

# INTIMATE ECOLOGIES

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An exploration of the languages of  
contemporary exhibitions and making  
in museums and related cultural  
spaces in the UK

Amanda Game

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The presentation of this thesis has been amended from the standard academic format following approval from the ABCD in October 2015. This has allowed for a different balance between image and text and a quality of visual spacing that supports an uninterrupted flow of the content.

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*Overleaf: fig. 01. Clare Twomey, 'Trophy' (detail) 2006, Victoria and Albert Museum*









*Intimate Ecologies* considers the practice of exhibition-making over the past decade in formal museum and gallery spaces and its relationship to creating a concept of craft in contemporary Britain. Different forms of expression found in traditions of still life painting, film and moving image, poetic text and performance are examined to highlight the complex layers of language at play in exhibitions and within a concept of craft. The thesis presents arguments for understanding the value of embodied material knowledge to aesthetic experience in exhibitions, across a spectrum of human expression. These are supported by reference to exhibition case studies, critical and theoretical works from fields including social anthropology, architecture, art and design history and literary criticism and a range of individual, original works of art. *Intimate Ecologies* concludes that the museum exhibition, as a creative medium for understanding objects, becomes enriched by close study of material practice, and embodied knowledge that draws on a concept of craft. In turn a concept of craft is refreshed by the makers' participation in shifting patterns of exhibition-making in cultural spaces that allow the layers of language embedded in complex objects to be experienced from different perspectives. Both art-making and the experience of objects are intimate, and infinitely varied: a vibrant ecology of exhibition-making gives space to this diversity.

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*This thesis is dedicated to the creative scholarship of individual artists and makers, in all forms, without whose commitment to intelligent practice neither museums nor exhibitions nor this thesis would exist.*

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#### *Author's Declaration*

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

*Signature*

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

*Date*

7th April 2016



# INTRODUCTION

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In his essay 'Vogel's Net', Alfred Gell proposes a series of theoretical frameworks through which a material object is recognised as art, i.e. as having cultural value: aesthetic theory, interpretative theory and institutional theory. The first theory he suggests, somewhat dismissively, is that the object has 'certain qualities which are particularly appealing'; the second is that the work 'is a highly intelligible gesture in terms of contemporary art making' and the third that 'if the art world co-opts the work and circulates it as art then it is art.' From these theories, he defines a practice called concept art – a highly evolved form of contemporary practice that 'is the final convergence of art making, art history, art philosophy and art criticism into a single package'.<sup>(1)</sup>

*Intimate Ecologies* suggests that understanding the first of these elements, art-making, is of critical importance to understanding all the other elements that Gell suggests define cultural value. This research therefore directs attention to the practice and concept of craft in contemporary Western culture as a way of framing the importance of making, and the value of understanding material practice as a way of recognising expressive objects. The intention is to interrogate the idea of art recognition more closely and to do so through the examination of the material practice of contemporary exhibition-making in UK museums. Making is part of the 'intelligible gesture' of the work that not only gives rise to material objects but also defines the shape of museum exhibitions.

Through this process, the thesis will suggest how a fourth theoretical structure might be added to Gell's list: material theory. Such a theory, I propose, calls attention to the fact that the choice of a particular material (both as physical matter and cultural substance) is the choice of a particular form of language that has its own cultural associations and technical practices inherent in it. Materials are an inextricable part of the ways in which art is both made and understood, and aesthetic

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1 Alfred Gell, 'Vogel's Net', *Journal of Material Culture Vol 1*. (1996): 22

experience, or affect, is partly achieved through practical engagement with the material. Gell's weak concept of aesthetic theory, which he attributes to objects 'with qualities that are particularly appealing' can be made stronger by greater understanding of the level of thinking embedded in material practice. An example of this can be found in the work of Joseph Beuys. Beuys described his work *Felt Suit* from 1970, held in the Tate collection, as an extension of all the sculptures he made with felt; in them the material's insulating properties were an integral part of the artist's concept: to create works that suggested warmth and changing states of human experience.

