

Encountering Gesturing Bodies



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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

9th October 2019

Abstract

Encountering Gesturing Bodies seeks to explore the unconscious/psyche manifesting itself through the gesturing body. The project focuses on the materialisation of anxiety expressed through the gesturing body, drawing inspiration from the inner (private) feelings that can often be distinguished through the rhythmic patterning and repetition of gestures. My interest lies within the negotiation between the body that is performing and the body that is receiving the action/performance. This project uses video and large-scale projection as a means to facilitate the viewer in an embodied exchange. Through heightened awareness, to the observation of minor but persistent gestures, *Encountering Gesturing Bodies* is an investigation not only into the unconscious and the psyche, but also affective and haptic relations.

Introduction

Encountering Gesturing Bodies is a practice-led project realised through moving image. The project focuses on the gesturing body and how it exposes its relationship to the inner workings of the human psyche. My project emerged through the investigation and re-enactment of a personal memory; this memory is contextualised in the Positioning of Practice section of the exegesis. In this section I also discuss how the re-enactment process and the resultant video work acted as a form of therapy, creating an interest in and exploration of the manifestations of anxiety-driven gestures. Through my engagement with anxiety driven gestures comes the recognition of how the body is utilised as a tool for communication and how it assists in forming affective relations.

Situating of the Personal - outlines the personal drivers of my practice; it looks at professor Ann Cvetkovich's feminist theory and how using one's own story allows for a sense of closure. It looks at the context of witnessing and how it helps with a better understanding of the work. Art historian Diana Nemiroff talks about the idea that the most provocative performances are those that encourage a physical or psychological form of engagement; this idea is analysed through the elimination of personal narrative. Throughout this exegesis, I utilise philosophers Sigmund Freud's and Carl Jung's theories regarding the unconscious, because the workings of the psyche are at the heart of my project. By filming the gestures of my subjects, I interrogate the relationship between the unconscious/semi-conscious states; for example, nervousness or anxiety and the nature of these gestures as they emerge from within the performing body. Artist Jackson Pollock utilised the gesturing quality of his own body, as he believed his actions/gestures could draw upon the unconscious to convey his inner thoughts and psyche. These ideas are examined in Unconscious Impulses section of the exegesis alongside the psychoanalytical research, which contextualises my thinking and the development of my practice.

In the section titled Gesturing Body, the body is employed as an agent for conveying private thoughts, disclosing them into the public realm while maintaining distance. It looks at philosopher Elizabeth Grosz' definition of the body as being an agent for the psyche, along with French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's value of hand movements. Discussions around the gesturing body and the gestures themselves are examined throughout this chapter. Artists such as Torbjørn Rødland, Anthony Goicolea, and John Coplan are investigated for their

employment of the gesturing body and affective relations. My practice focuses on affect transmission and haptic relations. These concepts are discussed in *Gesturing Body* and further contextualised in *Haptic and Affect Relations*. The body makes sense of being affected through emotional registers; to be affected means it has the ability to act and be acted upon. These ideas are explored in *Haptic and Affect Relations*. My research includes philosophers Brian Massumi and Teresa Brennan as well as professor Jill Bennett in regard to affect and its relationship in regard to trauma and event. Media theorist Laura Marks' film theories provide rich discussion regarding the haptic, and how artwork can not only affect the viewer, but also touch them haptically. The potential for realising embodied experiences through an engagement with the cinematic/moving image work is discussed in *Cinematic Experience*. It looks at artist Luke Willis Thompson's *Auto-Portrait* (2017) in regards to engaging an affective encounter. Media theorist Vivian Sobchack articulates the relationship between the body and film operating as an exchange between two entities; this idea is examined in relation to creating an embodied exchange.

Positioning of Practice

This project began by addressing the personal in regard to trauma and memory, and shifted beyond the personal by acknowledging that the residual anxiety created through such an event can, in itself, become the focus of the project. As I negotiated the separation between myself and my story, I developed a greater understanding of anxiety and its expression through body language. This mediation helped heal the past and moved the project toward a more psychologically rewarding set of observations and translations, ultimately manifesting in the production of a set of video recordings.

I explore the gesturing body, with a particular interest in the spontaneous gestures that spring from unconscious emotional states manifesting from deep within the psyche and take up residency within our everyday. I am especially interested in the minor but persistent and rhythmic gestures that often arrive unannounced and function in support of the incumbent inner states of being. It is my awareness and interest in the threshold between the noticed and the not-noticed aspects of these gestures that drives this practice, and how they often fold into sociality and/or event as a natural phenomenon. When we experience the portrayal of our emotional state of being, revealed through the observation of minor gestures, we further understand the hidden negotiations of our corporeality within the context of our body-mind relationship and our humanness. The body operates as a kind of visible platform for rendering publicly what is effectively private. What I mean by this is that the body acts as a surrogate to the self in communicating private thoughts and feelings within the public arena. Our body is a tool for bodily communication; we communicate emotions and feelings through body language and gestures, without strictly being conscious of the disclosure. Body language, in this sense, carries a deeper, more personalised form of communication. It brings with it psychological frames of reference that belong to the performing body's affective and psychological workings.

Philosopher Elizabeth Grosz (1994) discusses the body acting as an agent for communicating publicly what should effectively be private. I too appreciate the concept whereby the psyche can be released, or tempered by the actions of the body as it appears to do the psyche's bidding. My moving image work utilises the micro gestures that accumulate as repetitive patterning, both as content and the vehicle for affective relations operating within the encounter of the work. This happens by way of exploring the manifestation of embodied

exchange during the viewing of the work and the affective experience negotiated between the body that is ‘performing’ and the body that is receiving the action/performance. I am interested in exploring and understanding how gestural acts translate the emotional activity of the psyche through their expressed rhythm, repetition and duration.

