to pleasure.

[from desire to passion, and back] ___ MODE : PERFORMING EMOTIONS

How can one make her working gesture passionate, how to embrace intensity?

The inspiration for this thinking came from an essay by Michael Lambek.¹⁴⁰ Lambek uses an anthropological study of spirit possession among Malagasy speakers on the western Indian Ocean island of Mayotte to develop a proposition that passion does not need to be in opposition to reason nor to ethical. He wishes to challenge the Kantian project, which opposes passion to reason or to the ethical, a proposition that gives foundation to neoliberal thinking. Kantian morality sees impassionate states as something external that takes over, that carries away. One can no longer operate freely and gives into pathology — *pathē* in Greek means both disease and passion. One becomes a porous individual, perceived as infectious and socially undesirable.

¹³⁹ Malabou talks about the shift in psychoanalysis from fields of sex and language to neurology, it is not just the mind but the brain (physicality of the body comes to fore). Berardi, 'Desire, Pleasure, Senility, and Evolution', 7.

¹⁴⁰ Michael Lambek, 'How to Make Up One's Mind: Reason, Passion, and Ethics in Spirit Possession', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 79.2 (2010), 720–41.

I see this argument further strengthened by the thinking Rosi Braidotti developed as a part of her writing on 'nomadic ethics'.¹⁴¹ She proposes an approach, where desire, with its erotic and political connotations, can become a force behind sustainable ethics. Braidotti uses the example of the relationship of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West, which became a passionate force for producing, a form of acceleration for writing. In that, Braidotti follows Spinoza's ethics of joyful affirmation, framing passion as something that activates the desire to act and to self-express.¹⁴² Understood in such a context, passions can never be excessive.¹⁴³ An affective quality of passionate performance can lead to a shift of perspectives when flow, intensification of existence and self-empowerment become activated. Extending the idea of Braidotti, I wish to consider the desire (pleasure) in material action as the living fire in labour, and an enabler for self-realisation. This circles back to Lambek's proposition that the impassioned state could be a space for doing agency, not just having agency but a space of empowerment.

Living fire is to enter an impassionate space — a space that allows for feelings,¹⁴⁴ that is emotive,¹⁴⁵ unreasonable. I see this space of passion in action, as related to the pleasure of Franco Berardi, to the desire of Rosi Braidotti, to the joy of Baruch Spinoza. They are using different names depending on the philosophical framework. I choose to remain with Lambek's naming — passion — and its intensity while negotiating the aesthetic and political. Passion is proposed as sensuous and pleasure-giving, but instead of Freudian erotic focus or capitalist ever-excited desire, it enables an acceleration that produces forms of agency. This affective capacity to act and inter-act is at the core of human fulfilment and freedom. It is the art of living intensely.

Can we manage our own heart?

If giving-in to emotions allows us to enter an impassionate space, can we turn the dial the other way? Can we manage our stress, moderate our emotional states? Lisa Feldman

¹⁴¹ Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006)

¹⁴² Spinoza's active passions appear in Baruch Spinoza, *Complete Works*, ed. by Michael L. Morgan, trans. by Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub, 2002).

¹⁴³ For Spinoza passion is an impulse, a movement of the soul, which is excessive and irrational, a position exaggerated by Kant. This Kant/Spinoza argument can be also echoed in Nietzsche with his distaste for morality as giving rise to resentful and negative emotions, and reactive passions. See Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Will To Power* (Vintage Books, 1967), pp. 146-219.

¹⁴⁴ Ben Highmore, *Cultural Feelings: Mood, Mediation, and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁴⁵ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2004).

Barrett, a neuroscientist working on affective science, claims emotions are metabolic processes, constructed by the brain using past experiences. They are built rather than built-in, they are guesses.

You might believe that your brain is prewired with emotion circuits, that you're born with emotion circuits, but you're not. In fact, none of us in this room have emotion circuits in our brain. In fact, no brain on this planet contains emotion circuits.¹⁴⁶

In other words, the way we perceive affective states is rooted in predictions made by the brain; it is coming partly from the mind of the observer. The instinctual feelings with which we are born, like comfort or discomfort, relaxation or agitation, are reflections of states of the body but they provide little detail for us to act on. In order to produce that detail, to know what to do next, the brain makes predictions, producing meaning by connecting the feelings to a context, one based on past experiences. These predictions are emotions.¹⁴⁷ This leads to the proposition that emotions which we believe *happen* to us, are in fact *made* by us, suggesting we have more control over our emotions than we think. If we can reframe patterns that the brain uses to make emotion, if we train the brain to predict differently, we can transform our emotional life.

The human heart is a heavy duty 'labouring' machine, beating over 100,000 times per day while pumping about 7,200 litres of blood. At the same time, it is a metaphor, cherished in many cultures as a source or space of emotions. Romance, sadness, fear, courage, and so on, are imagined as located in the heart. Yet, as science evolves, this separation between biological functions and emotional perceptions merges with certain embodied disorders receiving new (or renewed) attention. One of these disorders is Takotsubo Cardiomyopathy or broken heart syndrome.¹⁴⁸ It is a condition where a heart becomes severely weakened as a result of physical or emotional pressure, ranging from a relationship breakdown or the death of a family member to financial pressures, occupational stress, or a physical accident.¹⁴⁹ A stressed heart becomes enlarged, taking on

¹⁴⁶ Lisa Feldman Barrett, 'You Aren't at the Mercy of Your Emotions - Your Brain Creates Them', TED Talk (2017) [accessed via TED talks on 30 September 2020].

¹⁴⁷ This proposition is similar to Spinoza's observation of two basic emotions of joy and sadness, with all other states being variations of those connected to ideas and objects that cause them.

¹⁴⁸ Takotsubo was first described in 1990 and named after a shape resembling ceramic pots used by Japanese fishermen to catch octopuses. The pot has a round bottom and narrow exit, and a rope attached to its neck. It is set at the bottom of the sea and offered as a safe habitat to an unsuspecting creature, until it is jerked to the surface, trapping the octopus inside.

¹⁴⁹ Dr Jauhar argues that the field of cardiology needs to devote more attention to the emotional factors that can influence heart disease, like unhappy relationships, poverty, income inequality and work stress. See: Anahad O'Connor, 'How Emotions Can Affect the Heart', *The New York Times*, 30

Takotsubo shape while its muscle weakens. The deformation manifests itself as chest pain and may even mimic a heart attack. The heart is broken, literally, although the condition does improve over time.

A stressful incident at work, whether psychological or physical, can therefore harm one's heart.¹⁵⁰ If we consider the feeling of distress both as a physical cause and as a constructed prediction, the labour of living fire becomes more than an ethical position. Putting oneself in a position of creating joy, allowing for inherent rhythm and irrationality, for being carried away and possessed by passion — can all become a space of resistance through restoring one's health.

Can we reduce emotional suffering if we consider the feeling of distress both as a physical cause and as a constructed prediction? More importantly, can we create positive emotions in daily encounters, in our labours and in physical interactions? Can we increase our potential by 'getting our butterflies flying in formation'?¹⁵¹

[managed hearts] ___ MODE : AFFECTIVE DEMONSTRATIONS

Managed emotions are already a prerequisite of the 'smiling industry'.

The demonstrations of *Forever Sharp Knife*¹⁵² are uploaded on YouTube by the product representatives, who are presumably self-employed and self-promoting their online image. There is a formula to these demonstrations, where a presenter acts out product features in a series of short engagements, attempting to imply that using the object is easy and enjoyable. There is a form of suspension, of disruption that takes place when viewing these videos. Greater awareness is being offered to individual tasks, to the moments of material interaction — how to hold or press down, how to adjust the angle. There seems to be a conscious re-engagement with the action and the senses, with the body and the object.

October 2018, section Well <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/30/well/live/how-emotions-can-affect-the-heart.html>> [accessed 30 September 2020]; and

Malik Halla, Nadarajah Kangaharan, and Ian Agahari, 'Takotsubo Cardiomyopathy Associated With Work-Place Bullying', *Occupational Medicine* 68, no. 1 (16 February 2018): 67–69.

¹⁵⁰ Agnieszka Mielczarek and others, 'Broken Heart as Work-Related Accident: Occupational Stress as a Cause of Takotsubo Cardiomyopathy in 55-Year-Old Female Teacher — Role of Automated Function Imaging in Diagnostic Workflow', *International Journal of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health*, 28.6 (2015), 1031–34.

¹⁵¹ Barrett, 'You Aren't at the Mercy of Your Emotions -- Your Brain Creates Them'.

¹⁵² Sample video: Scott Glass, *Forever Sharp Knife Demo*, 2014

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGc3JtBZZwU>> [accessed 5 June 2021].

At the same time, the commercial aspect of such demonstrations limits the freedom to fully enjoy this moment, replacing it with a need to manage an affective presentation of the self. The agent transforms himself into a demonstrating tool for the object, though his labouring body betrays him every so often showing signs of strain and fatigue. The product-object, being a source of income, holds an economic power to shift the balance in their relationship to more than a 'co-worker'. The 'culture of smiling'¹⁵³ requires the 'affective workers' to produce social relationships over the commodity goods. They are trained to adjust their bodies, to manipulate and harmonise them with those of their customers.¹⁵⁴ It is more than putting on a performance — they are trained to engage with customer bodies to create an affective response.

Sara Ahmed argues emotions are cultural practices, not psychological states.¹⁵⁵ Bodies are given value through emotion and thus the bodies, as well as the individuals, become aligned with a popular ideology. Cultural politics of emotions creates 'others' by aligning some bodies with each other inside a community and marginalizing other bodies.

How could we bring these other bodies in, especially when freedom is limited? How can we take over and find ways of performing impassionate agency?

[gestures of defiance] ___ MODE : SHARED PERFORMANCE

*Maquilapolis*¹⁵⁶ is a documentary film by Vicky Funari and Sergio De La Torre that focuses on multinational factories, known as *maquiladoras*, that are based in Tijuana on the US–Mexican border. Benefiting from the free zone status of the area, these factories rely heavily on a workforce that is migrant and predominantly female. The filmmakers worked with a group of these female workers to portray how globalisation impacts their human rights, working conditions and everyday lives. As *maquiladora* workers, the women face numerous problems including arbitrary layoffs, working rights infringements or health issues resulting from industrial processes. They are seen as 'commodities', susceptible to

¹⁵³ Maurizio Lazzarato, 'Immaterial Labor', in *Radical Thought in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

¹⁵⁴ Kaima Negishi, 'Smiling in the Post-Fordist "Affective" Economy', *TRANSFORMATIONS Journal of Media & Culture*, Hyperaesthetic Culture, 22, 2012 <http://www.transformationsjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Negishi_Trans22.pdf> [accessed 5 June 2021].

¹⁵⁵ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2004.

¹⁵⁶ Vicky Funari and Sergio De La Torre, *Maquilapolis: City of Factories* (California Newsreel, 2006).

being exchanged or replaced with cheaper labour. Wishing to avoid further objectification of the film subjects, Funari and De La Torre approached filmmaking as a collaborative process, sharing the authorship through a model of community production.¹⁵⁷ Over a period of five years, the artists lived and worked within the community, teaching women how to use cameras to record their own video diaries, and involving them at all stages from planning and scripting to shooting.¹⁵⁸

Woven among the autoethnographic stories and interviews, the film includes a visually compelling re-enactment of their working gestures. In one of the initial scenes, the women gather outside a *maquiladora* to replicate the automated nature of the tasks they perform on an assembly line. These performances show how the women's bodies have to adjust to conform to the demand of the technology and the calibrated tempo that they have to observe. At the same time, these simulations take on characteristics of a performative meditation practice akin to Tai chi — they create a sense of mundane melancholic defiance and evolve the psychological strength of these women. Without the physical objects, the hands recognise the work that is done and restore the gestures back to the body of the worker.

In his sci-fi film *Sleep Dealer*,¹⁵⁹ the filmmaker Alex Rivera imagines a futuristic scenario where manual labour in the US is accomplished without a physical presence of workers, who labour instead on the Mexican side of the border. A node interface implanted into the workers' bodies connects his nervous system into a vast network that operates robots based in the United States. The robots execute a wide range of jobs, from welding tasks on building sides to housework and babysitting. The 'node workers' build and preserve cities they never have and never will see. In the words of one of the characters, 'We give the United States what they always wanted: All the work, without the workers.'¹⁶⁰ The migrant workers are offered better pay than they could have earned in the villages, yet twelve-hour shifts drain their energy until exhaustion. Rivera, an immigrant himself and who

¹⁵⁷ 'MAQUILOPOLIS — Media' <http://www.maquilopolis.com/process_eng.html> [accessed 27 May 2021].

¹⁵⁸ De La Torre grew up in Tijuana himself, which would have added another layer of knowledge to the project. The filmmakers' manifesto was to 'merge art-making with community development and to ensure that the film's voice will be truly that of its subjects'.

Vicky Funari and Sergio De La Torre, 'Maquilapolis: Filmmaker Statement', *POV | American Documentary Inc.* (2006) <<http://archive.pov.org/maquilapolis/filmmaker-statement>> [accessed 2 June 2021].

¹⁵⁹ Rivera, Alex, *Sleep Dealer* (Maya Entertainment, 2008).

¹⁶⁰ Silverman, 'Injects Sci-Fi Into Immigration Debate'.

frequently tackles the issues of labour, immigration and politics in his films, expands on the issue:

The problem is that the worker comes with a body [...] That body needs health care, and gives birth to children that need to go to school. So keep the body outside of the United States. Suck its energy and leave the cadaver or the problematic shell out of the picture.¹⁶¹

Sleep Dealer extends this analysis of power relationships within transnational connectivity through the notion of being 'plugged in' — literally and metaphorically. Marionette-like, connected to wires and performing alienated gestures, the workers are forced into an alienated state, dislocating dimensions of the real. Yet the same hard-wired nodes can be used for a different form of connectivity. As the wires link into bodily nervous systems, the workers discover they are able to connect to each other's thoughts and dreamscapes. The hard-wired neurotransmitters create a new way of linking the bodies together, enacting social connectivity.

¹⁶¹ David Montgomery 'Alex Rivera's Lost Cult Hit "Sleep Dealer" about Immigration and Drones Is Back', *Washington Post*, 7 July 2014 <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2014/07/07/alex-riveras-lost-cult-hit-sleep-dealer-about-immigration-and-drones-is-back/>> [accessed 5 June 2021].



Fig. 9 Vicky Funari and Sergio De La Torre, *Maquilapolis: City of Factories*, 2006, video still.



Fig. 10 Alex Rivera, *Sleep Dealer*, 2008, video still.

[need for different modalities]

Lisa Barnett, who proposed emotions as metabolic processes that could be managed, believes the process could be helped by revising language around emotions to a more clinical one. I extend her proposition to searching for different forms of description that capture what happens in object-gesture, in the moment of engagement.

The above approaches combine different disciplines from choreography to efficiency studies, from performance to sales presentations, from relief sculpture to a sci-fi film. They capture the working bodies as a static representation or activate them in movement or participation. All these examples are showing different modes of recapturing the passion, though no single approach is able to capture everything — the heat, the smell, the porousness, the impact of other materials on how we feel, how things are moulded to our body, and how the bodies are moulded to the processes and emotions.

The object-gesture is multifaceted and requires these different ways of storytelling, documenting, instructing and presenting these multiple connections. It also requires different sensorial modes to reimagine the material resonances across physical, emotional, social or metaphoric territories.

I propose that this moment of object-gesture needs to be explored using a multimodal approach.

Transcriptions

4___ *towards a multimodal approach*

This section serves both as a pause from the written and a transition to an experiential mode of the thesis. It is an invitation to sample works, which explore the modalities of object-gesture events — textual, auditory and visual dimensions — and their metaphoric associations.

The key works — visual [OVERLAID BODIES], semantic [KICKING THE DRAWER] and aural [KNEADING MALLEABLES] — have undergone a number of reiterations. They are accompanied by textual pieces where the writing may be inspired by the artwork or it may have led to their latest reiteration.