This focus on material has led the research towards an interdisciplinary range of sources, in the form of exhibitions, objects and texts. At the same time craft, as a field of practice, remains central to the thesis as this field, above all others, has retained a vital focus on the value of intimate human relationships with materials, their histories and qualities. Nevertheless this focus on material, grounded in a concept of craft, also allows a particular critical lens through which to view art-making more widely. The reality of creative practice is that it often operates on the living edges between different forms of expression, and the selection of study material in this thesis reflects this.

In addition, common themes can emerge by bringing together different objects in the viewing space. Difference can prompt the fertile associative capacities of the human imagination, which like an exhibition can lend a sense of coherence to superficially disparate material. Such imaginative capacities, rooted in the material world of things, are constantly changing the shape of the world around us. Exhibitions in museums - with reference to a practice, and concept of craft - can reflect on this and thus how we make them matters.

Wayfaring across disciplines also reveals the highly permeable nature of the boundaries that we continue to erect in Western societies, in order





*fig. 02. Clare Twomey  
'Is it madness, is it beauty' 2010  
Performance with unfired clay, water  
ROTOR, Siobhan Davies Studios  
(see p. 250 for discussion of this work)*

to identify material objects that define culture more widely and a concept of craft in particular. It gives insight into the complexity of different forms of human experience and the types of expression that arise from it. Tanya Harrod suggests in a recent *Think Tank* essay that ‘part of the power that resides in objects of art and craft lies in their complexity – a complexity that creates relationships’. She also draws on the work of Gell, to describe how complex works can create these relationships by ‘slowing perception down... creating a sense of ‘unfinished business’, an open endedness which anthropologists recognise as underpinning long term productive social relations’. <sup>(2)</sup> The densely woven texture of my research aims to reflect this complexity across a range of distinct objects and exhibitions.

I have developed a series of defining principles for a concept of craft as outlined below. These are based on an initial process of reviewing exhibitions, objects and texts associated with a field of crafts, in the UK over the past decade, and is informed by a thirty-year career immersed in the practice of working with contemporary makers. Such a concept:

- implies critical engagement with the design and production of objects
- demonstrates an intimate and rigorous engagement with making and often hand-making processes as a way of developing ideas and building thought
- calls attention to sensory as well as visual perception as of significance to human experience

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2 Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1999), p.10.

- recognises the potential of everyday/domestic objects to foster imaginative space

These principles are common threads running through the critical practice of object-making, broadly defined within the field of craft. In addition, these definitions have provided the springboard for the examination of a wide range of different material forms of human expression.

Exhibitions have been placed at the heart of the thesis as they are unique social and material spaces that bring people, places and objects together and, as Stephanie Moser points out, they create both knowledge and meaning <sup>(3)</sup> around a field of activity. This is of particular interest when a concept of craft is being explored. Firstly, as Harrod points out, 'an idea of what might be craft depends to a large extent on where people choose to exhibit their work.' <sup>(4)</sup> The exhibition is the space where creative identity and disciplinary structures can be made visible. The complex forms of identity associated with the word 'craft' can be more fully explored in such spaces.

Secondly, exhibitions make use of a range of different forms of language through which they communicate their content: text, images, objects, sound, light, moving images, live conversations. This confluence of languages creates an experience to which we can respond not only through our logical-mathematical intelligence, but also through all our different bodily and emotional intelligences <sup>(5)</sup>. Exhibitions are therefore

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3 Stephanie Moser, 'The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge', *Museum Anthropology Vol 33 1* (2010): 22-32