Affect relations are the relationships formed through our engagement with an affective encounter within our proximity, including works of art. We can be affected as well as infected by everything nearby, and how, often the repetitive gestures that belong to others infiltrate our body-mind system without invitation or agreement. I am interested in these negotiations; for example, I explore gestures which are familiar or recognisable and that create an affective understanding within the encountering process. Gregg & Seigworth suggest:

Affect is integral to a body’s perceptual becoming (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is), pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, the forces of encounter. With affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself – webbed in its relations – until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter (Gregg & Seigworth 2010, p. 3).

This quote resonates with my practice, as it explores how the gestures utilised can manifest an affective response in the viewer through encountering the moving image. I am interested in how the gestures perceived in their intimate capacity can evoke a felt response inside, as well as outside the body.

Situating of the Personal

My project began through the exploration and re-enactment (through various means) of a traumatic scenario which was deeply embedded in my psyche and memory. This trauma was brought about through the experience of my father abandoning me at a very young age. As I worked through the chronological states of trauma, held in conjunction with my memory, the exploration and re-enactment served as a form of therapy. The therapeutic returning to the event and addressing the emotions associated with the event, within a safe and ordered sensibility, allowed me to grieve for the father that broke my trust. By returning to this particular scenario I was provided a form of closure that enabled me to not only come to terms with the event but also to move the project beyond my own personal narrative. As I took a step back, I was able to distinguish small but pertinent elements of interest that began a new exploration into the repetitive gesture and its ability to soothe. I notice how feelings can still linger within the memory and/or psyche and can be prompted to be expressed through movement, body language, and gesture. Our bodies automatically respond to their anxieties as they leak their anxious moments into the air we breathe. By maintaining the dynamic body as the subject of my work, but forgoing the trauma narrative, the personal has been contained, thus allowing for a more conceptual engagement to rise to the fore.

Utilising feminist theory, writer / artist Ann Cvetkovich discusses the movement towards addressing the personal in art-making, and how by women telling their individual stories it allows them to heal themselves (Gorton, 2007, p. 335). I felt that by originally pursuing my personal story and engaging in the re-enactment, I gained adequate healing to move on. Within my practice, the body's inner psychological emotions can be expressed, without having to verbally or physically narrate the personal. This has allowed me to explore the responsive body without having to disclose my personal psychology and its bearing on my life history.



Figure 1. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Fiddling Hair*.

Psychoanalyst and child survivor of the Holocaust, Dori Laub, discusses the context of witnessing. She identifies the need to tell one's own story, not so the author/artist can know the truth, but those viewing the work can come to know and process the experience themselves (Bennett, 2005, p. 31). The witnessing of such stories provides a particular kind of experience and is capable of creating personal feelings towards the work. By reducing or eliminating the narrative (and in my case the use of looped moving image scenarios), the artist forces a proposition that belongs somewhere between a construct and a recognisable or relatively familiar reality. Within my project, this construct includes a repetitive and affective visual language created through particular and pertinent body movements belonging to the subject. Work of this nature has the potential to trigger ideas through its repetitive and affective constructs. Art historian Diana Nemiroff suggests:

...the most provocative performances for the camera are those that engage the spectator on a conceptual level to participate either physically or psychologically in the action of these occasions. The communicative exchange at the heart of all performance is set in motion, and the social implications of the performance are understood (Nemiroff, 2005, as cited in Smith, 2012, p. 90).

By forgoing the personal in my practice, I was able to connect to a wider audience. My focus shifted beyond the personal to focusing on how to make the work more conceptual, so that it engaged others, not just myself. Nemiroff's quote gets me out of my own thinking to a more psychological way of thinking, as to how I can make the work have an affective presence.

Unconscious Impulses

The conscious portion, like the visible part of an iceberg, is small and insignificant. It presents only the surface; that is, only a superficial glimpse of the total personality. The vast and powerful unconscious—like the portion of the iceberg that exists beneath the water's surface—contains the instincts, those driving forces for all human behaviour (Schultz & Schultz, 2011, p. 309).

Authors Dane Schultz & Sydney Ellen Schultz discuss philosophers Sigmund Freud's and Carl Jung's contributions to psychology, including Freud's concept of the Freudian slip; thus, "that in everyday behaviour, unconscious ideas struggling for expression affect our thoughts and actions. What might seem a casual slip of the tongue or act of forgetting is actually a reflection of real, though unacknowledged, motives" (Schultz & Schultz, 2011, p. 301). They talk about Freud's concept of the unconscious mind influencing human behaviour, and how Freud argued that mental life is devised of two fragments: conscious and the unconscious. Freud focused his research on the idea that the unconscious and dreams were driven by sexual desire (Sedivi, 2009, p. 4).

I am interested in the body's unconscious narrative being made visible to the outside world by way of gestural acts. In my work, I utilise these casual slips/gestures to discuss the ideas surrounding them. The gestures I am interested in hang between consciousness and unconsciousness, they are on the threshold of converging between being normalised and accepted and/or strange and affective. They explore the territory of being recognisable as natural body movement and offering an affective engagement. I use repetition as a means to explore our response to seeing and feeling the pace and rhythm of compulsive acts within moving image work. Freud refers to repetition as being a compulsion to repeat (Martin, 2006, p. 26). Freud saw these repetitive, compulsive movements as a direct reference to the unconscious, as well as the uncanny. He suggests:

...for it is possible to recognise the dominance in the unconscious mind of a compulsion to repeat proceeding from the instinctual impulse...a compulsion powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle whatever reminds us of this inner compulsion to repeat is perceived as uncanny (Freud, 1983, as cited in Marin, 2006, p. 91).

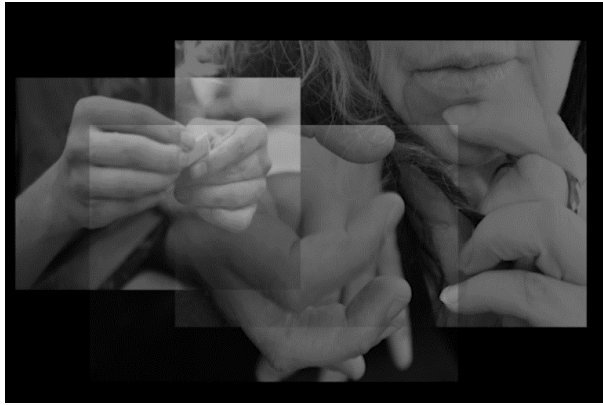


Figure 2. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Paper, Finger, Hair play*.