The material for transcriptions comes from my collection of images and videos of body labour, taken in public and semi-public spaces, on construction sites or in hairdressing salons. I would record soundscapes of ‘gestic echoes’ and gather ‘textual extractions’ from instructional manuals. These collections were enhanced by samples from online archives (British Pathe films, BBC Sound and Internet Archive) and social media (YouTube tutorials or ASMR resources).

I aim to suspend or disrupt the object-gesture in those collections, temporarily interrupt the habitual thought patterns. I juxtapose poses taken by a hairdresser with that of a neuroresearcher, overlaying, annotating and animating the overlaps and differences. I re-edit recordings of building site workers in the form of tableaux reminiscent of plaster friezes.

Instructional texts became further sites of disruption. I extract phrases from life demonstrations, YouTube tutorials and archival videos from disparate areas like gas mask handling, self-care or product sale presentations. Lists of verbal movements, prepositional spatiality and adjectival affectivity dissect the performative semantics of the activities. The resulting scores are offered up as fragmented voice acts for imagined embodied experience.

I observe how the same gestures appear across different spaces and activities, how gestic echoes of these actions melt into each other when interwoven together. The sounds of body massage resonate with the echoes of dough kneading and clay throwing.

Multimodal transcriptions are a process of looking wide and listening without prejudice, seeking connections across different sources and spaces. They seek to disrupt habitual meanings and set out to work across categories, disciplines or taxonomies. These works begin to manifest the concerns of expanding object-gesture as a space that is material, metaphoric and sensuous.

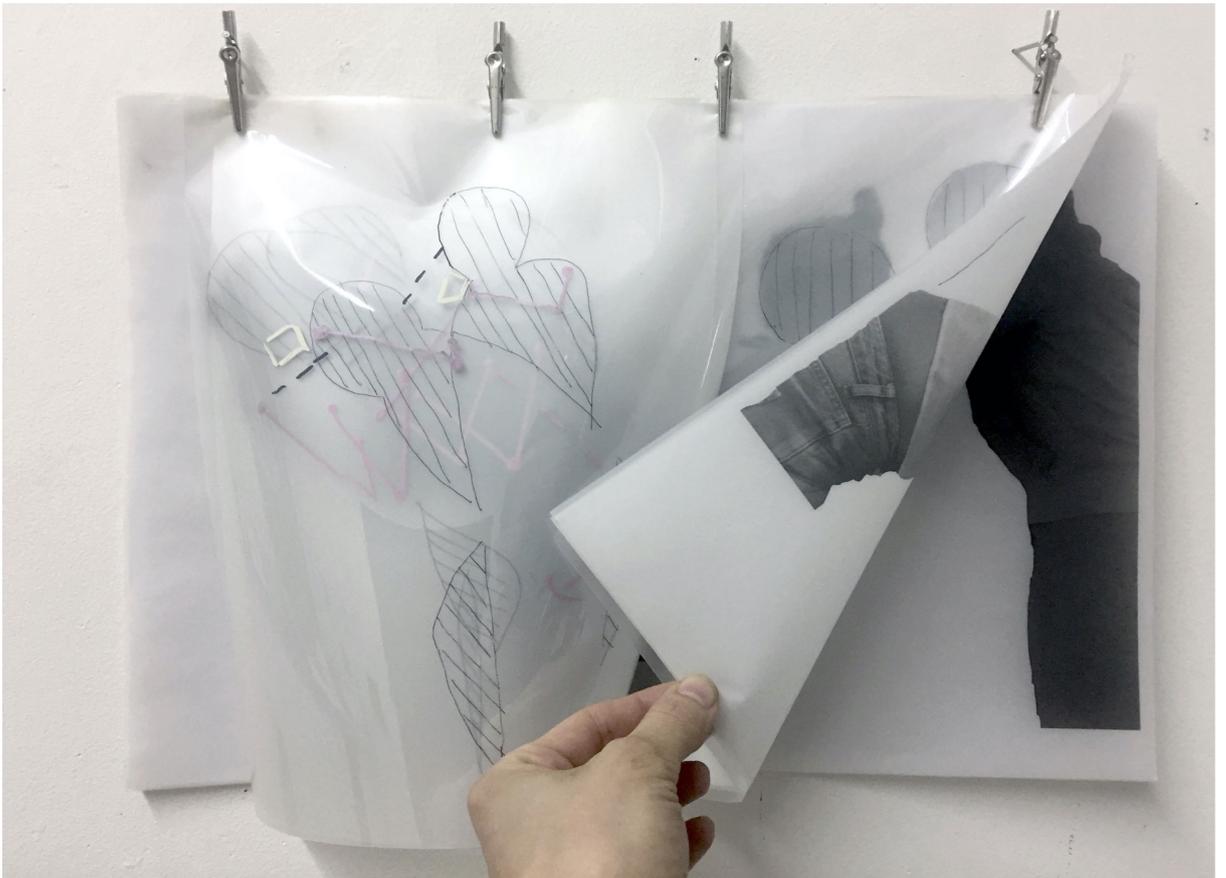


Fig. 11 Anja Borowicz, *Overlaid Bodies (study)*, 2017, mixed media, dimensions misc.

NOTE TO THE READER ____ please follow the link below
to experience a body of multimodal works:

Overlaid Bodies

Kicking the Drawer

Kneading Malleables

<https://anjaborowicz.com/multimodal-transcriptions>

Expositions

5___ *Gesture Labs*

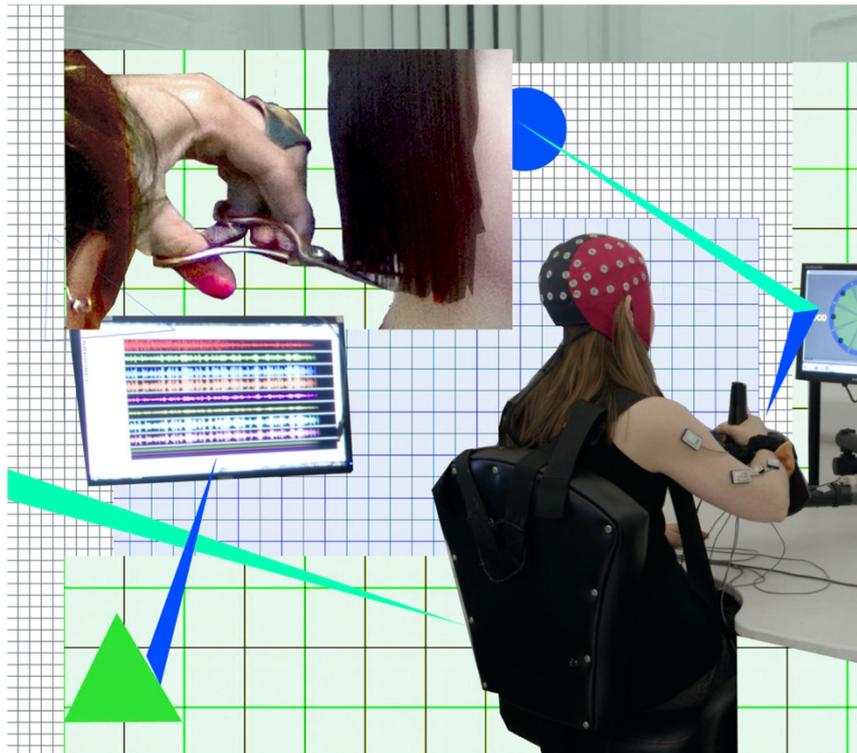
This part is an exposition of the object gesture through the practice of GestureLabs. I use the word lab to suggest a notion of a research laboratory, experimentation and testing ground, but also in association to its more recent use to describe public workshops and hackspaces, which promote collaborative and participatory approaches.

GestureLabs are proposed as shared affective spaces, where varied publics may encounter the project and engage visual, textual and sound-based forms of describing object-gesture. GestureLabs draw on works developed as multimodal cores — video compilations, instructional scores and gestic sounds — using these both as a reference and as a material for explorations.

GestureLabs expose object-gesture as a multimodal event. GestureLabs are both the inquiry and the conclusion of my project.

DISRUPTING GESTURE-OBJECT :::
developing a collaborative study

ARTIST @ Blackhorse Lane Studios Anja Borowicz
+ NEUROREHABILITATION researcher @ UEL Adela Desowska



Our study will focus on a relationship between working gesture-object, not as a choreographed performance, but as an everyday physical act. We plan to involve 'gestic professionals' [like hairdresser, masseur or baker] and seek input from other specialists with interest in movement.

Anja treats the [working] gesture as [sculptural] object, hoping for new ways of looking/thinking/talking about embodied making. Adela is looking for input from other disciplines to develop different forms of patient engagement and rehabilitation programs. Our ambition is overlay artistic inspiration with state-of-the-art neuroscience knowledge to conceive new ways of understanding and assessing, disrupting and recovering gesture.

Fig 12 Anja Borowicz, *Disrupting Gesture-Object (event leaflet)*, collaborative study, Blackhorse Lane Open Studios, London, 2017.

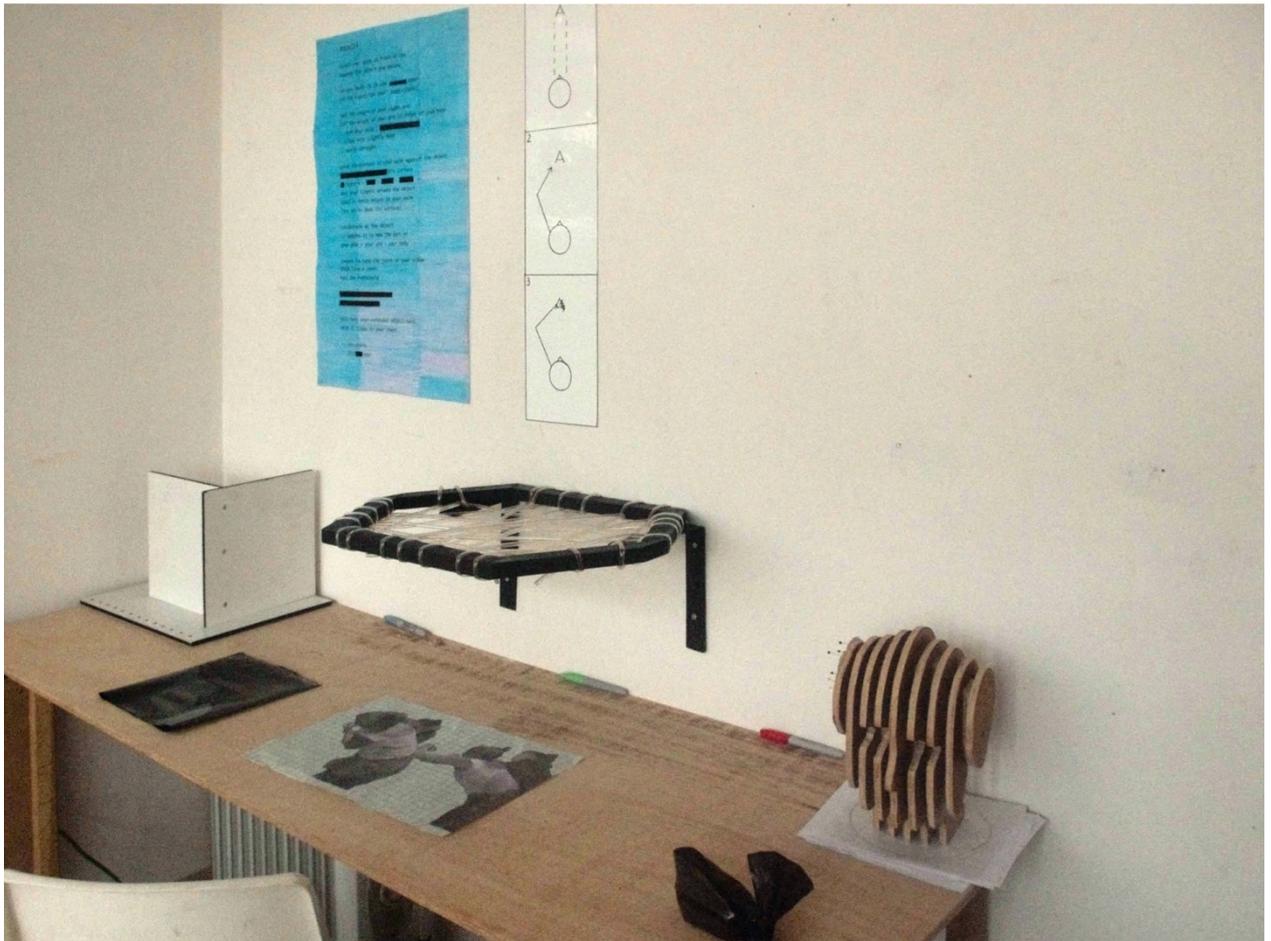


Fig 13 Anja Borowicz, *Disrupting Gesture-Object* (studio setup), collaborative study, Blackhorse Lane Open Studios, London, 2017.

[GestureLab 1 MIRRORING & ENACTING]

The concept of the Labs was developed in conversations with Dr Adela Desowska. Adela was finishing her PhD in neurorehabilitation of motoric functions and we noticed the overlaps between our research interests and how we thought about gesture as an everyday physical act. We staged a collaborative study DISRUPTING GESTURE-OBJECT during an open studios event at Blackhorse Lane Studios, London in June 2017. The study was an experiment in overlaying artistic perspective with a neuroscience approach to conceiving new ways of understanding and assessing, disrupting and recovering gestures. Inspired by this study, we imagined a series of gestic labs and GestureLab1 was the direct outcome of this collaborative thinking.

The first Gesture Lab was devised as a participatory public installation with a focus on mirroring visual content. I presented selected footage of working gestures and invited the public to mimic a range of movements. Participants' response to stimuli of different modalities was measured in a purpose-built booth. Their gestic responses were viewed live from outside as a shadow projection and recorded for further study. The aesthetic concept drew on Frank Gilbreth's chronocyclegraphs, Laban/Lawrence kinethography and manual hielogryphics of Francis Bacon

_____ The brief for the participant was simple: in the privacy of the booth, she will watch a selection of different body labours on a small monitor whilst mimicking the movements to the best of her ability. She consents explicitly to her gestures being filmed from the inside of the booth (and implicitly to her shadow being watched from the outside). Thus she enters into a relationship with three screens — (1) the monitor for her sole viewing in the private darkened setting, (2) the eye of the camera that diligently and greedily records her (re)actions; and (3) the plastic skin that captures her projected shadow, her flattened abstraction reflected back onto her and exposed to those that watch outside. The watching is watched and watches himself back.

SETUP / EVENT

The Lab was commissioned as part of the Waltham Forest art trail and London Borough of Culture programme and took place over three days from 30 May to 2 June 2019. It was set up at One Hoe Street, a space that served as a hub and an information point for cultural

events and talks. The decision to use this particular space allowed for different publics to be included as compared with an art gallery, with a high number of passers-by and local residents.

The setup included a spacious booth-like structure, 250 wide × 350 deep × 300 high cm, covered tightly in a black heavy-duty stage fabric except for the front panel, which was constructed as a rear projection screen. The monitor with video reel was hung inside and a projector was placed at the rear projecting a blue grid aligned into the screen. This created a shadow against the screen relaying the movement of the participant to the outside. The booth created a certain level of sensorial deprivation while giving a notion of privacy.

The structure was up for an evening launch event and weekend, and it relied mostly on passers-by and hub visitors without other external advertising. It was occupied by the steady flow of participants, with only a few breaks and having to turn people away at times. The duration of the video was nearly fifteen minutes, but out of thirty-nine participants, only a handful left the booth before the end. This was mostly because of time constraints although there was also one case of sensorial sensitivity.