4 Tanya Harrod, 'The Gift: a starting point for a discussion of craft', *Gift: Think Tank* (2007): 31.

5 'Howard Gardner suggests that there are seven types of intelligence: linguistic (used by writers); logical-mathematical (used by accountants and scientists); spatial (used by sailors, surgeons and sculptors); bodily-kinaesthetic (used by craftspeople, athletes and dancers); musical (used by musicians and teenagers); interpersonal (the ability to understand other people, used by teachers and



fig. 03. 'Added Value?'  
Design Junction 2012  
Photo: Sophie Mutevelian  
© Crafts Council

critical sites through which the embodied knowledge and material imagination embedded in objects can be understood, enjoyed, exchanged and developed and through which a multifaceted concept of craft, its objects, people and spaces, can begin to take shape. For example, the touring exhibition *Added Value?* organised by the Crafts Council in 2012, used the exhibition medium to unpack some of the different ideas embedded in objects and their relationship to cultural value. (fig. 03)

In *Ways of Curating*, Hans Ulrich Obrist traces the root of the large-scale public exhibition to Henry Cole's 'Great Exhibition' of 1851, although he also reminds us that the public display of valued, physical objects has its roots in less building-centred traditions such as medieval religious and guild processions.<sup>(6)</sup> The choice to focus on exhibitions presented in museums in this research, however, reflects the museum's role in defining cultural value in the UK. The museum is a place that is purposefully designated

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religious leaders) and intrapersonal (self awareness). He argues that although we put a high valuation on the first two, all seven are equal.'

R. A. Cramond quoting from Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: the theory of multiple intelligences*, (New York: 1983) in 'Motivation for creating the Museum of Scotland' MPhil Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2011

6 Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Ways of Curating* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Books Ltd, 2014), p. 119.



*fig. 04. Architecture Gallery 2011, Victoria and Albert Museum*

for the close examination of physical objects, from an immense range of formal and cultural traditions. The considerable, global proliferation of museum spaces in recent years – 55,000 at current count <sup>(7)</sup> - and the corresponding rise in the number of people visiting museums – 50 million in 2013 in UK - suggests that the museum's role in defining the language of culture remains significant, despite the range of fringe and independent exhibition-making practices that exist.

Exhibitions that have explored architecture, (figs. 04 & 05) sensory knowledge, relationships between making and memory, participatory performances with objects and the intimate lives of makers have all taken place in museums in the past decade in the UK, and have come under the lens of this research. Each has been considered in terms of the experience that has been generated in the physical space, and also in terms of the different forms of knowledge that have emerged through the process.

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7 Statistics given in a lecture by Dr. Rafal Niemojewski, 'Under Construction, Ethics of Museums in the 21st Century', Chelsea Arts Club, 2013.

Supporting texts have been chosen from four principal sources:

- those that directly explore the relationship between making, materials and human culture, through time, such as those by British anthropologist Tim Ingold, and Finnish architect, Juhani Pallasmaa
- those that focus on particular historical accounts of certain material practices in British culture, such as those by art historians Glenn Adamson and Tanya Harrod, calligrapher Ewan Clayton and potters/writers Emmanuel Cooper and Edmund de Waal.
- curatorial essays in exhibition catalogues that touch more widely on material sources for aesthetic experience such as those by Ian Jeffrey and Simon Groom for Kettle's Yard exhibitions, Margit Rowell for the Hayward Gallery
- other forms of writing such as poetry and cultural essays which explore, by one route or another, concepts of embodied thought and material imagination such the poetry of Thomas A Clark, Kathleen Jamie and Rainer Maria Rilke or texts by Gaston Bachelard, John Berger, Italo Calvino and Antonio Damasio

The title *Intimate Ecologies* has been selected to describe the constantly shifting relationship between individual experience and the social networks through which culture, its concepts and practices are defined. The word 'intimate' is used in order to focus on a sense of the embodied and individual nature of the experience of making, seeing and experiencing art and its objects, whatever form they take. In a recent essay, Griselda Pollock, describes aesthetic experience as an 'encounter with an intimate otherness that co-poetically shares an event that alters each partner

differentially' <sup>(8)</sup> something she describes as being akin to the relationship between a mother and her unborn child. This sense of embodied intimacy is seen as critical to understanding the object/subject encounter framed by an exhibition and the private world of object-making.