Figure 3. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Pen Play*.

French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty saw the body as a medium for meaning and the role of gesture in our vision. In describing what might be a model of automatism,¹ he states, “my movement is not a decision made by the mind... my body moves itself; my movement is self-moved as the autonomous order of the composite of soul and body” (Johnson, 1993, as cited in Martin, 2006, p. 49).

Turning to the Psyche

Jung’s theory is based on the conscious and unconscious being undoubtedly linked to the psyche. He argued that the “psyche is a part of nature, and its enigma is as limitless” (Jung & Franz, 1978, p. 6). Jung “determined that the *psyche* consisted of three parts: the conscious, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious” (Jung, 1964, as cited in Sedivi, 2009, p. 6). According to Jung, the conscious encompasses perceptions and memories that enable us to adapt to our surroundings (Jung, 1964, as cited in Sedivi, 2009, p. 6). “The personal unconscious consists of experiences or thoughts that at some point were conscious but have become unconscious, these include all the memories, impulses, faint perceptions, and other experiences in a person’s life that have been suppressed or forgotten” (Jung, 1964, as cited in Sedivi, 2009, p. 6). The collective unconscious is acutely embedded in the psyches of all humans and has been depicted as “a kind of racial ancestral memory in which the

¹ Automatism, as defined by Andre Breton, is “psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express-verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other matter, the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern” (Anapur, 2016, para 3).

cumulative experiences of generations past [are] embedded deep in the psyche” (Benjamin, 2007, as cited in Sedivi, 2009, p. 7). Jung posits that:

In addition to memories from a long-distant conscious past, completely new thoughts and creative ideas can... present themselves from the unconscious – thoughts and ideas that have never been conscious before. They grow up from the dark depths of the mind like a lotus and form a most important part of the subliminal psyche (Jung & Franz, 1978, p. 25).

In my practice, I utilise gestures which I believe are reflections of the inner psyche, and which arise through unconscious impulses. These gestures are the movements we make instinctively or habitually. They become so familiar to us that we don’t even know we are doing them until someone points them out. Jung refers to this as *archetypes*, which are human movements that “influence how a person feels in a certain situation, they mostly control the emotions or state of mind” (Sedivi, 2009, p. 8). For example, these archetypes create a reaction, for instance, when we are scared or in danger; a specific response emerges, reflecting how we are feeling on the inside. Jung stipulates that archetypes emerge spontaneously, in any form at any time. Philosopher Carl Jung and swiss Jungian psychologist Marie Louise von Franz state:

What we properly call instincts are physiological urges and are perceived by the senses. But at the same time, they also manifest themselves in fantasies and often reveal their presence only by symbolic images. These manifestations are what I call the archetypes. They are without known origin; and they reproduce themselves in any time or in any part of the world (Jung & Franz, 1978, p. 58).

Jung and Franz talk about the unconsciousness coming through in bursts of impulses which arrive unintentionally. They state that “there is a world of difference between a conscious decision to split off and temporarily suppress a part of one’s psyche, and a condition in which this happens spontaneously, without one’s knowledge or consent and even one’s intention” (Jung & Franz, 1978, p. 8). Writer Paul Bishop suggests that impulses arrive unannounced, and that the crucial insight in the psyche is that we do not produce things, but it produces itself. But our psyche presents itself and has its own life (Bishop, 2014, p. 123). He says, “the psyche is something autonomous” (2014, p. 123). According to authors Donald Lathrop, Mark E Stern, and Karen Gibson, the psyche can connect inner and outer worlds; it creates an

awareness which was not there before (Lathrop, Stern & Gibson, 2013, p. 19). Writer Harvey Fergusson devised a model of the mind; he saw the mind as an impulse-action mechanism. Whereby impulses that came from the unconscious and moved to the conscious part of the mind, were then felt as emotion. (Leja, 1997, p. 187). “From there, the impulse ideally is transferred into action, that is, the spontaneous expenditure of energy upon the environment” (1997, p. 187). Fergusson cites a writer employing a spontaneous technique in their creative process and how in that process, the writer embodies feelings and becomes a more conscious being than he was before. This idea of the writer’s body initiating affect can also apply to the gesturing body. It embodies feelings and emotions while performing gestures which come into being as representations of the psyche. As mentioned in the introduction I draw inspiration from artist Jackson Pollocks thoughts and use of the gesturing body and how he used the actions of his body (shown through his impulsive drip technique) to “depict his inner forces or the unconscious” (Sedivi, 2009, p. 34). Pollock surrendered his “conscious control of the painting in order to express his psyche through gesture” (Sedivi, 2009, p. 34).

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Figure 4. Jackson Pollock, (1952), *Blue Poles, Number 11*.

I am interested in a closed circuit or engagement of the body responding to itself, by way of exploring the slippery slope between a performance and the reality of the subject moving into its natural body gestures. What interests me in this closed circuit is the knots of the inside body and how it can come into being through these gestural acts. With the subjects gesturing body in mind, I utilise the differences occurring between a gestural act operating in the proximity of the camera being a performance and being a gesture that is involuntarily occurring, purely from an internalised mechanism. The subject knowing the camera is there as well as not knowing, ultimately becomes part of the play between reality and fiction, consciousness and unconsciousness. These binary states that filter into the content of my

work, somehow enable a porosity to occur between each other. I am interested in how such minor gestures can prompt a switch between a body in reverie and a performance enacted.



Figure 5. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Grooming Beard*.