The selected material included a combination of slow and fast movements and different levels of complexity, in particular, the pointing/conducting gesture was explored by the gestic pointing of a Korean guard, crane signalling and conducting an orchestra. These selected films were spaced out throughout. In addition to movement aspects, films were selected for their aesthetic quality to increase the level of engagement.

Recording: The participants were recorded by two cameras — one recording the inside of the booth and another the shadow projection outside.

FROM THE VIDEO

Teletext at the beginning of the sequence and end credits:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the project

Please stand on the marked cross on the floor facing the monitor

You will watch a selection of videos showing different body labours

The material includes artist's recordings, online archives Labour in a Single Shot and youtube presentations

The videos will show different views of the body, with changing camera angles and occasionally panning out of sight

You are asked to perform — mimic or imagine — the activity to your best ability

Each video will last between 30 seconds to 1 minute depending on the complexity of the movement

There will be short pauses between the videos allowing you to rest and reset

The whole experience will last less than 15 minutes and will finish with the rolling credits

Please assume the starting position that will be shown next and wait for the first activity

//

Gesture sequence material cannot be shared at present due to copyright.

//

Clip Credits in order of screening:

Di HU, Subway Security, Hangzhou, 2014, source: Labour in a Single Shot

Cristian Silva-Avaria, Concrete, Rio de Janeiro, 2012, source: Labour in a Single Shot

Daniel Ulacia, Colocando etiquetas, Mexico City, 2014, source: Labour in a Single Shot

Anja Borowicz, Scorching Signs, London, 2019, source: artist own

Yuri Ancarani, Il Capo, Carrara, 2010, source: YouTube

Melissa Elizondo, Aprendiendo a pisar mai, Mexico City, 2014, source: Labour in a Single Shot

Mingshen Group, Knock the Peanut Candy, Hangzhou, 2014, source: Labour in a Single Shot

Christoph Pohl, Maintenance, Bangalore, 2012, source: Labour in a Single Shot

Stephanie Rabins, Construction, Boston, 2013, source: Labour in a Single Shot

Anja Borowicz, Conducting Junior Orchestra, London, 2017, source: artist own

Yacov Afuta, Bread and Water, Tel Aviv, 2012, source: Labour in a Single Shot

Jeni Hansen Gard, How to Wedge Clay Properly, 2018, source: YouTube

CHU Kim Duc, Massage, Hanoi, 2013, source: Labour in a Single Shot

Anja Borowicz, Pier Painting, Sopot, 2017, source: artist own

Paul Geday, Modern Times Alexandria, 2012, source: Labour in a Single Shot

With special thanks to Antje Ehmman for her permission to use the online archive Labour in a Single Shot [curated by Antje Ehmman & Harun Farocki, 2011-14]



Fig. 14 Yuri Ancarani, *Il Capo*, Carrara, 2010, video still.

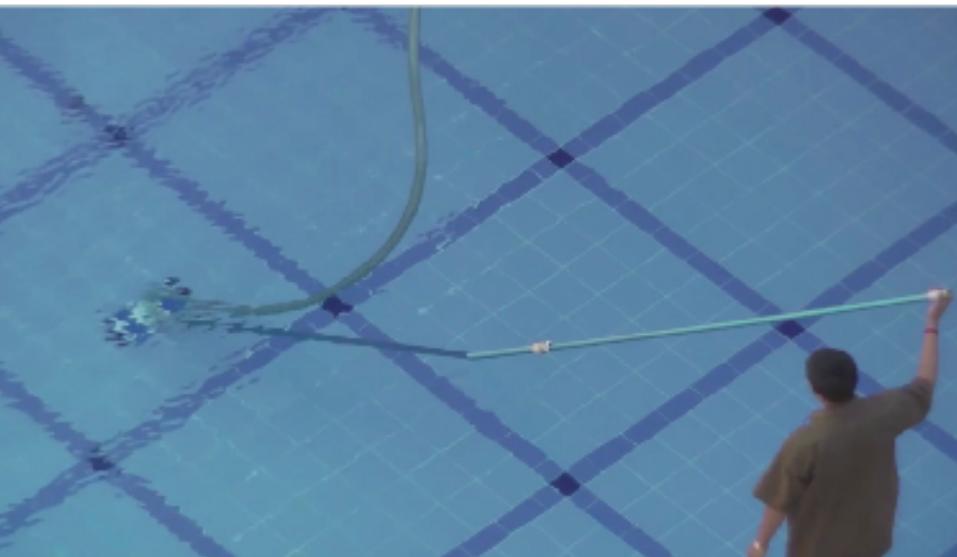


Fig. 15 Christoph Pohl, *Maintenance*, Bangalore, 2012, video still. Part of project 'Labour in a Single Shot' by Antje Ehmman and Harun Farocki.



Fig.16 Anja Borowicz, *Scorching Signs*, London, 2019, video still.

THINKING WITH GRID

The grid has been used throughout a number of works in my projects. For example, the initial studies for overlaid bodies consisted of layers of transparencies with selected work postures over square grids. Charting the surface, the grid is materialist in its disclosure of physicality as it is aesthetic. It becomes a metaphoric tool, while it thinks itself through Rosalind Krauss' iconic essay.¹⁶² It wishes itself spatial, mapping the external world onto internal spaces. Such a spatial grid is democratic, extending in all directions ad infinitum. In this extension, the grid opens itself up like Agnes Martin's drawings to different beliefs and imaginations.

The grid also echoes early motion photography such as Muybridge's studies, which employed grid arrangements to show movement progression. Frank Gilbreth also drew on these influences for his chronocyclegraphs to capture the live motion of bodies and hands in space, from micro to macro. His grid rendered the movement into graphic shapes with 'angles, lines and trajectories' that could be measured, analysed and corrected.¹⁶³

The grid is modernist and minimalist, allowing in its simplicity for 'thinking space'. It assumes an association with measuring and plotting, planning and analysis, with science and engineering. It is a sculptural tool. The grid in GestureLab also had a practical consideration for the neuroscientist, who potentially needed reference points to scrutinise the gesture. The grid is therefore undecided, pointing on the one hand to the matter and on the other, connecting to the spirit, torn between the science and the imagination. Material and spiritual, physical and aesthetic, internal and external.

Blue grid is that of blueprints and blue ferric ferrocyanide, of oxblood mixed with iron sulphate. It is the colour of the Maquilapolis worker's uniforms. Blue affects the pituitary gland; it can slow our breathing. Blue light enhances memory and kills some of the bacteria. Blue stands for serenity, therefore, just as the grid, it creates space for the internal 'living fire' of working gestures.

Yet Gilbreth's grid (alongside the clocks and stark lighting, cameras and observers) was also

¹⁶² Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids', *October*, 9 (1979), 50-64

¹⁶³ Caitjan Gainty, "'Going After the High-Brows": Frank Gilbreth and the Surgical Subject, 1912-1917', *Representations*, 118.1 (2012), 1-27.

demanding and almost oppressive, replacing the natural relationships between workers and their subject with measured reenactments. The worker's movement becomes disembodied and aestheticised into sculptural wire models.

These forms become abstracted not only from the worker but also from the activity itself. Though beautiful in themselves, there is a more sinister meaning — ragged lines symbolise inefficiency, wasteful motion, mess. Smooth simplified lines become desirable though the aesthetics of simplicity becomes a harness for the inherent and natural gestures. Moreover, the chronocyclegraph images blur and almost erase the labouring bodies. The action is elevated to the lines of light. Marx's alienation of labour is made inadvertently visible by making the object of the labour and the activity of labour itself invisible. Gilbert's wire models excised the worker wholly from the act of work. Even the names signed on the individual models are those of efficiency engineers who measured the activity. The mess of work — the body, the effort, the sweat, the tools and components are cleaned up, removed, alienated.¹⁶⁴

The shadow is an image by itself, a moving image. Shadow is an absence of light blocked off by an object or a body, it is an extension of that object or body. Shadow is Jungian unconscious snag, the disowned self. Observed from the outside, the shadow becomes a silhouette, standing-in for the other inside. *Is the silhouette the same as the absence of a working body?* I propose that it still holds onto some of the mess, onto the effort of movement, shivers, inconsistencies and fluidities — the human aspect

The grid and the shadow in GestureLab abstract and flatten the bodies onto a one-dimensional surface, yet retain enough liveness and characteristics for the participants to identify themselves with their shadow. The participants encounter the working agents, their effort, the environment and sounds through the film. The agent, the object and the activity of labour are all made visible to them. The participants are asked to embody these gestures and efforts, to connect emotionally and physically. Though filmed, they are treated sympathetically. The booth offers a notion of privacy as the cameras' setup is rather unobtrusive and the public observes only the shadow action. The abstraction wishes to capture the essence of experience through a modality of object-gesture.

¹⁶⁴ Sharon Corwin, 'Picturing Efficiency: Precisionism, Scientific Management, and the Effacement of Labor', *Representations*, 84.1 (2003), 139–65.

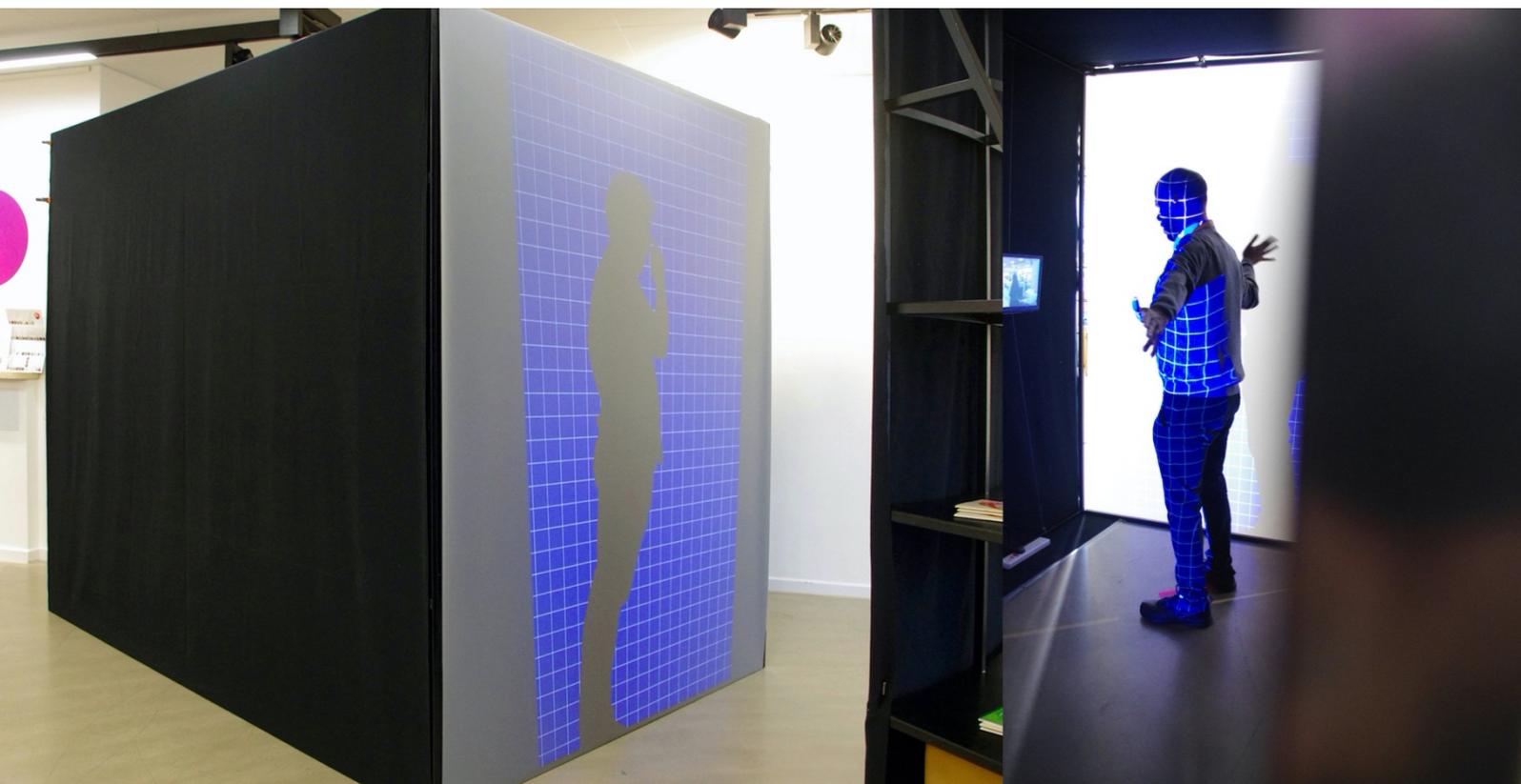
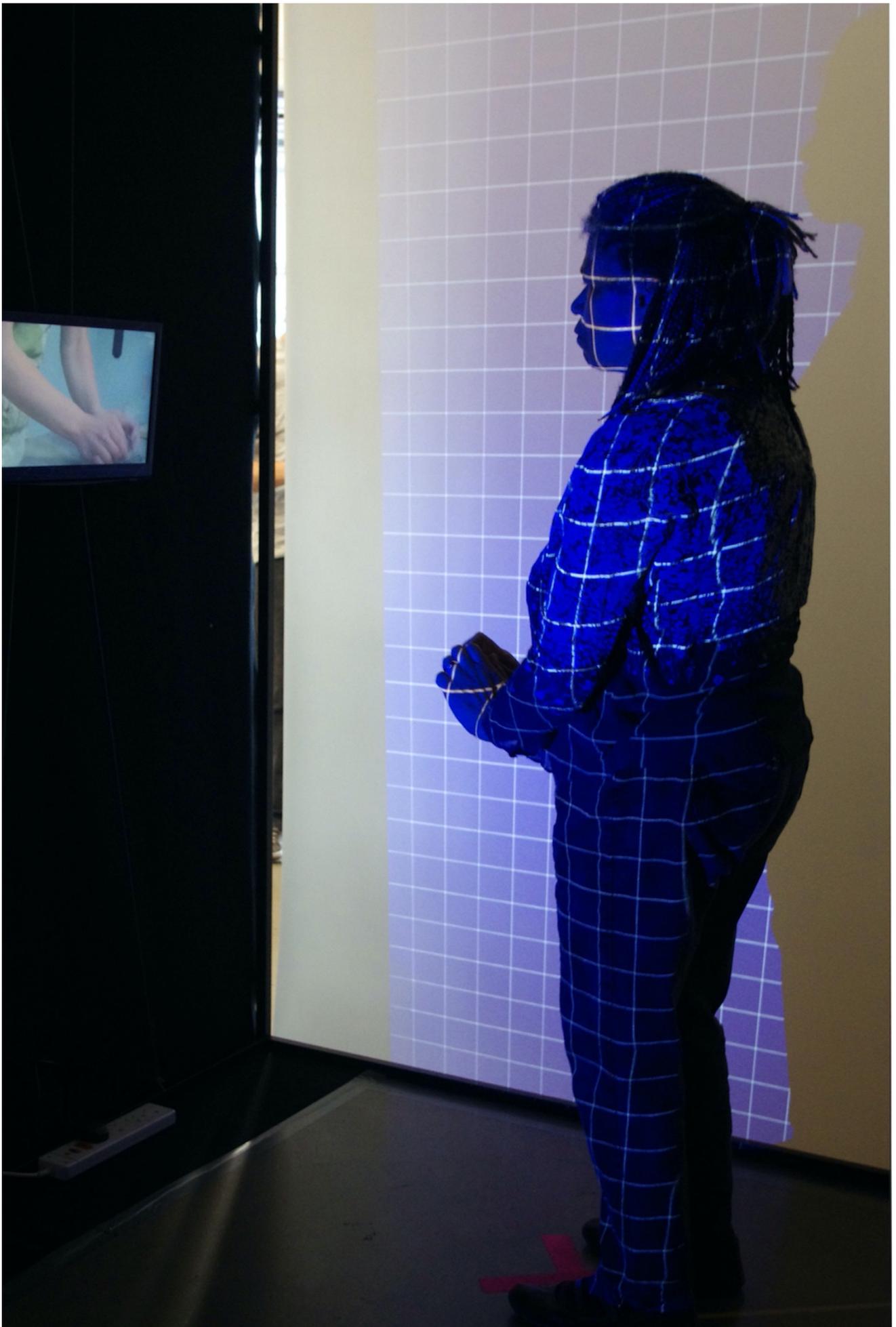
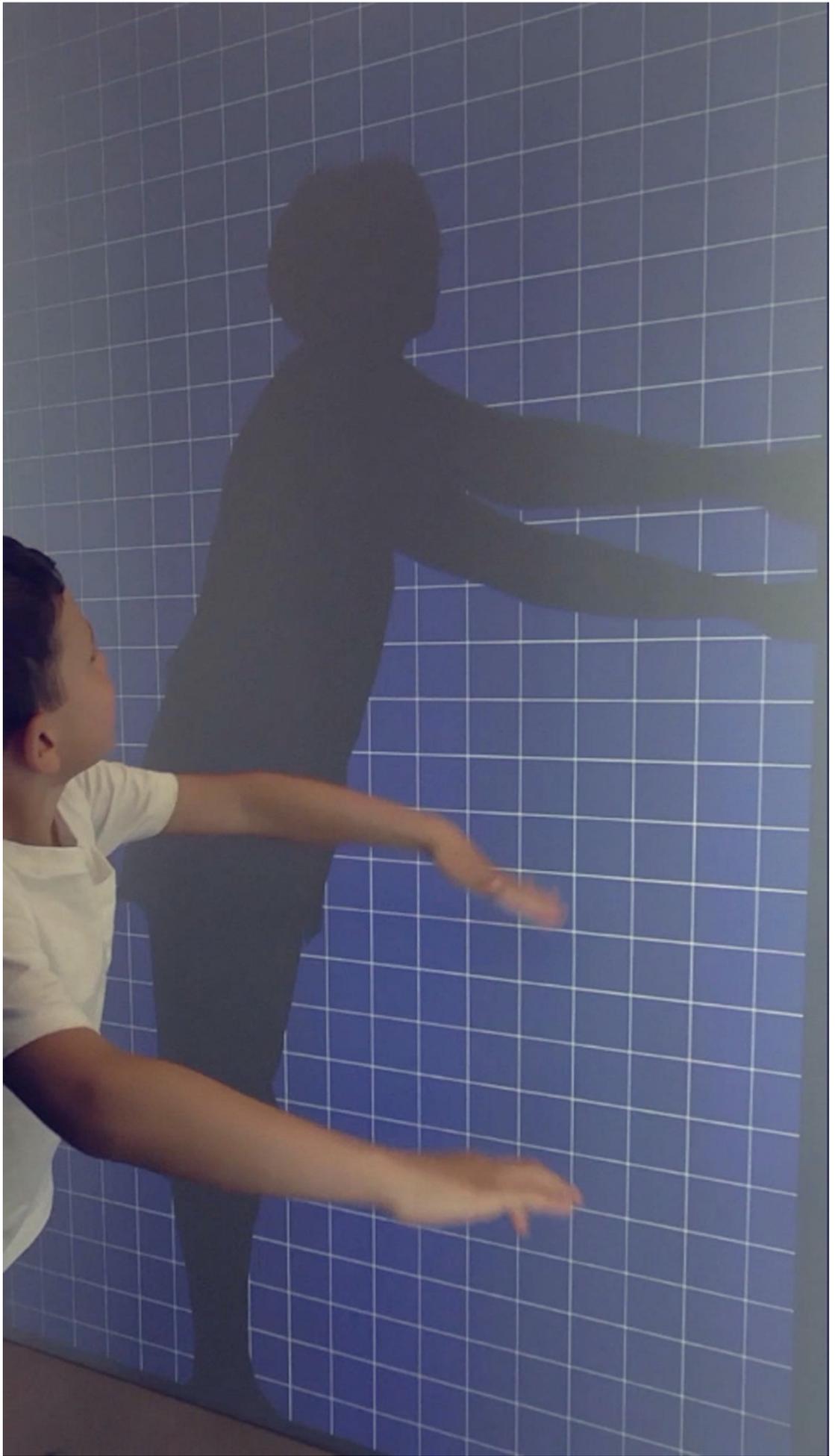