The word 'ecologies' focuses attention on the relationship between this experience and the network of lived experiences within the social spaces of culture, through which value in objects is defined and disseminated. A useful articulation of this concept of ecology can be found in a paper commissioned for Watershed Bristol in 2008 from the musician Bill Sharpe:

*'We must not forget that although our culture is mediated to a very large extent through symbols, meaning is based in our embodied nature: we are cultural beings but first we are physical and vital beings...Our mind is mostly unconscious, embodied and embedded in our social lives. This way of looking at lived experience brings into view the idea of our culture as many interlinked fields of meaning, each enacted in a distinct way by the individuals who engage in it separately and together. Think about some very diverse fields of human activity...scientific research... games of chess and football...ballet, storytelling and so on...each of them presents a different combination of three basic ingredients: the system of symbols, the type of lived, embodied experience that maintains them, and what is the world within which that experience is enacted - of what people, places and things is it comprised'. <sup>(9)</sup>*

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8 Griselda Pollock, 'What if Art Desires to be Interpreted? Remodelling Interpretation after the 'Encounter-Event'', *Tate Papers 15* (April 2011) <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/what-if-art-desires-be-interpreted-remodelling-interpretation> (accessed July 2015).

9 Bill Sharpe, 'The Economy of Art', [www.internationalfuturesforum/publications](http://www.internationalfuturesforum/publications) (accessed April 2012), p.10.

Sharpe's definition is valuable as it brings in a strong sense of the material and physical basis of experience, 'we are physical and vital beings'. It suggests that practices that set out to explore or define culture, such as exhibitions, need to keep sight of that embodied vitality. Therefore, the emphasis of the research is not on theoretical concepts of curatorship but on acts of exhibition-making, informed by practical engagement with objects, people and material space. As the artist Susan Collis stated in an interview, 'There is no better way to learn how something is made than to do it yourself' <sup>(10)</sup>. Whether making objects or exhibitions, this engagement with the full spectrum of practice is a critical part of the development of knowledge. The move from developing material knowledge to forging powerful visual expression is given precise articulation by the painter Howard Hodgkin in a transcribed interview:

*'I start out with the subject and naturally I have to remember first of all what it looked like, but it would also perhaps contain a great deal of feeling and sentiment. All of that has got to be somehow transmuted, transformed, or made into a physical object and when that happens, when that's finally been done, when the last physical marks have been put on and the subject comes back - then the picture's finished'. <sup>(11)</sup>*

Exhibition-making, in this context, is about enabling the subjects, objects, people and ideas under review to 'come back' to the exhibition maker. And to return to Sharpe's point, in the care taken with using different forms of language, the same elements can be 'enacted in a distinct way' by each viewer. Exhibition-making is essentially a social practice built on a dialogic relationship with the vast ecology of material culture.

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10 Laurie Britton-Newell, *Out of the Ordinary: Spectacular Craft* (London: V & A Publications, 2009), p. 70.

11 David Sylvester interview with Howard Hodgkin, *Howard Hodgkin: Forty Paintings: 1973–84* (Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1984), p. 105.





*fig. 05. 'Architecture of Hope' 2010, Victoria and Albert Museum, London*

This sense of shared experience, active in both object-making and exhibition-making sharpens focus on the idea of the valuable, or aesthetic encounter. In 2011 the writer and dramaturg Ruth Little defined the word 'aesthetic' by pairing it with its opposite, 'anaesthetic'.<sup>(12)</sup> This elegant antithesis suggests that aesthetic experience possesses a vital bodily quality: the experience of feeling alive and being alert. This quality reinforces the idea that an aesthetic experience of things is deeply embodied: those objects which we experience as having aesthetic value are, therefore, in some form returning a sense of aliveness from the body of the maker, to the body of the viewer, via a precisely crafted

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12 From a lecture given by Ruth Little on talent development at the Edinburgh International Festival, 2011. The full transcript can be read here <http://amplifiedevents.co.uk/ruth-little-stewardship-connections-and-ecology-contexts-for-the-development-of-talent/>

arrangement of material. The skill of the artist lies thus in the ability to make this form in ways which invite dialogue and activate an embodied response, in the viewer.