Writer Anne Martin understood repetition as “an interrogation of the other through bodily movement, which is repeated to become a rhythmic process of autonomous intensity” (Martin, 2006, p. 95). She conveys “repetition is a machine for remembering, it is a process of remembering without trauma, of remembering what has never touched the conscious mind because it threatened the psyche and could not, therefore, be consciously absorbed” (p. 95). I have noticed through undertaking this research that I make my own gestures when I am stressed, anxious, or not paying attention. I notice while engaged in these gestural acts that they have a compulsion to repeat; it is as if this compulsion to repeat is keeping me calm, the familiar nature of the movement hypnotic and soothing. Even though these gestures hint at coming from the unconsciousness of the psyche, there is a soothing-ness or something in the action that puts the anxiety of the performer, artist, and viewer perhaps at ease. While these gestures derive from something stirring within us, it also has the ability to affect us in a positive way.

Gesturing Body

The gesturing body as subject is central to my practice. It makes public the thoughts, feelings, and affective relations that are essentially private negotiations. The body can, and often does, lay bare our hidden agendas, sometimes in an obvious manner, sometimes in small seemingly irrelevant repetitive movements.

Grosz defines the body as an agent for the expression of an otherwise “sealed and self-contained, incommunicable psyche” (Grosz, 1994, p. 9). She suggests that through the body, the performer can express his or her (self) in subjectivity. It is through the body that he or she can translate meaning and representation of both the internal and external world (p. 9). Our inner psyche has a knowing of something before our conscious mind has grasped it. I am interested in the process whereby the ‘voice’ of the psyche spontaneously arrives through the gesturing body. Examples can be found in repetitive gestures and their ability to either soothe or annoy; lull or disrupt. These qualities, when expressed and experienced, can find ways of evoking a recognition of feelings within the body; the feelings that rise to the fore when the inner psyche externalises itself within the physicality of the body.

The body has the ability to converge between the private and public domain; it can subtly shift the private into public awareness while also allowing distance to be maintained.

Professor Lauren Berlant discusses how one of the central themes in dealing with emotion and affect is the intrusion of the private into the public realm; she refers to this as the ‘intimate public sphere’ (Berlant, 1974, as cited in Gorton, 2007, p. 335). The body plays a significant role in my practice; I use the body as a tool for communication, specifically a tool for the translation of emotions. My artwork highlights the dexterity with which hands and fingers can do their ‘talking.’ These finely tuned movements reveal intimate and personal details of the subject; however, they do this in isolation, not necessarily within the context of the subject’s actual identity.

Media theorist Laura Marks cites philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s concept regarding the value of hand movements in artist Robert Bresson’s film, *Pickpocket*, thus, “the hand doubles its prehensile function (as object) by connective function (of space): but, from that moment, it is the whole eye which doubles its optical function by a specifically grabbing (haptic) one”

(Marks, 1998, p. 337). This concept is useful because it describes the sense of touch, separating affect from its narrative purposes, allowing a cinematic space to be achieved. Marks discusses how instead of identifying with whose hands they are and getting a sense of touch, it would be better to think of the hands as characters in a story, and so through this the haptic experience, bypasses such identification, and instead becomes an identification with touch itself (p. 337).

Marks questions Deleuze's concept of the "haptic" filmic images of hands, she suggests that hands evoke the sense of touch through identification, either with the subject or merely with the hands themselves. (Marks & Polan, 2000, p. 171). While hands can evoke a sense of touch through the identification process, they do not necessarily evoke a haptic quality. I am interested in how hands, in particular, can have both identification and dis-identification. I am drawn to hands for their ability to reveal something about the body. The hands, by their very nature and utilisation of gesticulation, become a form of body language. In my practice, I am exploring the notion of intimacy, brought to bear through the close-up and its accompanying provocative textural affect. The close-up gives licence for the viewer to engage at close proximity in a manner that is otherwise denied.



Figure 6. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Closed Hands*.

Artist Torbjørn Rødland's photographs are often staged, portraying the body in intimate situations; they are filled with tension and complex emotions, allowing for multiple interpretations. He is interested in revealing our complex and layered reality through individual body parts such as hands, knees or ankles, and how they come into being "staged

topologized characters in the midst of telling a moment” (Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, 2019, para 2). Rødland’s hand photographs explore Deleuze’s haptic definition, as the hand is shown in the midst of telling a narrative, enabling its own encounter (frozen in time) and our affective encounter with it. There is a tension in the image, between an act of aggression and an act of love, a subtle shift of the ring either going on or coming off. This is an excellent example of the tension that occurs in body language when distilled into moving images.

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Figure 7. Torbjørn Rødland, (2017), *The Ring*.

Situating of Gestures

As these gestures move between a confident or anxious movement, they bring about provocation of gender identity. Whether it be residing in the actual hand, or residing in our understanding of male confidence and female gentle-ness or even in the way the work has been filmed, this provocation seems to arrive through affect relations and the encounter. I am interested in this provocation and the slippages that occur within this, the assumptions that

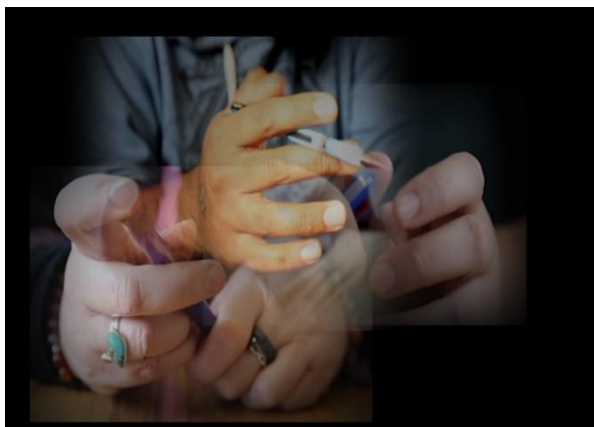


Figure 8. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Multiple Clicking Pens*.