Fig. 17-19 Anja Borowicz, *Gesture Lab 1 MIRRORING & ENACTING (documentation)*, participatory public installation, London, 2019. Developed in collaboration with Dr Adela Desowska. Commissioned by Artillery.





OBERVATIONS

Viewers are seduced into participating — the size of the booth, its positioning in the space and the aesthetics of the shadow projection were designed to lure them closer; the conversation with the artist or assistant settled their initial objections (I am not a dancer. I am not a performer). The potential participants thought initially that the installation was activated by the performers but once the idea was explained, they became more open and curious to try it out. A form of desire and gentle offering — the full experience can be only fulfilled inside the booth but the participant can exit at any point in time. The darkened space of the booth offered privacy and a certain form of detachment from the outside. The signed participation form acted as a form of ritual introduction. The teleprompter introduction set a slower pace and enabled participants to attune their senses to the booth environment, introducing a trance-like mood.

The level of engagement was increased by active viewing of the video material, activating a mirror system of empathy through embodying the gesture. The shadow projection enhanced the aesthetic experience of own gesture. Through watching the participants my own appreciation of the human body in movement deepened, connecting at an embodied level, instead of through profession, age or appearance.

Post-experience conversations became an important element though they were only carried out when possible as the artist was simultaneously inducting new participants. Expressions of the feeling of enjoyment, reminiscence of gestic labours being similar yet at the same time different across social groups and countries (making of the Chinese peanut candy brought recollection of a similar recipe in Brazil), points raised around changes to bodily labours and traditions, skill and its loss, harmful labours, thoughts about own bodies and everyday activities. It was interesting to observe how the participation changed the level of understanding of the research ideas, the participants echoed the principles set out and some tried to provide other ideas to explore. Some stayed behind and acted as ambassadors for the project, providing mini-inductions and encouraging sign up.

FURTHER NOTES

The material was organised to mix different levels of movement complexity and perspectives — from facing the gestic performer to having a bird-eye view of the movement. This was reflected in different levels of interpretation, dynamically shaped by the participants. The performance of movement was also reflective of bodily ability, age and lateralisation. Participants switched hands for more complex gesture and different perspectives. Participants who were left-handed switched to the preferred mode for more complex gestures.

One of the visitors suffered from a brain tumour and was initially reluctant to take part in the project, unsure whether she would be able to follow the movement. I explained that she can leave the booth at any point and mimic the movement only as far as she is comfortable. Having a neuroscience collaborator, who was interested in movement therapy for brain damage patients, further reassured the participant. The participant engaged fully with the instructions and she shared how much she enjoyed the experience. My collaborator later reflected on the fact that it is easier to generate involvement when the artistic element allows the participants to feel more empowered and playful, as compared with the observation studies of patients during clinical trials and therapy. The potential of artistic inspired therapy was one of the elements set out before the project was carried out.

One group of participants was a family cluster — a father who was an artist, a wife who had no creative connection, a daughter who was a dancer. Their engagement with the material reflected the background — the father talked about embodied engagement with materials like clay, the daughter' interpreted the gesture towards more choreographed movement while the mother talked about the meditative feeling of flow when inside the booth.

The interpretations were similar for simpler movements but diverged with changes of perspective, especially for more complex movements — from the worker facing the camera to having her back to it or even the birds-eye view. Further changes had to do with handedness where frequent swapping was observed for left-handed people. The kinetic interpretations become more varied, p into the inherent body rhythm.

Children were not allowed inside the booth for Health and Safety reasons, but I found they were drawn to the shadow, spontaneously mimicking the gesture (yet another layer) of secondary mimicry.

Adela observed the difference between participation in a scientific study and an artistic installation — a feeling of empowerment, a pleasurable form of movement therapy experienced through artwork and as artwork. She was aiming to carry out analysis of the motor abilities from the recordings for the purpose of therapeutical engagement (due to the lack of funding, this idea has been suspended).

[GestureLab 2 BODYWORKS or WORK IN THE HEAD]

While developing the research, I have extended my own embodied practice. I returned to studying a Tai Chi form and attended workshops and classes focused on movement explorations at the Siobhan Davies Studios, London. These sessions introduced me to movement-based approaches, such as body-mind centering, somatic experiencing, contact improvisation or axis syllabus, yet the core purpose was to support my embodied approach to reimagining material engagement and functional movement.

I have also attended OPENLAB sessions at Chisenhale Dance Space, London, a model for professional self-development for performers devised and facilitated by dancer/choreographer Antonio de la Fe. The sessions had a fluid framework and were developed by a constantly changing group of people. They were aimed at 'artists interested in performance, movement, the body and in the actions the body can deploy as an artistic medium'. Some sessions were hosted, and others were totally self-managed, offering space for self-exploration and collaborations, workshops, experimentations and discussions — generally without pressure to have a specific outcome. The structure seemed a perfect opportunity to explore some of the material from my research.

I was invited by Antonio to facilitate one of the sessions as a part of OPENLAB programme in September 2019. My aim was to hold a session that would take a form of a journey across networks of material, emotional and metaphoric overlays, in order to ask ourselves: What will occur if we traverse physically, poetically and askew: mirroring, enacting and imagining?

_____ From notes on a hairdresser : a self-choreographed dancer performing with the unruly matter, an aesthetic therapist in a social contract of trust, a creative cutter in search of beauty. An unmoving and unmovable model reduced just to a head. Extended gaze and smiling effort. Heat, disinfectants and deadly-sharp objects.

SETUP / EVENT

The session at Chisenhale Dance Space drew on my growing research material of everyday working gestures, including my multimodal explorations works.

The structure of the event was devised loosely to move from guided exercises to self-initiated responses. I started by giving a brief overview of the project, followed by a warmup co-led by the participants with exercises from somatic practice and Tai Chi. Next, the participants engaged with the same video sequence I assembled for GestureLab 1. The role of the video was different in this set-up — while during the GL1 it was the main exploratory material, here it was part of the warm-up, of getting into the headspace — a shortcut into my thinking about object-gestures.

At that point, I invited a shift from the structured and controlled engagement to an open and fluid absorption. I made an 'offering' of multimodal material that included extracted instructions, images of bodies at work and gestic soundscapes. The material has been distributed across the space to be selected, engaged with directly or used as an inspiration into movement. There was a progression in dealing with the materials from mimicking to simulating then imagining, allowing the explorations to inform the increasingly self-directed movement. That progression depended on the fact that my participants were experienced movement practitioners.

We ended the session in a lounge space, conversing over cups of tea about the project, our own associations and potential explorations.

FROM MIMICKING TO SIMULATING

I have already used the word mimicking to describe the actions in GL1 but GestureLab 2 shifted the engagement from mimicry to something else, that 'else' being a simulation. Mimicking copies the actions or appearance of something else, in order to make them seem like the same thing. Simulation creates a new thing with particular rules that enables understanding how the real thing works. They end up referring to the same process, but when you mimic something it's a two-way activity — you hear/watch and then you copy. 'Simulate' refers just to the productive phase of the process; therefore, both GL1 and the first half of GL2 were a process of mimicking the movement while the second half shifted into a mode of simulation.

A simple action of mimicry, spontaneous and immediate imitation of the dynamics of movement of the other, fulfils a number of complex functions — empathy enhancing,

furthering understanding of others, fostering social engagement, to name a few. Mimicry is key to human-human interaction, promoting trust, empathy and liking. It is conscious, deliberate, voluntary imitation. It is unconscious synchronisations and mutual alignments. Imitating each other in social situations functions as a social glue. The social importance of mimicry results even in an anticipated action effect, where individuals engage in anticipated action before the observed person starts engaging in that action. I was encouraged that the speculative proposal of the GestureLabs, of enhancing empathy through actions, of understanding material engagement through mimicking — is supported by embodied cognition and mirror systems phenomena.¹⁶⁵

Can similar behaviour apply to interaction with other non-human agents and inanimate objects?

Furthermore, I found out that the classic motor hypothesis does not apply to emotional mimicry. Emotional mimicry depends on the social context: we only mimic emotional signals that are interpreted to promote affiliation goals, less likely to mimic strangers. I read about the lyrebird, the master mimicker. Lyrebirds, like the other songbirds, learn their vocalisations from other birds so it's a culturally transmitted trait. They too seek benefit — a male lyrebird will emulate predatory calls to scare a female to return to the territory if she tries to escape while mating.

Can conscious mimicry overcome these goal-oriented preferences and allow for connecting with others in a more inclusive (democratic) way?

¹⁶⁵ See the following texts, among other for the ideas on mimicry and simulation: J. A. C. J. Bastiaansen, M. Thioux, and C. Keysers, 'Evidence for Mirror Systems in Emotions', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 364.1528 (2009), 2391–2404; Vittorio Gallese and Alvin Goldman, 'Mirror Neurons and the Simulation Theory of Mind-Reading', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 2.12 (1998), 493-501; Ursula Hess, Pierre Philippot, and Sylvie Blairy, 'Mimicry: Facts and Fiction', in *The Social Context of Nonverbal Behavior, Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction*. (Paris, France: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1999), pp. 213–41; Andrew D. Wilson and Sabrina Golonka, 'Embodied Cognition Is Not What You Think It Is', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4 (2013) <<http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00058/abstract>> [accessed 20 August 2021].

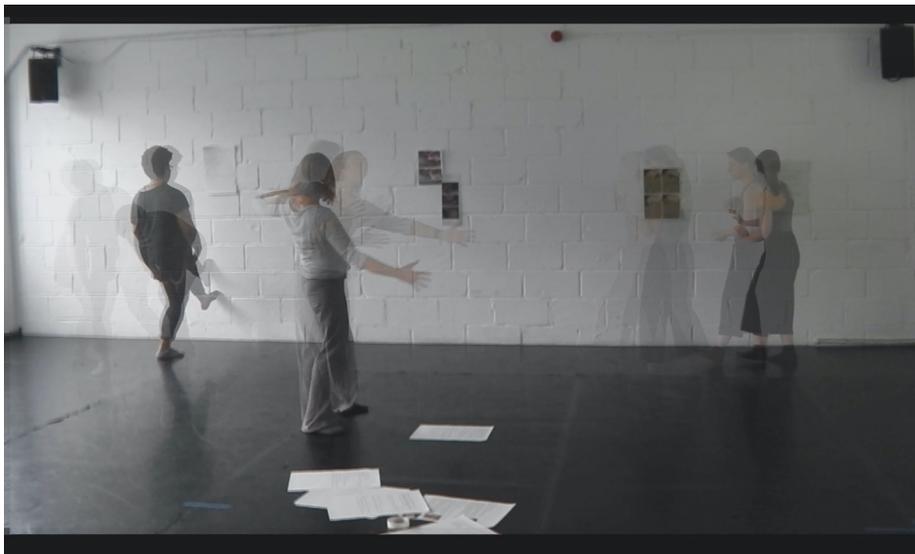


Fig. 20-22 Anja Borowicz, *Gesture Lab 2 BODYWORKS or WORK IN THE HEAD (documentation)*, workshop facilitated for OPENLAB programme at Chisenhale Dance Space, London, 2019. Invited by A de la Fe.