This pre-verbal response could be linked to Gaston Bachelard's description of the poetic experience as one which generates an 'experience of emerging'<sup>(13)</sup>: a sense of the possibility of things, as yet not articulated. It chimes with Little's understanding of the aesthetic as a lived, and living experience. It is this concept of aesthetic value that, I aim to demonstrate, sits at the core of both the practice and concept of craft, and is critical to the understanding of art-making. It thus needs to be activated through the processes and spaces of exhibition-making in museums.

In an attempt to find a precise way of describing resonant forms of object, the words and phrases 'poetic image', 'poetry', 'poetic spatiality' have been adopted. To explain further: a poetic image is taken to be a vital form, whatever its material and shape, of experience in life. Certain works have the capacity to establish living relationships between artist and viewer, as Juhani Pallasmaa comments in his writing on architecture: 'poetic images arise from a sense of life and they are generators of live experiences'<sup>(14)</sup>, their living qualities can shape qualities of living. This sense of aliveness rests in a fully embodied experience of the world, in that as Pallasmaa continues, works of art 'originate in the body of the maker and they return back to the body through the experience of the beholder.... dweller, through the mediation of the image.'<sup>(15)</sup> It is

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13 'The poetic image is an emergence from language, it is always a little above the language of signification. By living the poems we read, we have then the salutary experience of emerging.' Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004) p. xxvii.

14 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image - Imagination and Imagery in Architecture* (England: Wiley, 2011), p. 57.

15 *ibid*, p. 42.

of interest to this research that awareness of this embodied poetics is deeply embedded in all processes of art-making: as the sculptor Andy Goldsworthy comments 'making... is a procedure of discovery... an opening into the processes of life in and around.'<sup>(16)</sup> Intimate and rigorous engagement with shaping material, as a concept of craft reminds us, is part of the process that creates poetic form.

Poetry, as Bachelard notes, puts language into a state of emergence and as readers we experience 'the salutary experience of emerging'.<sup>(17)</sup> This suggestion that a particular crafting of language can evoke an echo in the body 'of emerging' which creates a receptive, open response in the reader, re-emphasises the idea that language has material roots and that poetry in particular is language 'which flaunts its material being'.<sup>(18)</sup>

This interest in the poetic use of verbal language underpins the third section of the thesis. Wordsmiths are, however, not the only poets: those who make objects, spaces, films and gardens are also crafting language, working to create a distillation of materials, symbols and systems of meaning which can potentially trigger Bachelard's sense of emerging in the viewer, and thus set up an intimate exchange. Active immersion in the chosen language/material is critical and, as Bachelard suggests, 'poets will help us to discover within ourselves such joy in looking that

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16 T. Friedman and A. Goldsworthy, 'Hand to Earth' 1990, quoted in Tim Ingold, *Being Alive : Essays on Movement, Knowledge, Description* (England; USA: Routledge, 2011), p. 20.

17 Bachelard, p. xxvii.

18 Terry Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), p. 42.

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*Overleaf: fig. 06. The Green Eyl, 'Whispering Table' 2012, mixed media, from 'Utensils' 2012, Crafts Council of Ireland Bachelard's 'perfectly familiar object' is re-imagined through this interactive sound piece by design agency, The Green Eyl. Originally commissioned for the Jewish Museum in Berlin to share stories of domestic rituals from diverse cultures, here the work is installed as part of Crafts Council of Ireland's 'Utensils' exhibition in 2012.*





sometimes, in the presence of a perfectly familiar object, we experience an extension of our intimate space.’<sup>(19)</sup> (fig. 06)