Figure 9. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Thumb Rubbing*.

can be made and how it ignites questions about gender, colour, and/or age. While my work is not intentionally looking at gender

differences or feminism, during the making I came to realise that some of these ideas have arrived on screen, although it was not my intention.

Artist Anthony Goicolea's moving image work titled *Nail Biter* (2002), portrays a young boy sitting on a bed, nervously biting his fingernails. He employs repetitive actions which come across as compulsive and obsessive. This nervous/anxious affect is achieved within the duration of the work as the pace of biting quickens and nail shards gather around the boy. Goicolea also uses an amplified heartbeat within the soundtrack to create a feeling of suspense. He turns our recognition of this every day nervous habit into a powerfully affective engagement with the abject. We are lured into a process whereby we can identify with the subject and simultaneously feel the underlying disgust of their behaviour. While viewing work of this nature, we can be positioned between wanting to look away and wanting to keep watching in the hope of finding closure. When closure cannot be experienced, the affect relationship belonging to our encounter with the work persists, and in doing so is difficult to ignore or forget. The work and feelings they provoke resonate long after our engagement with the artwork.

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Figure 10. Anthony Goicolea, (2002), *Nail Biter*.

Often at the beginning of a moving image work that employs the body and its gestures, we can bring to bear our own experiences or understanding as we familiarise ourselves within the act or event, even though we may not carry out the specific act or gesture ourselves. Through the repetitive action taking place, along with the manipulated duration of the gesture (especially when the moving image work is looped), the familiar gesture turns from being recognisable to something abhorrent; beyond our recognition. In contrast to Goicolea's fast-pace action in *Nail Biter* (2002), which helps position the act as a fantastical exaggeration, my work explores the portrayal of the casual or more subtle gestural acts expressed at their natural pace, which provides access to a recognisable 'personal.'



Figure 11. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Bracelet Play*.

In *Birthday Suit with Scars and Defects* (1974), artist Lisa Steele uses her body to consider how emotional content is communicated through the gesturing body performing these repetitive gestures or acts; she uses her own memory to influence her work. Steele explores unconsciously-driven physical caresses of her scars, repetitively touching them while talking into the camera, explaining how she got them. She states how the repetitive nature of her caresses emerged spontaneously during her performance as part of some mysterious, unconscious impulse (Steele, 2008, as cited in Smith, 2012, p. 104).

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Figure 12. Lisa Steele, (1974), *Birthday Suit with Scars and Defects*.

In my practice, I draw inspiration from Steele's touch and use these to influence how the gesture is acted out. I encourage the subject to try and get in touch with their unconsciousness and see if they can draw any gestures out, which are a reflection of their inner psyche. I explore ways that the camera pushes personal boundaries and how far is too far in documenting a gesture. The gestures I explore engage in repetition; I am investigating this repetition in relation to the psychological affect of the unconscious. Writer Matthew Smith refers to the idea of repetitious contact as being a reference to the unconsciousness's attempt to mend and repair latent psychological wounds (Smith, 2012, p. 106).



Figure 13. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Picking at Nails*.

Artist John Coplans is interested in the decaying body. I employ a similar concept to that which Coplans employs – the exclusion of the face. It is the gestures which I am interested in; not the subject's identity. Also, I explore gender neutral gestures which, while not talking about gender, seems to ignite questions about it. Coplans excludes the face because he does

not want the work to be about a specific body, but a body which becomes a universal representation of age and decay.

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Figure 14. John Coplans, (1985), *Self-Portrait (Hands Spread on Knees)*.

Coplans is interested in examining the “deeper, unconscious drives and image of manhood, revealing his hidden inner life is not without its comic aspects. He is actor, spectator, creator, dupe, inquisitor and squealer” (The John Coplans Trust, 2002, para 2). While not exploring gestures per se, Coplans explores ways for his body to act out reflections of his thoughts and inner psyche. He says:

....my approach, however, is intuitive. I am not as concerned with meaning as I am with its expression, as it reveals me to myself. In a strict sense, I have no prior ideology. The gestures I make and the images I capture must ring true even though they are the product of my fancies and thoughts, of my picturesque and amusing associations encoded into a personal sign language of non-verbal confessional (The John Coplans Trust, 2002, para 4).

Coplans’ thinking links into my investigation of gestures being a representation of an internal mechanism. I encourage the subject to let their body speak through these gestures not their mind. Coplans suggests that the expression of the internal reveals itself, not the meaning; an idea which interests me.

Affect and Haptic Relations

Affect can be transmitted through one person and entered into another; it can also be encountered through the atmosphere. During a collective encountering of an artwork, emotions and feelings can be caught and entered into another; affect has the capacity for acting and being acted upon. Marks discusses the idea of the haptic which encourages a more

bodily way of seeing and experiencing the work, the haptic has the ability to ‘touch’ the viewer both on the inside and out.

Bodies can catch feelings as easily as catch fire: affect leaps from one body to another, evoking tenderness, inciting shame, igniting rage, exciting fear – in short, communicable affect can inflame nerves and muscles in a conflagration of every conceivable kind of passion (Gibbs, 2001, para 1).

I am interested in writer Anna Gibbs’ term ‘contagious feelings’, in that feelings can be caught by other people. This focus links into Smith’s writing around how it allows the viewer to engage through cognitive and affective processes that involve emotion, memory, identification and the body by using such a personal topic (Smith, 2012, p. 2). I am interested in encouraging ways of getting the viewer engaged in a cognitive process, which allows for embodied exchange.

Professor Jill Bennett describes an “affect as being an embodied sensation and a process of seeing feeling, where it is both imagined and regenerated through an encounter” (Bennett, 2005, p. 41). Philosopher Brian Massumi believes an affect is a demonstration of “an interactive phenomenon which is captured by the qualification of emotion” (Massumi, 1995, p. 84-86). He talks about an affect as being a contagion and how it can be transmitted from one person to the other (Massumi, 1995, p. 96). Both Massumi & Bennett suggest that “the body makes sense of affect through emotional registers” (Smith, 2012, p. 50). Philosopher Teresa Brennan talks about how an affect, not only arises within a person but comes from without as well. Affect is produced through interactions between people and environments, creating a physiological impact. In summary, an affect entails that the emotions of one person or their affect can enter into another. Basically, the feelings and emotions of one person come into alignment with others through interactions with each other (Brennan, 2004, p. 6-9). Smith engages in the same concept as Brennan in that the exchange between an artwork and its audience can absorb and experience others feelings and emotions which are present in the atmosphere (Smith, 2012, p. 51).