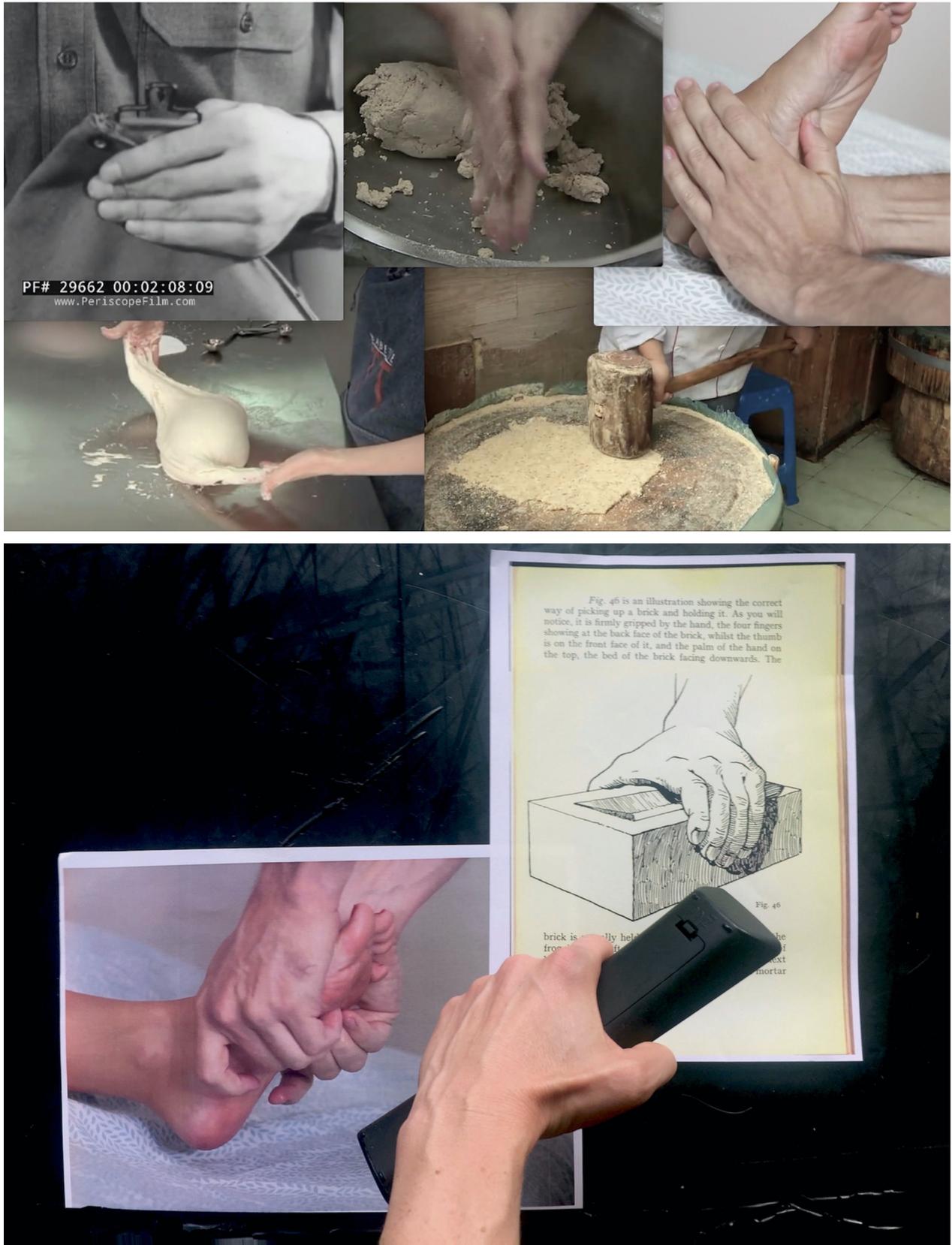


Fig. 23 Anja Borowicz, *Gesture Lab 2 BODYWORKS or WORK IN THE HEAD* (sample visual material), 2019, mixed media collage.

Suppose we take the easiest form first.

The dough should be scaled and allowed to lie.

When ready for making up, lift the piece in one hand and give it a smart slap:

This will make it slightly oval.

Lay the piece down on the table now the longest way from left to right

(just as if you had stretched the piece in front of you with both hands)

Then fold the part close to you fully half-way over away from you

Run the heels of your hands along it to make sure it will stick

Then fold the side furthest from you over towards you

Again run the heels of the hands along

This time not only to stick the pieces together, but to make a slight hollow.

Now fold the further half back on the half next you

Use the heels of your hands again to "close."

Now flatten your hands over the piece.

Move them backward and forward towards the ends of the piece

The idea being to make it full in the centre and pointed at the ends

Fig. 24 Anja Borowicz, *Gesture Lab 2*
BODYWORKS or WORK IN THE HEAD (sample
instructional material), 2019, mixed media collage.

Gesture Lab 2 BODYWORKS or WORK IN THE HEAD (sample listening), 2019, soundscapes.

- 1_Kneading Malleables_live_laptop_recording.wav
- 2_Sound of the Mountain_Craig Pedersen.mp3
- 3_Communion with the Wind_sherylcheung.mp3
- 4_30 MINUTES_ Construction Site Ambience (CC BY 4.0).mp3
- 5_ASMR Office Cleaning (1 Hour).mp3
- 6_SAPPHO and SWEAT. HEAVY Breathing AUDIO 266mb.wav
- 7_BBC_Auto hacksaw cutting through sheet metal_07046073.aup

OBSERVATIONS

The social benefit of mimicry and synchronisation notwithstanding, there was another aspect I observed in myself and others — there is an element of joy in mimicking. GL1 participants shared openly that they enjoyed performing the actions. In GL2 it became visible in simulation, simulating the movement from fragments of instructions, sounds, images, taking on that movement and evolving it. Observing others and transforming into their own embodied response, traces of action visible across other bodies as ripples and echoes. I can imagine the movement awakening muscle memory of similar actions, aural memory activated by the sound recollections, and associative connection made with other gestures. The movement becomes assimilated into our own bodies, layered on top of other movements and enmeshed with other memories,

I speculate: Can these explorations become assimilated into participants' bodies to be drawn upon in future?

I came to the space with selected material and structure for the lab, but it was important to leave the space for participants to develop their own responses. I reflect on the importance of experimentation and sharing. The workshops/events that I found artistically most beneficial, were less focused on techniques but rather on exploring the body as a 'lived in' thing, drawing on everyday references and a wide range of practices. Where different ideas, approaches, elements of research were offered up, transmitted and developed through artistic exchange. The events become exchanges or sharings — sharing of the energy, of movement, of conversations. They are moments of planting seedlings for other ideas.

Finally, different publics have different levels of competence — if I wished to open multimodal exploration to the general public, I would consider more structured framework supported by careful dissemination of the material as instructions. The object-gesture propositions could also be encountered as multimodal installations, where the experience could be hypothesised to awaken mirror neurons simply through observing, listening and reading of the visual, aural and textual.

[GestureLab 3 *BODYWORKS REIMAGINED*]

During the first GestureLab at One Hoe Street, the participants signed a consent form agreeing to be recorded while they responded to archives of working bodies. The silhouettes and shadow projections were recorded by two cameras placed inside and outside the booth. There were around ten hours of material from each of the cameras that were suitable for further development. As the initial idea of using the recordings for analysis of the motor abilities was suspended, I decided to take the idea towards a more imaginary proposition of creating another layer of encounter with object-gesture.

BODYWORKS REIMAGINED would explore the echoes of original movement through secondary mimicry. Artillery, an art organisation that supported GL1, wished to support the development of the idea and it commissioned a video installation in December 2019.

SETUP

The funding for GL3 was part of the Mayor of London events programme linking art, businesses and the general public, and the installation needed to be in a commercial setting. I opted for a crate unit in CRATE St James, a business community of mixed hospitality and creative use. The settings had a couple of main implications. First, for health and safety reasons I decided the installation would be viewed only from outside. Second, as public attention might be divided so any edit would require to be more explicit rather than focusing on more subtle differences and progressions.

The videos from GL1 were edited to fit within the dimension ratio of the space — I reduced the initial idea of triptych presentation to diptych format and opted to take the recording showing participants inside the booth rather than their shadows. The edit combined multiple views, either by overlaying the multiple bodies or by aligning sequences.

The projection was calibrated to be life-size. Initially, the projection was to sit on the photographic film on the glass door but due to the light pollution from outside, the film was replaced by a projection screen and set back half a meter. This created a lightbox illusion of real-life performers being hidden behind the screen.

Without any additional information, the public engagement with the display would be purely visual, as viewers rather than participants.

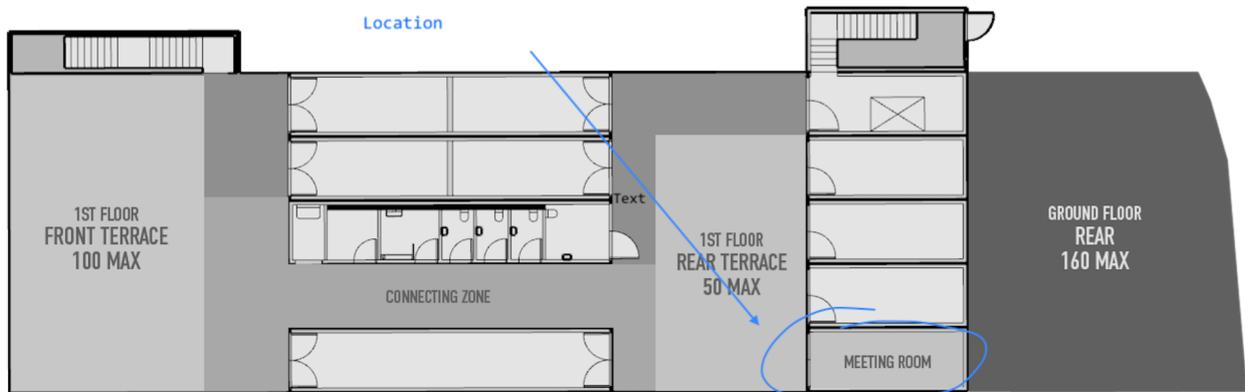


Fig. 25-26 Anja Borowicz, *Gesture Lab 3 BODYWORKS REIMAGINED (location study)*, CRATE St James, London, 2019.



Fig. 27-28 Anja Borowicz, *Gesture Lab 3 BODYWORKS REIMAGINED* (documentation), video installation, CRATE St James, London, 2019. Image credit: James Robertshaw.

OBSERVATIONS

There was a shift of involvement, that of the participant to the viewer, and from event to installation. The installation created another layer of gesture, abstracted from its context, materiality or setting, without any additional clues such as gestic echoes. I sensed that the level of engagement remained at the aesthetic level. The perspective shifted once I explained the context of the project and the video material to the viewers — at that point, they began to look for clues of different actions.

Is there still an affective connection formed between bodies?

I hypothesised that abstracted viewing of gestures may still generate a notion of own movement in the viewer through mirror systems. That secondary mimicry can draw from a memory bank of own action and muscle memory. Reducing the format from triptych to diptych edit created a more intimate presentation and a form of triangulation between two projected bodies and the viewer, rather than a more sociological comparison of movement differences between the bodies. The viewer tunes into the simultaneous movement and synchronises with the projected bodies.

I read that synchrony is affective — shared feeling states often emerge when individuals synchronise their movements with one another, such as walking in sync with a partner, mimicking their postures, facial expressions, and gestures.¹⁶⁶ Affective synchrony gives us pleasure in letting these alignments regulate some emotive functions and responses, we offload these regulative processes onto these shared states, onto the environment. It is a pleasure of reduced cognitive workload. I presume that misalignments, losing rhythm, becoming out-of-sync — all break these emotional connections.

Is the setting problematic?

I reflected on the libidinal circulation¹⁶⁷ of the object-gestures. In my installation, it is the sensuous aspect that threatens to undermine the working bodies, returning again to the tension between the aesthetic and the political. Seen in that light, the installation begins to echo the friezes, fixing the object-gesture in the movement. I again return to the conclusion

¹⁶⁶ Joel Krueger, 'Affordances and the Musically Extended Mind', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4 (2014), p. 3.

¹⁶⁷ Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, *Theories of Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

that bringing back some of the original source material, images and soundscapes, other modalities, would expand the encounter.

[GestureLab 4 SOUNDING-OUT EFFORT] _ test

During the GL2 at Chisenhale Dance Space, I met Nicola Collett, a voice and drama teacher at RADA. We discussed her observations of the lab, in particular the link between activity and sound. Nicola talked about the impact of occupation on the speech of workers in coal mines and textile mills. I jotted down 'sounding body and restrictions' and speculated on scenarios when a body performing an activity or labour may be allowed to sound out, vocalise the effort or it may be restraining, internalising the action.

Previous labs gave a preference to visual sources and mimicking through observing movement layers. GL2 at Chisenhale Dance Space mixed visual sources with dissected instructions and soundscapes but the preference was still given to video and images of the working bodies. The precedence of the visual over other modalities reflects the natural inclination for many. The idea for sound-based lab(s) aims to remove this preference and offer a space for sounding-out and listening-in to the material engagement.

The lab Sounding-Out Effort is proposed as a space to imagine a corporeal engagement with another material surface as and through sound and listen to the embodied response, which the sound may invite. I devised a series of propositions that would underscore the concept of this Lab and invited Nicola to reimagine our conversation in a studio.

_____ Sounding out is voice shaped by occupation. It is a practice of narrow-mouthed speaking of Lancashire colliery men wishing to avoid the coal dust. It is the mew-mowing of women working in weaving factories so they could be heard over the noisy machines.

Sounding out vocalises the effort through quasi-abstract expressions (words or sounds) that support the action. It is the cadence call of hey ho, the phonation of vowels or consonants when exerting an effort.

Sounding out is the sounds of the body, which hisses, puffs and rumbles like a factory does, it grunts and squeaks. These are the internal sounds of the body, some inaudible and muffled yet reverberating inside. Then the others were expelled outwards.

Then soundings out are the gestic echoes of impact, the sound of the encounters between materials or rather between their surfaces (as we can only experience the surface of other materials).

SETUP / TEST

The test session with Nicola took place in the RCA moving image studio on 17 March 2020.

We used the instructional video from the first GestureLab to warm up. I have also brought printouts from the archives of body labours, showing preselected poses and different complexities of working gestures. Nicola observed how these different working gestures can be transcribed as Laban Efforts of Action Drive (Wring, Press, Flick, Dab, Glide, Float, Punch and Slash).¹⁶⁸

Laban's concept of Effort was influenced by his workplace efficiency studies (as described in Chapter 3). It aims to reveal both 'the qualitative range of expression in movement' and the 'display of inner affect'.¹⁶⁹ The method is used by actors, offering a vocabulary to draw from. Choosing ways of carrying out the action is a vital part of expressing character — by changing the way one expresses action, the sensation of the movement, one is able to develop a new physicalisation and transform the way of being in the world into that of others.

We explored these transcriptions, trying to understand different Effort 'quality' and 'emotional content' of specific movements. The pool cleaner, using an overly protracted pole to wipe the bottom of the pool from above, performs the unbound movement, with a sustained speed, light pressure and direct in his arm action. His extended pole-arm 'glides' gently across in the air. The hairdresser 'slashes' and 'flicks' the hair with his hand-scissors. The baker, kneading the dough, is applying heavy direct action, and her movement is bound. She 'presses' the dough with sustained gesture, 'wrings' it indirectly or in multiple directions and then 'punches' it suddenly. Effort types combine and intertwine in working motions.

¹⁶⁸ Laban categorised human movement into four component parts where each part has two elements:

Direction - direct or indirect.

Weight - heavy or light.

Speed - quick or sustained.

Flow - bound or free.

For example, a bound Flow movement is tight and held in, like that of a businessman. A free Flow movement would be the opposite, the movement of running children.

Laban then combined these parts together to create The Eight Efforts: Wring, Press, Flick, Dab, Glide, Float, Punch, Slash

¹⁶⁹ Ed Groff, *Laban Movement analysis: An historical, philosophical and theoretical perspective*. (Connecticut College, 1910) cited in Krista Treu Derington 'Using Rudolf Laban's Effort System as an Inroad to Choreography.' (unpublished master's thesis, The University of Utah, 2015), 17
<<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/276266556.pdf>> [accessed 18 August 2021].