Bachelard’s succinct phrase ‘poetic spatiality’ creates awareness of the role that the structuring of space, in the physical realm, has in structuring of imaginative space(s) in the mental realm. It touches on the design and production of material exhibition spaces; their gravity and tactility; the interplay of matter and substance; light and shadow. As Pallasmaa reminds us,<sup>(20)</sup> architectural space articulates the encounter of the world with the human mind. Poetic spatiality suggests the vital dialogic exchange that exists between imaginative space and physical space, in a kind of continuous feedback loop, well articulated here by the Scottish poet Thomas A Clark:

*‘In literal space, the volume occupied by the apple cannot at the same moment be occupied by the pear, but in imagination all the volume taken up by the apple may be full of flavour’.*<sup>(21)</sup>

Each section of the thesis emphasises different forms of language. This approach underlines the importance of language, in its broadest sense, as a frame for this research. Culture is rarely understood through a single lens since, as cultural historian Wendy Steiner suggests, it is a place where ‘the struggle of languages can be acted out:’<sup>(22)</sup> a place where human systems of communication are scrutinised and reinvented

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19 Bachelard, p. 199.

20 Pallasmaa p. 43.

21 ‘On imaginative space’, blog by Thomas A. Clark [www.cairneditions.co.uk](http://www.cairneditions.co.uk) (accessed July 2015).

22 Wendy Steiner, *The Scandal of Pleasure – Art in the Age of Fundamentalism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 124.

and the complexity of the relationship between thought and action is materialised. Steiner's observation reminds us that close focus on the nature of language, on the way it is crafted in all its different material, visual as well as verbal forms, is one of the means whereby creative practice can offer critical insight into human experience. The task of

any exhibition-maker, therefore, is to keep this awareness of different language systems in play at all times, and to keep sight of the inherently propositional notion of value embedded in the subjects and objects explored.

The word 'craft' is of particular interest in this artistic struggle for language, due to its shifting relationship to meaning and value in Western culture. For the critic and theorist, Glenn Adamson, craft is 'a set of concerns that is implicated across many types of cultural production';<sup>(23)</sup> among the types of production he includes not only forms of artistic expression, 'painting, sculpture, architecture' but also functional daily activities 'routines of maintenance and repair...construction work and so on'.<sup>(24)</sup> This move to extend the word's meaning beyond a set of defined physical objects is a useful one; thus, for example one can reconsider what another critic Robert Hughes describes as 'the ethic of craftsmanship'<sup>(25)</sup> in relation to all forms of artistic expression, - writing, filmmaking, photography, jewellery – and to wider life.

Hughes explores the word 'ethic' by equating it with an act of care in relation to making things; he illustrates this by explaining how he sees the achievement of the wooden structure of the Hōryū-ji temple in Japan through his eyes both as an amateur carpenter and as a critic:

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23 Glenn Adamson, *The Craft Reader* (London: Berg, 2010), p. 3.

24 *ibid.* p.3.

25 Robert Hughes, *Culture of Complaint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 158.

*'When I see the level of woodworking in a Japanese structure like the great Temple of Hōryū-ji, the precision of the complex joints, the understanding of hinoki cypress as a live substance, I know that I couldn't do anything like that if I had my whole life to live over. People who can make such things are an elite: and have earned the right to be. Does this fill me, the wood butcher... with resentment? Absolutely not. Reverence and pleasure more like'.<sup>(26)</sup>*

If one then returns to the reductive functionality of Adamson's second set of definitions of craft relating to 'routines of maintenance and repair' with this image in mind, one can see how Adamson's definition underplays the complex space the word 'craft' and its associated practices occupies: the space of material knowledge and embodied imagination, 'the understanding of *hinoki* cypress as a live substance': a critical space from which emerge forms and ideas that can offer renewed insights into human experience. The human imagination has material roots, and the creation of the poetic image or object often arises from highly attentive engagement with material. As the sculptor David Nash says 'the contact that my body and mind has with raw material stimulates different ideas'.<sup>(27)</sup> (fig. 07)

Finding language through material practice is a process to which the word 'craft' sticks with great potency: something captured by the designer David Pye in his phrase 'workmanship of risk'.<sup>(28)</sup> It suggests knowledge of a medium (both technical and cultural) held in tension with the ability

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26 Hughes p. 172.