My practice has a strong focus on creating an affective presence which can be transmitted through the work to the viewer in an embodied exchange, creating as Brennan terms it, a physiological impact. I am interested in how an encounter with an artwork can have the ability to act and be acted upon within the viewer. I explore this idea by way of illustrating gestures as states of becoming, referencing the inner psyche.



Figure 15. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Folding Paper*.



Figure 16. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Folding Paper*.

Author Simon O'Sullivan talks of the thinking perceiving body and how it moves from its outer edge (the unconsciousness) where it meets another body, and through its interaction, the outer body locks onto another's affects (abilities for acting and being acted upon) (O' Sullivan, 2005, p. 21). He discusses affect via the Deleuze-Spinoza definition, which is understood as the feeling produced by the given object or what the practice has on its beholder, and on its beholders becoming (O' Sullivan, 2005, p. 38). Affect has to do with the body and with thoughts and feelings; he states affect is primarily a felt experience encompassing the whole body (O'Sullivan, 2005, p. 43). Smith talks about affect generating meaning and representation through the viewer's feelings, emotions, and bodily responses (Smith, 2012, p. iii). Furthermore, professor Lisa Cartwright links empathy in conjunction with affect, and that empathy comes out of an affective response. Empathy, as Cartwright defines it, is feeling for another, not an attempt to feel like another (Gottschall, 2009, p. 409). She uses the formations found within empathy and affect, which also links into Smith's thinking to showcase how audiences/viewers can respond to art through feelings and emotions.

Haptic

Marks discusses the haptic in three segments: haptic perception, haptic visuality, and haptic images. Each draw on the awareness of 'touch', where haptic perception "deals with the way we experience touch both on the surface of and inside our bodies" (Marks, 2002, p. 2). Haptic visuality draws on sense, mainly touch and kinesthetics; in this, the viewer's body is more involved in the process of seeing (Marks, 2002, p. 3). While haptic images focus more on encouraging a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image (p. 3).

Artist Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1988) touches on haptic qualities. It shifts between a haptic way of viewing to a more optical way of viewing; this is shown through the movement of the camera pulling back. The figure being pushed into the background creates a separate, complete, and objectifiable image. The figure comes into being as the video plays on, switching between a haptic and optical way of seeing. In my work, I am playing around with scale, placement, and the illusion of the image fading in and out within the editing process, converging between the optic and the haptic. This haptic quality I am trying to achieve, moulds into my investigation of ways of achieving an affective response within the viewer. In my videos I play around with techniques similar to Hatoum's, for example, the pulling back movement of the camera. Marks says of Hatoum's work, that the pushing of images back and forward shows "the movement between a relationship of touch and a visual one" (Marks, 1998, p. 344).



Figure 17. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Ring, Bracelet, Hair Play*.

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Figure 18. Mona Hatoum, (1988), *Measures of Distance*.

Marks posits an "epistemology that uses touch, rather than vision, as its model for knowledge, namely, *mimesis*" (Marks & Polan, 2000, p. 22). In German philologist Erich Auerbach's definition of mimesis, it "requires a lively and responsive relationship" (Marks & Polan, 2000, p. 138). He gives an example of this lively and responsive relationship between "listener/reader and story/text. That each time a story is retold, it is sensuously remade in the

body of the listener" (p. 138). I am intrigued by this idea of the 'story,' or in relation to my work the 'memory' being remade in the body of the 'viewer'. I am interested in Auerbach's definition of mimesis and the viewer forming their own lively and responsive relationship to the gestures depicted in the moving images.

Within my practice, I encourage the viewer to engage with the work and experience their own story or memories in which the gestures evoke within them. Through a critique I had during Talk Week at Auckland University of Technology, I discovered through using short-throw projectors, which made the moving image larger than life, that the viewers taking part in the critique found themselves being compelled to copy the gesture in the moving image. The moving image was large and intimate due to the scale of the work, through looping it; the viewers commented on how they felt a compulsion or need to copy the gesture by mimicking the act.



Figure 19. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Talk Week Display*.

I draw inspiration from Marks' thinking process regarding the haptic and how it encourages an intimate and embodied way of experiencing artwork. When creating my work, I think psychologically about the gesturing body and what it represents, not on a looking level, but on a psychological level of feeling. I am drawn into the emotional space that inhabits the threshold of a gesture being noticed and not being noticed. This continuum or expanded threshold includes the subtly tuned shifts that occur from soothing to annoying, for example, as a rhythmic action enters the consciousness of those in proximity. I am interested in how these filters within the editing process, such as layering, blurring, masking, and close up

angles, engage the moving image in haptic and affective relations. These filters encourage the viewer to draw on other senses found within the body while encountering the work.

Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces-visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability (Gregg & Seigworth 2010, p. 1).

My approach to my work comes out of an interest in the psychological behaviours that manifest during times of stress. Marks states that when creating work dealing with grief or personal experiences in relation to film or moving image, that the emotion or grief made in the work may be widely or individually shared, but when viewed it becomes a collective experience (Marks & Polan, 2000, p. 5).



Figure 20. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Blurred Rubbing Thumb*.

Cinematic Experience

When working to create an affective response within the viewer, I look to authors Melissa Gregg & Gregory Seigworth's description of affect where they dictate a body's becoming

through the forces of an encounter. Therefore, I think about how the installation of the work can aid in the affective relations experienced through the work. I am interested in the way artist Luke Willis Thompson creates an affective response in his work *Auto-portrait* (2017). A moving image work referencing Diamond Reynolds' experience of witnessing her boyfriend get shot and recording it live via Facebook.