We then started experimenting with ways of voicing these particular actions. Some of the soundings were drawn from memory of heard and experienced grunts and voicing that accompany stronger efforts. For more subtle gestures we imagined sounds. What is the slashing or gliding quality in the voice? Our explorations became gradually braver.



Fig. 29 Anja Borowicz, *Gesture Lab 4*
SOUNDING OUT EFFORT (test), rehearsal,
Moving Image Studio RCA, London, 2020.

POLITICS of vocal utterances

Is there a vocal landscape of effort?

In our conversations, Nicola mentioned anecdotal examples of how the voice can be shaped by occupation. Lancashire colliery men developed a practice of narrow-mouthed speaking to avoid the coal dust, while women working in weaving factories developed a form of speech over-pronouncing and exaggerating the vowels so they could be heard over the noisy textile machines. This made me think of my own language. I am effectively bilingual, with my mother tongue Polish stumped in its growth while I trip over the expressions I have since learned in English. Thinking in English but with a constant disregard for definite or indefinite articles. At certain points of time, living across three countries, my language melody has evolved, and I wonder if having to perform my personality primarily in the English language over the years has changed my architecture of the mouth. I wished to find more about the above anecdotal examples and the relationships between the spoken or sounded performance, the working gesture and their potential impact on cognitive and physical states.

The form of exaggerated mouthing developed by Lancashire mill workers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was called mee-mawing.¹⁷⁰ The clatter of the machines and the bustle inside the weaving shed rendered hearing impossible. The weavers needed to overemphasise their speech both visually and acoustically to communicate over the distances of ten yards. Mee-mawing was a cross between mime and lip-reading and was so ingrained in the behaviour that for private conversation the women would cup their hand over their mouth to obstruct vision rather than attempt to tone down their form of expression. It was said that each mill had its own dialect.

The acoustic communities of the workplace were deemed essential in the processes of production and were reflected in developing the production settings by labour reformers. The Cope's Tobacco Factory in Liverpool was known for its progressive attitude towards

¹⁷⁰ Ron Freethy, *Memories of the Lancashire Cotton Mills* (Countryside Books, 2008), Nigel Barlow, 'Blood, Sweat and Tears of Mill Life Explored in New Exhibition', *About Manchester* (2019) <<https://aboutmanchester.co.uk/blood-sweat-and-tears-of-mill-life-explored-in-new-exhibition/>> [accessed 21 February 2021], Gill Johnson, 'East Lancashire Mill Workers Share Memories in New Book', *Lancashire Telegraph*, 9 October 2008 <<https://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/3742665.east-lancashire-mill-workers-share-memories-new-book/>> [accessed 21 February 2021].

the workers. Rhythm, singing and sound underpinned the din of the workplace, with girls chatting, humming, singing and snatching songs of others.¹⁷¹ Within noisier workplaces, it was more difficult for workers to attain a balance between tonal and work rhythms, and having to draw on different communication methods such as mee-mawing. Where the machine noise was present, vocalising inwards, humming and singing to oneself would be common if allowed.¹⁷²

Inspired by such settings, a combination of tonal and work rhythms was promoted later by Karl Wilhelm Bücher in his 1896 book *Arbeit und Rhythmus* (Labor and Rhythm). Concentrating on work rhythms, Bücher described work as human action, not merely as a means to an end.¹⁷³ The notion of "life-rhythm" appears again in its sonic form as it did in the movement or inherent rhythm of the body for Rudolf Laban. Bücher, and Laban to a certain extent, thought of these rhythms as formulas to regulate the relation between body and production, whereas I am more interested in the body as the source of an internal rhythm in itself, in tension with economic and political aspects, in a chaotic and undomesticated desire. It is the potentiality of exchanging, sharing and inhabiting each other's rhythms that holds the promise. Or subverting the ideas of C.G. Jung — because the infection occurs at an unconscious level, it is precisely the rhythms — psychological, physiological, linguistic, and musical — which are the most powerful viral agents.¹⁷⁴

Therefore, object-gesture extends to the gesture of work speech, vocal utterances and internal vibrations.

¹⁷¹ Joseph Hatton, 'A Day in a Tobacco Factory', illustrated by John Wallace (Liverpool: Office of 'Cope's tobacco plant', 1893), 48 <<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/tf9mtesb>> [accessed 28 October 2021].

¹⁷² Marek Korczynski, 'Music at Work: Towards a Historical Overview' *Folk Music Journal* 8 (2003), 321-322.

¹⁷³ Bücher analysed songs in relation to the work performed (milling, spinning, plucking, dredging, hammering, digging, lifting, circumcising, infibulating, carrying, piloting, scrubbing, dealing with animals, and so forth); in relation to whether work was performed alone or with others; in relation to sexual identity of the workers; and in relation to the cultural identity of the workers. Although no single musical rhythm seemed to dominate relations between song and work, one could nevertheless observe an 'original unity' in which 'labor, play, and art blended into each other' to establish 'rhythm as an economic principle of development'.

Pascal Michon, 'Rhythm as Form of Working Process', *Rhuthmos* (2019), 6 <<http://rhuthmos.eu/spip.php?article2350>> [accessed 27 February 2021].

¹⁷⁴ The awareness of fascist aspects where these considerations apply cannot be dismissed — Friedrich Nietzsche's linguistic rhythms as characteristics of race, Oswald Spengler's psychophysical rhythms of collective metabolism reflected in cultural outputs and C. G. Jung's 'racial infection via exposure to an alien culture's rhythms'. Michael Golston, 'Im Anfang War Der Rhythmus: Rhythmic Incubations in Discourses of Mind, Body, and Race from 1850-1944', *Rhuthmos* (2016) <<https://rhuthmos.eu/spip.php?article680>> [accessed 27 February 2021].

Returning to the initial examples, I could not find evidence of the narrow-mouthed speech of colliery workers. I have though come across research that looked at the listening practices of the miners that would shape their behaviour and when they vocalised.

Miners adapted to the acoustic of the mine by using different modes of listening — from listening-in-search, seeking out conscious clues to background listening, when most of the sounds are expected and do not require conscious effort until an exception arises.¹⁷⁵ The acoustic of the different spaces influenced listening practice. Cart room was the noisiest space, yet the quieter space of the mine shaft required adjusting the behaviour due to the sound being reflected exponentially from the walls.¹⁷⁶ The lift was the quietest space as the miners were mindful of the acoustic signals of the operators and a high propensity for accidents¹⁷⁷ if the communication broke down. Once they exited in the shaft, the rough voices created cacophony resonating and dancing in each direction with nowhere to escape.¹⁷⁸ The walls and floor inside the mines absorbed low-pitched and reflected some of the high-pitched sounds. The miners listened among this collective sound for signals that required response, switching between listening-in-search and background listening, in particular when they needed to load a coal trolley and then ignoring it at other times.¹⁷⁹

OBSERVATIONS from SOUNDING-OUT

I feel that performing soundings-out makes the politics of the embodied sounds more transparent. We accept grunts and loud exhales from a tennis player or a construction worker, but we expect an office worker or a musician to contain their effort. Through thinking about these normative restrictions and habitual expectations, we can potentially explore possibilities for voicing efforts that are silenced or performed in silence (sounding out imagined effort). The reverse could also be performed by silencing or holding in the effort of loud labour, I would call it an act of swallowing sound. Another consideration would be to bring or insert loud labours into quiet zones, making the effort visible through sound.

¹⁷⁵ Barry Truax, *Acoustic communication* (Westport, CT, 2001), pp. 22-25, quoted in Walraven, 'The Noisy City', 176.

¹⁷⁶ Walraven, 'The Noisy City', 177.

¹⁷⁷ Max Lotz, 'Coal Miner', in *The German Worker: Working-Class Autobiographies from the Age of Industrialization*, ed. by Alfred Kelly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 324.

¹⁷⁸ Lotz, 'Coal Miner', 325.

¹⁷⁹ Lotz, 'Coal Miner', 330.

Nicola's idea of using Laban's Movement Efforts has also opened up a further way into performing sound or soundings-out, offering a structure that could be developed for a participatory engagement. During the first Gesture Lab, the booth and the selection of the material was key to successful engagement by the public. The session with Nicola reminded me of the importance of setting and building up confidence when bringing in new participants. I found the vocal exploration more challenging than movement and the gradual warmup exercises helped me to become more playful in the vocal exercises. The privacy or some form of soundproofing of the space would be another consideration.

Sounding-Out Effort lab needs to be thought of as a space of permission for sounding out with or without movement. It is to offer a moment of tuning in or deeper level listening. It is about engaging the everyday sounds and their meshing with internal bodily rhythms. It embraces individual sonic incidents as well as patterns and repetitions while trying to avoid musical associations, which may hijack the gestures. It sonifies working gestures, extending them or even generating new movement.

The lab extends the materials of the previous GestureLabs through the sonic, presuming that gestic echoes activate neuron pathways in the same way they become activated when observing and imagining the action. It imagines that sharing these sonic echoes will enable a form of empathy and connectivity. Therefore, it can afford an opportunity for affective connection and exploring emotional content — it can become a space for performing passionate ethics.¹⁸⁰

Finally, as the session took place days before the first pandemic lockdown, further developments of in-person activities have been put on hold. Unable to explore the material with other participants, I have instead speculated on and researched the potentiality of object-gesture as vocal utterances and gestic echoes.

¹⁸⁰ As proposed by Rosi Braidotti and Micheal Lambek and discussed in Section 3 of Reasonings.

I imagined a listening version of the GestureLab, where different forms of soundings of object-gesture are offered up to take in, listen to, reflect on. A meditative space where one can also listen to their own embodied response to these stimuli. The pandemic has put the plans of a participatory event on hold, but I had an opportunity to explore a test version of the idea during a research academy dedicated to listening.

The Listening Academy took place from 19 to 23 July 2021, it was devised as a part of THE LISTENING BIENNIAL, Berlin and held at the Uferhallen in Berlin and Culpeper Community Garden in London. The programme was led by Lucia Farinati, Carla J. Maier, Budhaditya Chattopadhyay, and Brandon LaBelle, bringing together artists and musicians, somatic practitioners and researchers to share critical knowledge and creative approaches, posing

listening as a critical and creative capacity, one that is both thoughtful and transgressive, caring and complex, enabling a diversity of encounters and negotiations across society.¹⁸¹

I decided to bring to The Listening Academy a series of propositions that draw on my investigation of sounding and vocalising the material encounters. These rely on the presupposition that gestic echoes activate neuron pathways in the same way they become activated when observing and imagining the action. I, therefore, imagine that sharing these sonic echoes enables affective states, empathy and connectivity.

_____ To hear physically means that vibrations or waveforms that are within the range of human hearing (in frequency typically 16hz to 20,000hz) can be transmitted to the auditory cortex by the ear and perceived as sounds.

Listening has very little definition compared to hearing. Though the two words are often used interchangeably their meanings are different.

To hear is the physical means that enables perception. To listen is to give attention to what is perceived both acoustically and psychologically.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ 'The Listening Academy', led by Lucia Farinati, Brandon LaBelle, Budhaditya Chattopadhyay, and Carla J. Maier (Part of The Listening Biennale, London, Berlin, 2021) <<https://listeningbiennial.net/academy>> [accessed 19 August 2021]

¹⁸² Oliveros, Pauline, *Deep Listening*, p. XXII.

SETUP / TEST

The setting and the objectives of the Academy influenced the mode of presentation for LISTENING-IN to effort.

The Listening Academy was set out as a 'nurturing framework' for exchanging and collaborating, taking the format of talks and presentations, 'workshopping new directions' and 'material explorations'. Most of all, the event was fully committed to listening, spanning such diverse areas as modes of listening, rhythms, multi-sensorial practices, sonic agency, care and acoustic commoning, to name a few. I saw it as a sharing space for listening practitioners, similarly as the OPENLAB at Chisenhale Dance Space was a space for movement practitioners, and with that, I would presume a certain level of attunement and experience.

As for the setting, the academy took place in Culpeper Community Gardens, London — both a city park and an environmental community project. Lusciously green, an oasis of 'lawn, ponds, rose pergolas, ornamental beds, vegetable plots'¹⁸³ and wildlife, the location provided a nature-bound grounding and a shared communal setting. The spirit was that of sharing — ideas, knowledge, works in progress, care and support, cups of teas and food. This established specific conditions for my presentation of slow absorption and open curiosity.

I did not develop new material for this mini-Lab but instead focused on offering different modes of listening — listening in motion, listening to recordings, listening to live reading, listening to the video. The material included the sound pieces *Kicking the Drawer*, *Kneading Malleables* [laptop performance], the video *Overlaid Bodies* and the reading *Kneading Malleables* [squeeze stroke smear]. The sound pieces were sent to participants' mobile devices so they can be explored through headphones while walking around. The video was projected on a loop in the community room and I read continuously in the shaded area under the tree in another part of the garden. There was no order specified in which to engage with the individual works, it was up to the listener to navigate through the material and space.

¹⁸³ 'Culpeper Community Garden' (2014) <<http://culpeper.org.uk/projinstall/>> [accessed 24 August 2021]

ACOUSTIC DIMENSION OF OBJECT-GESTURE

One of the listening propositions Kneading Malleables [laptop performance] explored a very particular aspect of object-gesture.

Object-gestures have acoustic dimensions, where echoes of engagement become a source of information. I refer to these echoes as gestic sounds, they reveal a sense of space and a sense of surfaces¹⁸⁴ through which the different materials interact. They perform affectively, creating a felt embodied reaction (especially sounds rich in low frequencies).¹⁸⁵ They can potentially trigger a memory of action as neuroscience has shown the connection between auditory and motor systems in the brain. In that respect, they can stand in for the visual observation of working bodies while expanding the experience to include material echoes.

I propose gestic sound as an everyday echo of object-gesture. Through this, I consider sound as an object in itself taking inspiration from Pierre Schaeffer¹⁸⁶ who, in his phenomenology of the audible, puts forward the idea of a sound object that can represent any sound of the environment. Object-gesture, therefore, is an acoustic encounter, an everyday sound-producing event. For the everyday sound object to appear, there must first be some form of action, and event that causes the interaction of materials. This is further explored by William Gaver, a professor in design and interaction research. Gaver draws on principles of physics and studies of everyday listening when grouping materials into acoustic classes.¹⁸⁷ The classes are vibrating solids, gasses and liquids and their interactions are defined as different sound-producing events. Vibrating solids for example sound out impacts, they scrap, roll and

¹⁸⁴ Jean François Augoyard and Henry Torgue, eds., *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds* (Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).

¹⁸⁵ Julian Henriques, 'The Vibrations of Affect and Their Propagation on a Night Out on Kingston's Dancehall Scene', *Body & Society*, 16.1 (2010), 57–89.

¹⁸⁶ Pierre Schaeffer disrupted academic classifications of noise, sound, and music through his concept of the sound object. The functional understanding of sound object describes it as the interaction of the physical signal and the intentionality, which form the process of perception. The phenomenological approach understands it as a search for the essence of sound. From the perspective of instrumentation, the sound object is a unit of music which can be played or sung. Pierre Schaeffer, Christine North, and John Dack, *Treatise on Musical Objects: Essays across Disciplines*, California Studies in 20th-Century Music, 20 (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017).

¹⁸⁷ William Gaver, 'What in the World Do We Hear?: An Ecological Approach to Auditory Event Perception', *Ecological Psychology*, 5.1 (1993), 1-29.

deform. Gasses explode or produce more continuous sounds like wind or whoosh. Similarly, liquid sounds may be caused by discrete drips, or by more continuous splashing or pouring events. The complexity increases through encounters of different classes of materials (or interaction of different surfaces) creating increasingly complex hybrids.¹⁸⁸

____ Our inner ear, the innermost part of the vertebrate ear, is responsible for both sound detection and balance. It is built in a way that disregards our bodily sounds which tend to work on low frequencies. Our heartbeat for instance has a frequency of 50Hz. People with an oversensitive hearing system (SCDS) will however experience autophony — hearing one's self. The sound of breathing, heartbeat and blood flow or even the moving of the eyeballs will leak inside the inner ear. For most of us these sounds are inaudible in the course of everyday life though they still exist and reverberate in our bodies. The moments of physical engagement, the exertion, the impacts tend to be the bodily sounds we all notice. Neck cracking when the air bubbles in the membranes collapse. The unruly displays of internal self, grunting and groaning, laboured inhales and exhales, sighs, gasps, moans and whimpers, creaking, snapping and cracking.