27 David Nash interviewed by Peter Murray, *David Nash at Yorkshire Sculpture Park*, (England: Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 2011), p.14.

28 David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship*, (London: The Herbert Press, 1995), p. 20. David Pye OBE was a designer, writer and woodworker and Professor of Furniture Design at the Royal College of Art (1964-1974). This book, originally published in 1968, became an influential articulation of some of the processes that sit behind creative material practice.





*fig. 07. David Nash 2012*  
© Royal Botanical  
Gardens, Kew

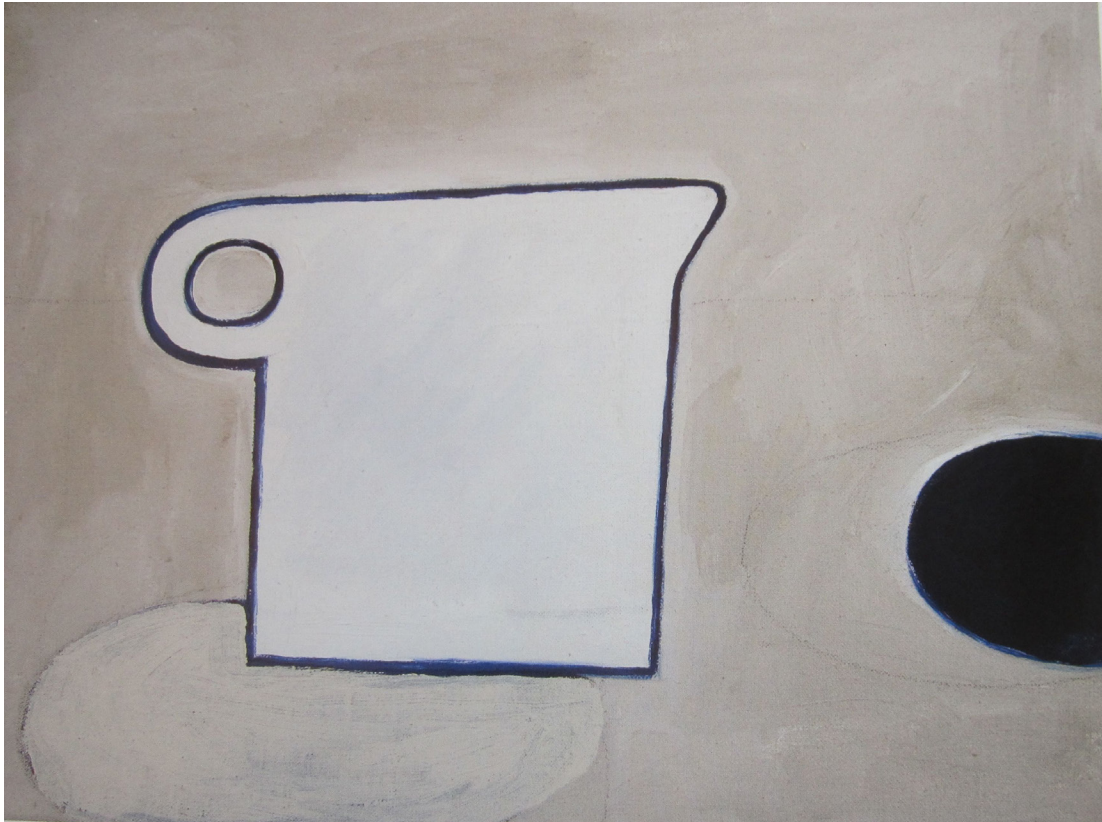
to transcend its recognised limits, in order to express concepts that do not yet have a name. Or as Mary Warnock suggests in her essay on imagination;

*'...the creative artist constructs an external form which is to be interpreted as signifying something which does not, in the same sense, exist'.<sup>(29)</sup>*

Exhibition-making however, unlike object-making, is not about finding a new language, or concept; it is a diectic act pointing, as precisely as possible, to an area of practice which, if it takes place in a museum,

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29 Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1976), p.197.