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Figure 21. Luke Willis Thompson, (2017), *Auto-Portrait*.

Writer Alex Quicho writes of Thompson's installation:

...that it must be viewed in the context it was created for in a darkened room, with one's entire attention given over to it – is a quiet riposte to the demands of media to perform, articulate, and re-enact one's trauma in exchange for public sympathy and belief (Quicho, 2017, para 3).

Thompson installed the work in a darkened room and the only thing illuminating the room was the recording of Reynolds who was displayed centrefold, framed in mid-shot, self-possessed, regal in her mourning (Woodhouse, 2017, para 6). The only noise in the gallery was the revolving sound of the projector running, the stark black and white moving image of Reynolds creates an immense (larger than life) affective encounter which is genuinely moving and elegantly simple in execution. As viewers move in closer to the moving image, Reynolds' subjectivity is emphasised to the human detail of her skin, the texture of her skin merging with the surface of the film, hinting at her being substantially present (para 6).



Figure 22. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Post Pilot Exhibition*. Photo courtesy of Artsdiary.co.nz.

Media theorist Vivian Sobchack writes about the relationship between the body of the image and body of the viewer. She suggests that when viewing film or moving image, it operates as “an exchange between two bodies; that of the viewer and that of the film” (Marks, 1998, p. 338). Therefore “the characterization of the film viewer as passive, vicarious or projective must be replaced with a model of a viewer who participates in the production of the cinematic experience” (Marks, 1998, p. 338). She also claims that as a spectator, the viewer takes part in the film experience through their own perception. The viewer is encouraged to use their own experiences, their own body to vigorously compare the films expression to their own in an invisible and inaudible encounter (Strand, 2005, p. 4). I utilise different methods when testing out different installation scenarios. I prioritise the relationship between the receiving body of the viewer and the perceived affect and its register being transmitted from the work.



Figure 23. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Display Experiment*.



Figure 24. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Display Experiment*.

Sobchack suggests that “the relationship between spectatorship and film is fundamentally mimetic, in that meaning is not solely communicated through signs, but experienced in the body” (Marks & Polan, 2000, p. 149). This quote resonates with me as I am exploring ways both in the content of the videos (the gesturing body) as well as the displaying of the work to create an affective experience/response within the viewer. Smith discusses the term ‘touch’ and how ‘touching’ engages certain representations of memory. He suggests that ‘touch’ or manifestations of touch/touching can also register powerful affects in the reader. He draws inspiration from American academic scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s theories, where “a strong physiological connection exists between physical textures and bodily affects” (Smith, 2012, p. 105). In Sedgwick’s view:

...the same double meaning, tactile plus emotional, is already there in the single word “touching”; equally, it’s internal to the word “feeling.” [She is] also encouraged in this association by the dubious epithet “touchy-feely,” with implication that even to talk about affect virtually amounts to cutaneous contact (Sedgwick & Frank, 2003, p. 17).



Figure 25. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Post Pilot Exhibition*, Photo courtesy of Artsdiary.co.nz.

In the developmental stage of my practice I was interested in the tactile potential the textile muslin offered. Ultimately, I found as my work progressed, while the tactile was held within the physicality of the muslin, it soon became embedded in the moving image itself.



Figure 26. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Muslin Play*.



Figure 27. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Muslin Play*.

Situating the Cinematic

Author Philip Auslander argues that performance is not ephemeral, in that it inevitably leaves something behind in addition to an audience's retained memory of the experience (Auslander, 2018, p. 1). This statement resonates with me because I wanted to map something in my practice which does something for the audience that they can take away with them. Similar to Auslander's theory of the document and the relationship it has to the audience, my focus is not on the relationship between the document and the performance, but the one between the document (moving image) and its audience (Auslander, 2018, p. 39).

Artist Carolee Schneemann's film work literalises the concept of film as translating bodies, but also as itself having a body (Jones, 2006, p. 145). Schneemann thinks of film as a physical thing to engage with, encouraging the viewer to have a visceral relationship with the bodies within the film (Jones, 2006, p. 146). What intrigues me about Schneemann's work is that she engages the viewer in a bodily interaction through her editing and filming techniques. She manipulates film to the extent of the viewer no longer engaging with it as medium, but as a physical thing of having a body of its own. While my practice does not engage to this extent, it does encourage the viewer to have a bodily relationship with the work, and so through doing this allowing for an affect to take place.

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Figure 28. Carolee Schneemann, (1963), *Eye Body # 11*.

Sound is visceral; we respond to it immediately according to how it works and resonates within our bodies. When we hear things, it can return us to something like a memory or emotion. The sound I am exploring works in conjunction with the subject of my moving image, the sound allays the movement of the gestures produced. Sound has the ability to evoke a tactile and immersive experience (Kelly, 2011, p. 213). Writer Brandon Labelle states:

Sound is intrinsically and unignorably relational: it emanates, propagates, communicates, vibrates, and agitates, it leaves a body and enters others, it binds and unhinges, harmonizes and traumatizes, it sends the body moving, the mind dreaming, the air oscillating. It seemingly eludes definition, while having a profound effect (Labelle, 2006, p. ix).

I am interested in ambient sounds, particularly when married with a gesture that opens it up to new readings. Ambient sounds are sought out that will affect the repetitive action within the moving image work so they will correspond to access further tension or soothing. I am cognisant of the ambient sounds and the kind of affective engagement I have with them, hence my choice of place and environment. Even though the environment is not known to the viewer through visual imagery, it is present through the sound. Marks talks about visuals and sound images as resolving themselves in our understanding. She states:

Along the continuum of mimetic and symbolic images, visual and sound images tend to be symbolic signs while we experience their rawness, their immediacy to perception, images, and sounds tend to quickly resolve themselves in our understandings so that we are pulled into their symbolic, quasi-linguistic meaning (Marks, 2002, p. 118).