The noises of gestic impact of material engagement, physical collisions. The slaps and the whacks of the hand, the click and clack of the tools, the scrunch of paper and the chink of metal. Scrapes, scratches, thumps, pounds, hammering and drumming. Different frequencies, different pitch resonating in different parts of the body.

Some sounds are deemed acceptable, the others are shamefully muffled. An anxiety of contamination with the porous bodily boundaries.

¹⁸⁸ Interestingly, the participants in Gaver's studies often misinterpreted the sources of sounds they heard but never across these proposed categories, mixing sounds made by vibrating solid with that of water. See Gaver, 'What in the World Do We Hear?', 14.



Fig. 30 Anja Borowicz, *Gesture Lab 5*
LISTENING-IN (test), presentation during
The Listening Academy, Culpeper Community
Garden, London, 2021.

OBSERVATIONS from LISTENING-IN

In addition to listening to soundscapes and reading, I offered up the video *Overlaid Bodies*. It is an animated sequence showing studies of the actions of a neuroscientist and a hairdresser, the similarities between their positions of spine, hips, shoulders, elbows, and the relationships of the angles and axis. Both bodies are overlaid and the overlaps are annotated. I wished for this animation to be listened to rather than watched, to involve other senses, to imagine listening through the eyes and bone structure, the garden and my reading.¹⁸⁹

I have already touched on the different levels of participation in the GL3 when involving the general public or experienced practitioners. I would like to mention however the potential impact of different spaces for sharing. In this case, the setting was a garden — I was bringing the ‘sounds’ of labour and technology to a space that is removed both physically and conceptually. It is yet another layer that could be described as ‘quantum listening to more than one reality simultaneously’.¹⁹⁰ I put it forward as a way to rewire our habitual ways of perceiving the world, so as to create new ways of relating and connecting to others (subjects or objects, humans or non-humans).

Object-gesture has an inherent motion to it, it is the movement of gestic action but also a motion of material and thinking. I have been thinking about peripatetics in Ancient Greece, the walking philosophers of Aristotle and Socrates schools. *Peripatetic* brings together two Greek roots: a prefix *peri* meaning ‘about’ or ‘around’ (as in perimeter and periphery), and a verb *pateō* meaning ‘walk’ or ‘tread’ (also relating to ‘path’). I wished to take advantage of the garden in that context, walking around while listening-in, exploring that which is in the periphery and finding different paths. It is listening in motion, allowing the sound to steer the body in space. That wish to enable mobile

¹⁸⁹ This proposition of extending our senses through other organs echoes a Buddhist koan ‘the sound of one hand clapping’. The desire to recover multi sensorial way of being and thinking has been written, among others, by

Oliveros, Pauline, *Deep Listening: A Composer’s Sound Practice* (New York, NY: iUniverse, 2005)

Pallasmaa, Juhani, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester; Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Academy; John Wiley & Sons, 2005)

Sansonese, J. Nigro, *The Body of Myth: Mythology, Shamanic Trance, and the Sacred Geography of the Body* (Rochester, Vt: Inner Traditions, 1994)

¹⁹⁰ Oliveros, Pauline, ‘Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory (to Practice Practice)’, 1999 <https://soundartarchive.net/articles/Oliveros-1999-Quantum_listening.pdf> [accessed 6 October 2019]

listening is to some extent reversing the action — the sounds come from an object-gesture motion, from gestic echoes, from the description of an action, from a moving body. Therefore, a walking listening puts the body back in the motion.

It is important to note that the body is not passive while listening and performing actions have an effect on auditory perception.¹⁹¹ Physical gestures can represent the sounds they accompany.¹⁹² This corporeal representation has been shown as related to the level of recognition of the sound source.¹⁹³ Therefore, sound sources and sounds themselves can invite action. In such context, listening in has the potential to help with movement, expanding the range of gestures and encouraging novel forms of movement.

Listening therefore becomes a critical aspect for an everyday object-gesture event.¹⁹⁴ Research in the physiology and psychology of listening seeks to understand the internal processes that are triggered in the listener, the way listening affects our mental and physical states. For the participants unable or less willing to enact movement, static responses would invite internal and embodied reactions, small twitches of the muscles, changes in heartbeat or body temperature. Affective frequencies, rhythms and sonic textures expressed in gestic sounds can have specific outcomes within the listener such as recollection of memories or and metaphoric associations. Modalities of sound could encourage internal growth, cultivating awareness and could therefore be seen as a form of transformative or meditative practice.

¹⁹¹ Pieter-Jan Maes and others, 'Action-Based Effects on Music Perception', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4 (2014) <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.01008>>.

¹⁹² Marc Leman and others 'Sharing Musical Expression Through Embodied Listening: A Case Study Based on Chinese Guqin Music', *Music Perception*, 26.3 (2009), 263–78.

¹⁹³ Baptiste Caramiaux and others, 'The Role of Sound Source Perception in Gestural Sound Description', *ACM Transactions on Applied Perception*, 11.1 (2014), 1–19.

¹⁹⁴ Gaver, William, 'The SonicFinder: An Interface That Uses Auditory Icons', *Human-Computer Interaction*, 4.1 (1989), 67–94

Epilogue

6___on analogue liveness, attunement and collective potential, or conclusion

This section returns to the discipline of sculpture and material practice through reflecting on the findings of this research project. It differentiates a material action as a way to think, talk and make materially even if the work is no longer physically present.

It argues for material action as a form of analogue liveness, incorporating ongoing-ness and corporeal echoes, and for a mode of attunement that carries the potential for individual and collective change.

ANALOGUE LIVENESS — CORPOREAL ECHOS — INACCURACIES —
ATTUNEMENT — COMPASSIONATE STATE — COLLECTIVE POTENTIAL
— SOUND POLITICS — OBJECT-GESTURE AS METHOD — RESISTANCE
— RETURN TO PRACTICE

What is the (expanded) methodology to talk about a practice that deals with physical engagement and material exchange in more fluid and inclusive ways?

[an analogy of physical engagement]

GestureLabs as an exposition of object-gesture became an analogy of physical engagement.

When I re-stage the action the object disappears. The participant's body replaces the worker's body but the object in the object gesture becomes a dispersed echo — present only through the video of body labours, through the instructions they listen to, and the editions of gestic sounds. The object is replaced — it is no longer the material the worker is in contact with, but the material of the artistic medium used to stage the situation. It is the booth, the cameras, the darkness, the monitor, the projected light and the shadow. It is the sound and the language of instruction.

The body is asked to draw on its memories, a bank of past gestural labours, stored as muscular echoes. The memories of situations, the moments that were undeniably individual, the subjective histories are to serve as a pool to draw from, to re-imagine the labour even if it has never been performed. The labours might be alien but many of the actions aren't — the body knows them.

They seek to understand the condition of the object-gesture event. They perform these conditions rather than addressing representation. As such, Gesture Labs allow me to move from representation and activity itself to something in-between.

Can these approaches speak for working bodies and material practices other than those of the artist?

[analogue liveness in material action]

The idea of object-gesture allowed me to probe at the specifics of what differentiates material action (and material thinking) as compared with other forms, such as digital and immaterial practices.

Material action requires effort, with its scope for deterioration and inaccuracies. The degree of effort needed to handle the physical tools or perform a range of actions manually influences the decision on how to execute the material gesture.

I, therefore, assert human presence as a key aspect of that difference. It is an analogue gesture performed live, a form of liveness, which vibrates with corporeal echoes, inaccuracies and passions.

That liveness is analogue, it is different from digitalised liveness, and leads to different forms of knowing and being in the world. Analogue liveness still thinks materially — material describes space, space describes movement, movement describes body. It enables talking about materiality without material, it encourages thinking about how materiality is still present even if the object and body are no longer physical. Analogue liveness recognises the human element, individual perceptions and subjectivities. It is the human presence in action, it is living fire even if the work is no longer physically present.

Paul Sanden talks about liveness as linked to our perception, in his example, it is a perception of musical experience, but I would extend it to the perception of object-gesture, the materialities, the movement, sounds and smells. Sanden puts forward the importance of witnessing in liveness, I would further this thinking to include self-witnessing through attentiveness and attunement.

How it could be extended to other forms such as digital and immaterial practices?

What is the agency of making in this digital space and what is the agency of digital space with making post-Covid?

Analogue liveness draws from and against digital liveness. Phillip Auslander proposes liveness should not be understood as an inherent difference between live and 'mediatized' forms, instead it depends on historical context, cultural aspects and technological developments.¹⁹⁵ By understanding liveness as a fluid category, analogue liveness becomes a reverse move — it embraces the thinking about liveness, as developed for digital technologies but it returns these ideas to analogue.

¹⁹⁵ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (Routledge, 2002).

Therefore, object-gesture as a performance of analogue liveness can be extended into the digital sphere. This is one of the areas, I see as a fertile ground to be explored further — beyond this research project.

I could insert the digital into the analogue: I have started to think about how working gestures could be extended into the digital sphere through different biometric readings. I would gather and translate data of the body obtained, for example, via EMG and other sensors such as accelerometer and gyroscope, even galvanic skin response. Biosensors would record the effort of different performed, mimicked or imagined corporeal engagements. Sensors could then act as an interface, the code transcribing the recorded body data into sonic output. Can the sonic output, in turn, invite an additional embodied response, increase or enhance the range of everyday movement?

I could insert the analogue into the digital: Before the pandemic, I began working with combining gesture, a robotic arm and sensors. I observed how the movement of the robotic arm KUKA is programmed to take the shortest path to goal and wondered if it could take a wasteful approach enjoying fully its 7-axis. I desired to inject the feelings into machine action, to instil passion into a robot. Can the poetics of a hairdresser movement insert passion into the program? Can programming language become choreographic notation for the performer and poetic instruction for the viewer? Can the empathic movement in the machine create human-relating forms of artificial consciousness, a programme that desires to learn emotions?

These are just a couple of ideas, but the creative and political scope is much larger when thinking of digitalisation in amazon warehouses, telematic connections, aleatory movements, with workers as invisible machine servants and so on.

Can this working gesture become a form of self-development, resisting or extending our bodily engagement with the world?

[agency of impassionate self]

Passion¹⁹⁶ in my project is embodied, it is mediated through bodily experience, through working gestures. It has the capacity to matter knowledge, of self (Spinoza) but also knowing of outside, learning through material engagement (Barad). It has become as a space of resistance, an enabler for performing agency (Lambek).

Impassionate action in practice, in sculpture, is the pleasure of material engagement, tuning into the sensuous, it is finding the flow in the object-gesture. By giving into emotions, I invited others and myself to step into a different space of making.

___ It is a space that moves from productivity, takes a side-step away from efficiency. The inattentive space leads to a different way of sensing, of looking, of being. It is the attentiveness of a different kind, that of a useless dimension. It trails on the edge of reason, traversing the hysterical dimension before the return, looking for the beauty in spillages from oozing bodies, in sweat and tremors. It is an interest in failure and imperfections. It walks the border between care and care-less, between the conscientious and the indifferent, between the political and the aesthetic.¹⁹⁷

[attunement with the world]

The research opened up the way I view material practice — thinking of the body as an open metabolic instrument that is continually played by affects and interchanging states, that can respond to the world with an evolving vibration.

My personal albeit irregular practice of Tai Chi,¹⁹⁸ echoed this vibrational thinking through the internal flows.¹⁹⁹ Ch'i is more than energy as frequently translated and understood in Western thinking. It is both a substance and function, it is an influencing substance and that which performs the function of influencing.²⁰⁰ Tai Chi as a practice is a way of enabling that influencing function, of restoring internal flow and removing blockages from the excess of

¹⁹⁶ I am returning here to Lambek, Braidotti and Berardi's propositions of passion, desire and pleasure.

¹⁹⁷ Anja Borowicz, 'CARE-LESS DESIRE', in *CARE(LESS). A SUPPLEMENT TO ON CARE*, ed. by Sharon Kivland and Gemma Blackshaw (MA BIBLIOTHÈQUE, 2021), p. 31.

¹⁹⁸ Tai Chi is commonly understood a practice of increasing body ch'i through sequence of dynamic movements that combine soft and hard, fast and slow motions with controlled breathing.

¹⁹⁹ Caitlin C. Finlayson, 'Performativity and the Art of Tai Chi: Understanding the Body as Transformative', *Southeastern Geographer*, 55.3 (2015), 362–76.

²⁰⁰ The material body is the holding vessel (Yin) and by that holding it affords ch'i function (Yang) Arya Nielsen and Ted J. Kaptchuk, 'Physiology of Gua Sha', in *Gua Sha* (Elsevier, 2013), pp. 21–30.

'desires and anxieties of daily life'.²⁰¹ Practitioners will talk about a sense of transformation that's both metaphorical, but also in terms of the space: 'it transforms you into an open, lighter person'.²⁰²

The object-gesture awareness is a form of attunement across modalities, a form of listening with ears and skin, with eyes and mind. Suspended between the muscular memory of the movement, the knowledge of the processes, from listening for variations to the known to encounter the new material, extension, instruction.

There is a moment of tuning in, simultaneously focused and relaxed in the flow, resonating between the body and the object, fluidity in the movement that has a 'marine quality'²⁰³ about it. Larger movement is made up from repetition of small gestures, of mini-encounters between the materialities. There is a feeling of release in a repetitive gesture, a falling into a rhythm where the body enjoys the movement and the thoughts are flowing loosely, triggering random connections.

Therefore, the practice of tuning in object-gesture became as a space of deep viewing, deep moving, deep listening that carries a transformative potential.

Can it increase our connection and empathy for other bodies, both material and immaterial?

[compassionate state]

There is a distinct pleasure in watching other bodies performing the action, mirror neurons are firing even without movement. Empathy is being developed through watching. It is empathy in other bodies and for other bodies, material and immaterial connection, affecting and being affected.

The law of value becomes suspended on an affective level, passion develops into

²⁰¹ *108 Tai Chi Moves* <<https://www.108taichimoves.com>> [accessed 6 October 2019]

²⁰² Joan, Taoist Tai Chi Society Interview (2011), quoted in Finlayson 'Performativity and the Art of Tai Chi: Understanding the Body as Transformative', 362–76.

²⁰³ Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006), 194.

compassion (after Vishmidt).²⁰⁴ The compassion here would be understood more as 'feeling with' or 'feeling as' rather than 'feeling for'. I agree here with Nietzsche who broke away from Schopenhauer's proposition of compassion, which he saw as pity, which was deeply entrenched in the Christian religion. I am distancing myself from the Stoics' view of compassion, which connects it with suffering. Even Spinoza's perspective is not useful here as he compared compassion to envy as both tend to focus on the Other or the Self, moving us away from 'good' knowledge to differentiating knowledge. I am not interested in forms of compassion that may lead to overindulgence in sentimentality. Nor do I find use here for compassion as a moral faculty leading to charitable acts, while fulfilling the neurologically stimulated desire for self-satisfaction.²⁰⁵ All these compassions are ultimately insufficient as vehicles of resistance.

I wish to think com-*passion* as an enabling force, akin to the way Rosi Braidotti posits desire as nomadic affectivity²⁰⁶ that accelerates sustainable ethics. Com-*passion* of strength, that moves past sympathy and pity into action, whether creative or political as positioned by Nietzsche.²⁰⁷ Mastering com-*passion* in this way enables further growth.²⁰⁸

Can it inspire new awareness and lead to new or different meanings?