Figure 29. Danielle Carter, (2019), *Talk Week Display (Close Up)*.

My work explores aspects of the cinematic, but the overarching cinematic sense is utilised in the experiencing of the work. I am interested in Sobchack's writings around the cinematic relationship of viewing film "occurring between two bodies; that of the viewer and that of the film" (Marks, 1998, p. 338). In my moving image work I utilise the use of gestures, sound and the installation of the work to create a cinematic experience, I give precedence to the relationship of the body receiving the work and the cinematic affect being transmitted through it.

Conclusion

By letting go of the personal narrative within my practice I have found through undertaking this research that it allowed for greater understanding as the focus was clearer and more coherent. This project acted as a form of therapy which transcended relationships from the past into the present with an improved foundation of communication and trust. A deeper and psychological understanding of the gesturing body was produced through the research investigated, and knowledge gained. It enabled an awareness of noticing things which would typically go unnoticed; new perspectives and insights into the observation of surroundings and environments were achieved.

The gestures investigated allowed for a sense of recognition, thus enabling the chance for a sense of familiarity to be engaged within the viewer. They afforded the viewer the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences or memories in which the gestures were triggered. By maintaining the dynamic body as the subject of my moving images and by eliminating the traumatic narrative, it assisted in a more conceptual engagement to be produced. By utilising the unconsciousness alongside the psyche, it communicated thoughts and feelings to the outside world, unknown even to the conscious mind. The gestures explored, produced an awareness of how the unconscious mind manifests anywhere, at any time.

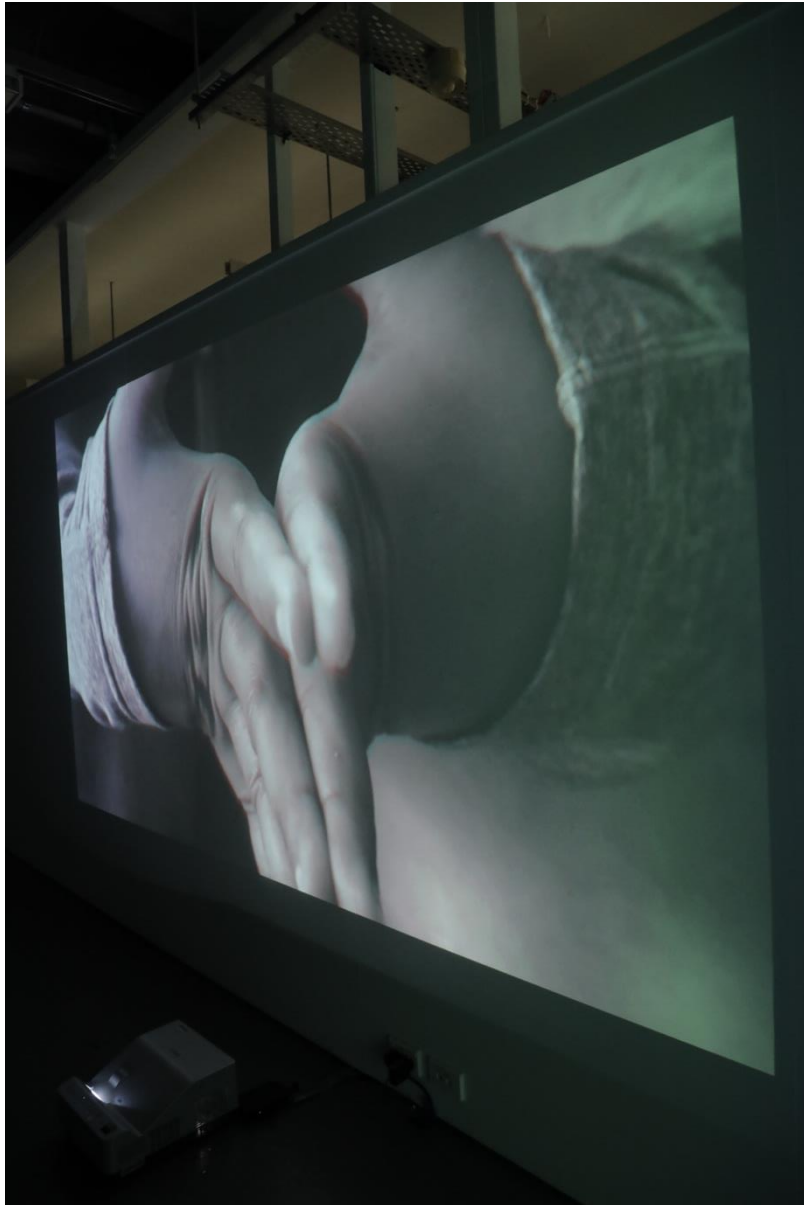
The body was explored as a mechanism for the public and private domain; it facilitated in addressing the private and intimate gestures we perform when we think we are alone. By using the body and not the subject's identity, it allowed for distance to be maintained. Through the investigation of gestures, filming, editing, and installing my work, haptic and affective relations were interrogated. The manipulation I explore in my practice plays with the viewers bodily responses and how the work affects and/or touches them. The cinematic was explored alongside the gesturing body in creating an affective embodied exchange. It was addressed through the installing of the work and how it aided in an affect being produced. The cinematic was investigated in sequences through editing and installing.

Exhibition of Final Work

The work selected for the final exhibition consisted of two moving image works which reflected the body's inner psyche coming to the fore through minor but persistent gestures which arrived spontaneously. The moving image works selected showcase gestures which go unannounced and unnoticed. I chose these videos as I see my own gestures in the actions taking place, although my gestures differ to those selected, I resonate with them through recognising my own repetitive seemingly irrelevant actions. I used short throw projectors to for the presentation so as to create larger than life size human gestures. This scale enabled an affective space to be created in which the viewer could not escape the gesture. Consequently the work took ownership of the room and created an affective presence in which the viewer could engage.











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