²⁰⁴ Vishmidt, 'Situation Wanted', 26.

²⁰⁵ Jorge Moll and others, 'Human Fronto-Mesolimbic Networks Guide Decisions about Charitable Donation', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 103.42 (2006), 15623–28; Joshua D. Greene, 'Beyond Point-and-Shoot Morality: Why Cognitive (Neuro)Science Matters for Ethics', *Ethics*, 124.4 (2014), 695–726.

²⁰⁶ Rosi Braidotti, 'Affirming the Affirmative: On Nomadic Affectivity', *Rhizomes*, 11/12 <<http://www.rhizomes.net/issue11/braidotti.html>> [accessed 11 December 2014].

²⁰⁷ See Nietzsche's writing about pity as a self-pleasing motivation in Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Will To Power* (Vintage Books, 1967), p. 39.

²⁰⁸ This is where it may be more helpful to think through different German etymologies. *Mitleid* is suffering-with, *Mitgefühl* is feeling-with and *Mitempfinden* empathy-with. The test of compassion is within the 'with' element as Nietzsche puts as his own personal challenge "does not consist in feeling with [mitzufühlen] men how they are, but in enduring that I feel with them" Michael L. Frazer, 'The Compassion of Zarathustra: Nietzsche on Sympathy and Strength', *The Review of Politics*, 68.1 (2006), 49–78.

[collective potential]

This research project uses the practices of writing and contemporary art to mix taxonomies and modalities. Initially carried out through intimate artworks and poetic texts, I started to involve other practitioners, publics and spaces.

Gesture Labs enabled me to bring different academic disciplines into the conversation, different types of publics and different spaces of experience. They exposed that mixing different abilities and experiences can lead to the potential collapse of habitual meaning while opening up new conversations, in a way that is non-hierarchical and inclusive. They highlighted the importance of context and conversation over the aesthetic display, and the importance of collective spaces for collaborations, experimentations, work-shopping new creative approaches.

Shared performance of object-gesture fosters awareness, adaptability and cooperation, revealing its collective potential.²⁰⁹

[sound politics]

A rather unexpected discovery of this project was the sonic aspects of object-gestures.

Firstly, it was the discovery of gestic sound — echoes of physical impacts and noises of the body. Also, voice as object voice in Malden Dollar comprised of 'the prosody, the intonation and the accent, the melody, the redundant elements',²¹⁰ I would add the effort utterances. The variability of these sounds and echoes enables deeper sense-making.

There is an ongoing disciplining of the sound - from the sounds we and our bodies make to sounds in our surroundings. The explosive use of Zoom during the pandemic has been reflected in applying options to restrict the undesired and undisciplined through the use of noise suppression to sounds picked up by users' microphones

Background noise, like paper crunching, keyboard typing, fan noise, dog barking, and other noises will be filtered out to create a better meeting experience.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ I am returning here to Marina Vishmidt's proposition that collective potential can be theorised as the becoming-communist of capital 'in unforeseen levels of global exploitation'.

Vishmidt, 'Situation Wanted', 33.

²¹⁰ Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, Short Circuits (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006).

²¹¹ 'Background Noise Suppression Settings for Videos', *Zoom Help Center*

<<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360046244692-Background-noise-suppression->

Yet unrestricted listening allows us to access these internal and external sounds, to hear what is happening, to give space to what is going on. American musician-composer Pauline Oliveros's *Sonic Meditations*²¹² are considered as a healing practice, a 'tuning of mind and body'. An exercise in listening allows for the conscious process of converting the mechanical vibrations into neural signals.

___ *To listen for subtle echoes as a way of expanding the thinking into a more nuanced subtle body.*²¹³

The process of attuning to working gestures can be imagined as an extension of Deep Listening developed by Oliveros as a practice to expand 'dimensions of awareness' and 'attentional dynamics'.²¹⁴ I saw a similar awareness takes place in object-gesture through attentional listening to different modal inputs and outputs, noticing the overlaps and gaps, the fluidity and stoppages or pauses, the flow and moments of hesitations alike.

Deeper level listening proposes to expand dimensions of awareness and attention through the consciousness of sound. It is a process of giving attention to listening — hearing, interpreting and deciding on action.²¹⁵ In my project, it was the hearing and listening to gestic echoes, the internal sounds of the body and external manipulations.

I am extending the proposition of visually activated mirror neurons to an aural sphere. Listening-in and sounding-out can not only expand our engagement but can also replace some of the in-person and physical aspects, lost either through increasingly immaterial conditions or other circumstances like that of social distancing.²¹⁶

Listening may keep us attuned to the ongoingness of life with others.²¹⁷

settings-for-videos> [accessed 4 September 2021].

²¹² Pauline Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* (Smith Publications, 1974).

²¹³ Subtle body (as a religious proposition - In the Bhagavad Gita, the subtle body is described as a combination of the mind, the intellect and the ego, and it is the subtle body that controls the physical. The subtle body is considered to be the various energetic layers that make up a human being beyond physicality.

²¹⁴ Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice* (New York, NY: iUniverse, 2005), p. XXIII.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, XXII.

²¹⁶ These listenings could take the form of meditative podcasts, suggestive exercise routines or imaginary situations with sound and spoken word.

²¹⁷ 'The Listening Academy', led by Lucia Farinati, Brandon LaBelle, Budhaditya Chattopadhyay, and Carla J. Maier (Part of The Listening Biennale, London, Berlin, 2021) <<https://listeningbiennial.net/academy>> [accessed 19 August 2021]

[object-gesture as a term and a method]

My contribution to the field of contemporary art is the compound term *object-gesture*. It is both a mode of practice and a mode of thinking. It is a shorthand as well as a method of making art about the issues of labour and the body.

I explored different behaviours of *object-gesture* to reveal various dimensions of material practice, of what happens in the moment of interaction. It became a process of gathering, collecting what fits within this category — and part of that is describing, or making an account of that which is affiliated and its representations.

OOO posits object withdrawal while I propose that working gesture also withdraws. I, therefore, explored approaches to articulate that in-between, to reveal that which withdraws. I demonstrated how disrupting the perception and exposing modalities of object-gesture challenged this withdrawal and opened up new perspectives and new conversations.

Object-gesture as a term allows for a fluid approach, it has an inherent motion to it. It reflects the movement of gestic action but also enables a motion of materiality and thinking.

As a sculptural approach, it rebalances the focus between the process of making and the outcome. In a similar way, Pauline Oliverios' practice of deep listening led her to reframe music as a 'welcome by-product' of the process of composition, I came to see a sculptural object as a by-product of the process of material engagement, of movement and manipulation, of materials, tools and space — as a derivative of object-gesture.

As a mode of thinking, object-gesture starts from the core and goes out, then returns before crossing the same territory using a different modality. There is circulating, coming back to the same, rhizomatic following of threads, some of which could be unravelled to no end. It embraces the challenge of holding everything together while questioning why things need to be closed off, structured when the structure is the issue.

As a mode of research, it is the weaving together of practical and theoretical, the process of asking, speculating, discovering.

[on resistance]

When I use the term resistance, I return to the proposition of Rosi Braidotti who talks about the project of affirmative ethics²¹⁸ (a variation of nomadic ethics I wrote about in Chapter 3) and which accelerates sustainable resistance.

It is resistance that is based in choice and is therefore an active exit from the system of need, returning to immediate being 'for the itself of labour.'²¹⁹ Resistance that chooses *not* anchor itself in negation or melancholy. While disruption of habits of thoughts and actions can be painful, Braidotti advocates decoupling pain from suffering. — the same events that bring about negative experiences such as oppression or trauma, have the potential to enable positive actions.²²⁰

It is resistance that has capacity to transform. By aligning with the radical French reading of Spinoza's ethics, it follows the ethics of affirmation and it frames passion (which in my project is embodied) as something that activates desire to act and to self-express.

It is resistance that draws on feminist and queer conceptualization of multi-scalar practices. Resistance that is micropolitical — beginning with 'micro-instances of embodied and embedded self' as a 'practice of daily activism or intervention'²²¹ (akin to Alan Kaprow's daily enactments). Resistance that is grounded in the concept of becoming. In opposition of closed, formed and static, it is always in process and open.

Resistance that is a space of pause. Contrary to Marxism-Leninism idea of revolution, it prefers a process of step-by-step changes, taking distance from habitual action, habitual thinking, habitual relating. It generates quieter moments to enable reflection, discussion and opening a space where individual practices and individual bodies begin to relate com-passionately, in solidarity. Resistance that becomes collective and collaborative.

²¹⁸ Rosi Braidotti, 'Affirming the Affirmative'.

²¹⁹ Bruno Gulli, 'The Labor of Fire:', 30.

²²⁰ '[T]he material that damages is also that which engenders positive resistance, counteraction, or transcendence'. Braidotti, quoted in Maud Ceuterick, *Affirmative Aesthetics and Wilful Women: Gender, Space and Mobility in Contemporary Cinema* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), p. 19.

²²¹ Rosi Braidotti, 'Affirmation, Pain and Empowerment', *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 14.3 (2008), 7–36.

[returning to practice]

As this project is located within the field of contemporary art, I wish to make final reflections on the artistic influences and changes to my own practice. The thesis names a limited number of artists (Oliveros, Serra, Rainer, Wentworth) and even these practices are given a specific role in facilitating the research argument, while being positioned alongside other cross-disciplinary references, mythical heroes or efficiency specialists.

The key artists within the field, not mentioned explicitly in this project, but who I wish to acknowledge, include art practices that approach objects and subjects as equal, networked and participatory. Starting with Helio Oiticica's habitable paintings *Parangolés* that foreground bodily interaction, or Franz Erhard Walther soft sculptures *Werkstücke* as 'instruments for processes', to be activated so they can come into meaning. Practices, where objects become co-workers like the refuse tracks in Mierle Lederman Ukeles' work ballets. In particular, I refer to those artistic practices that engage with the meaning of work as effort: Ehamann/Farocki's *Labour in a Single Shot* as filmic documentation of working bodies, Ukeles's *Hand Shake Rituals* that expose less visible forms of maintenance labour, or Francys Alÿs' *When Faith Moves Mountains* engaging 500 volunteers in a futile attempt at moving a sand dune. These practices could be plotted across the axis of different levels of participation — from recording working gestures to engaging with workers and recreating the acts with public. Irrespective of the affinity with the subject matter, my practice departs from 'doing' labour and from its representation, to something that sits in-between. For example, the Farocki/Ehamann's project *Labour in a Single Shot* echoes my approach to recordings of working bodies, yet I see the resulting films as materials to be used further in participatory situations.

I would therefore like to highlight practices of my peer artists, which resonate with these shifts in my project, e.g. Jenny Brockmann's practice that seeks to create a discursive space through creating laboratory-like settings.²²² While I propose object-gesture as sculptural, for Brockmann it is the conversation that is a sculpture — dialogic, material and performative. She is facilitating the situation, objects and bodies to enable the conversations, ultimately bridging different fields, social groups, and human and non-human worlds.²²³

²²² Linda Rocco, 'Jenny Brockmann: Bypass – emergence of voices', *Jenny Brockmann*, 2021 <<https://www.jennybrockmann.de>> [accessed 28 April 2022].

²²³ Having participated in the panel of *Entanglement #1: Into Out-of-Skin*, I observed the how this approach is used to generate different forms of knowledge.

Or the practice of Annie Abraham who works within the internet-based performance, setting up situations and scores for collaborative performances such as *Utterings*, or *Angry Women*.²²⁴ Abrahams's performance pieces seem simple and understated, yet they are only so owing to rigorous and constantly evolving protocols. A scientist by training, Abraham admits to drawing on scientific thinking — setting up experiments, asking questions and collecting responses. Ultimately, her performances are attempts at a machine-mediated intimacy, at penetrating other performers to unveil that which is usually hidden.²²⁵ I see different forms of collaborations and participations enacted in these practices. Abraham's protocols set out simple guidelines for the participants, while Brockmann's situations require more planning and external contributions. Ultimately both artists are seeking collective interconnectivity.

The research project initiated and accelerated substantial changes in my practice. My practice used to be concerned with aesthetics, consciously relating to other artistic practices. It was focused on object-based making and exposing the outcome. I was seeking to expand the sculptural concerns and debates through site investigations, while unpacking labour concerns in relation to the feminist practices of the 1970s. As I was developing the research, my concerns and processes became embodied, and with the addition of the body, I began making space for the emotions and passion in action. The notion of extended sculptural practice became pursued through non-object-based modalities (sound) and expanding conversations to include other disciplines. Instead of pursuing outcome, I think my practice as a space of daily material practice of ideas, actions, experiences.

These shifts would not have been achievable without collaborations and contributions. My key collaboration with the neuroscientist Adela Desowska led to progression from the self-contained multimodal transcriptions to the concept of GestureLabs. This collaboration was significant with regard to expanding my methods, exposing the differences in science-art

Jenny Brockmann curated by Linda Rocco 'Entanglement #1: Into Out-of Skin', with Angela Richards, Kyra Pollitt, Vivi Pamphile (Part of series Jenny Brockmann: #LIMITS - Seat #12, Goethe-Institut London, 2021) <https://www.goethe.de/ins/gb/en/ver.cfm?event_id=22066114> [accessed 1 October 2021].

²²⁴ Abrahams, Annie, 'Angry Women 2021', with Alice Lenay, Amaranta Osorio, Anja Borowicz, Christine Develotte, Colette Tron, Emmanuelle Gibello, Eugenia Cano, Jo Morrison, Karla Ptacek, Mansi Thapliyal, monica de ioanni, Sylvie Roque (Online Event, Magdalena Online Festival, 25 June 21) <<https://bram.org/angry/women/>> [accessed 27 April 2022].

²²⁵ Maria Chatzichristodoulou, 'Annie Abrahams. Allergic To Utopias (Interview)', *DIGICULT* #58, October 2010 <<https://digicult.it/digimag/issue-058/annie-abrahams-allergic-to-utopias/>> [accessed 28 April 2022].

approaches, methods and ethical responsibilities.

Collaborations require aligning different objectives, adopting 'self' to co-create a change, generosity of gifting but also dealing with more practical considerations of logistical obligations or funding. Seen in this light, I began to enact project through smaller interactions, thinking of these as 'soft collaborations' — contributions, participations, conversations and sharings with movement practitioners, a voice coach, a tai chi teacher, a hairdresser and a ceramicist. Many of these would be unrefined, unstructured and instantaneous. I would also perceive different publics and spaces as participants and 'soft contributors' to my own practice. Development of GestureLabs and staging those in One Hoe Street, Chisenhale Dance Studio or Culpeper Gardens relied on the principles of public exchange. Collaborations and participations enabled continuous testing of ideas, their bending or adjusting.

Within this notion of reciprocity, I became aware of my own contributions, seeking out opportunities to share my research propositions, voice and body with other projects.²²⁶ It is in that respect that I enact collective resistance.

²²⁶ E.g., *Utterings of Annie Abraham, School of Broadcasting* with Radio Arts Catalyst, *Zoom Intimates* project with DasHaus Lab.

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Appendix: Ethics Approval

From: RCA Ethics ethics@rca.ac.uk 
Subject: Research Ethics Application - Result
Date: 6 October 2021 at 16:33
To: Anja Borowicz anja.richardson@network.rca.ac.uk
Cc: Joanne Tatham joanne.tatham@rca.ac.uk, Francesca Bowen-Watts f.bowen-watts@rca.ac.uk

Dear Anja,

Many thanks for submitting your Research Ethics Application Form. This has been reviewed and we are pleased to inform you that, based upon the information supplied, we can approve your application and you can progress with your research.

Please note that should you make any changes to this research project, you may need to apply for further ethics approval.

Please contact us at ethics@rca.ac.uk if you have any questions about the ethics process.

Kind regards,
The Research Ethics Team

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