*fig. 08. William Scott  
'Poem for a Jug' 1979  
Oil on canvas 30.6 x 40.9 cm*

implicitly points to value as well. One of the ways in which an exhibition-maker creates a sense of value is through paying attention to Hughes' 'ethic of craftsmanship': the ethic of taking care to make an exhibition which draws on an understanding of the material, visual and conceptual contexts of the objects being explored through the exhibition.

A particularly apt comparison can be found in the Western practice of still life painting, which takes the arrangement of contrasting domestic objects as a fundamental conceptual framework. An exhibition is, in some sense, a form of still life – an arrangement of objects in material space in order to focus on their qualities and meaning. As Gombrich suggests 'varieties of apple are infinite...words finite'<sup>(30)</sup> reminding us of the rich cognitive potential of visual language.

In addition, the still life genre, since its early appearance on the walls of Roman villas, has used material processes to create a poetic language of the everyday: this binds it to the inherently domestic rhythms to be found in many works associated with craft. Still life painting has thus become the critical frame for the first section of the thesis exploring the relationship between exhibition-making and a concept of craft. Certain painterly and compositional techniques found in this genre of painting can animate the language of objects in non-verbal ways: ways which recalibrate the viewer's relationship not just to the painted object but also to the objects depicted in the painting. Kinaesthetic, spatial and musical intelligences are activated, as well as the logical-mathematical intelligences. William Scott's decision to title a series of his still life paintings *Poem for a Jug*, (fig. 08) makes clear this critical layering of language and intelligence.

The skilful artist's ability, in different media, to structure our perception by creating patterns of contrast and difference, reflects Mikhail Bakhtin's

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30 E. H. Gombrich, 'Tradition and Expression in Western Still Life', in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and other essays on the theory of art* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1971), p. 96.

thoughts on the nature of dialogue in literary texts. In his *Discourse on the Novel*, Bakhtin considers how certain kinds of writing allow us to 'view all human activity and all human discourse as a complex unity of differences': the differences are needed to reach some form of dialogic exchange between writer and reader, a form of dialogue anticipated in exhibition making. He goes on to say:

*'dialogical rhetoric is not only a multiplicity and diversity of voices, a "heteroglossia," but an act of (and an active) listening to each voice from the perspective of the others, a "dialogized heteroglossia"'.<sup>(31)</sup>*

In an exhibition, this 'active listening' can be encouraged through the orchestration of different materials, contrasting forms and distinct artistic voices. The result is a kind of coherent diversity through which productive difference can be experienced and enjoyed by the viewer. Ways of reaching this coherent diversity are explored, in the first section, by juxtaposing examples of still life painting with Readymade sculptures and contemporary ceramic and metal vessels. Each, it is argued, is calling attention to distinct languages of the domestic object. However, a deeper awareness of the material qualities of the work, focused through the lens of making, and the chosen concept of craft, encourages a different perception of their value as cultural objects.

In the second and third sections of the text, the relationship between material and imaginative worlds is examined further, firstly through exploring the use of film in exhibition spaces, (fig. 09) and secondly through

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31 James P. Zappen, 'Bakhtin and dialogic rhetoric', in *Twentieth-Century Rhetorics and Rhetoricians* edited by Michael G. Moran and Michelle Ballif (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000): pp. 7 – 20 (p. 17).

consideration of the writing and structuring of words and text in these spaces. There is recognition, in both these sections, of the increasing impact of new digital technologies on language and communication.

In the second section, examples of both documentary and artist film-making are highlighted as a way of considering the role of moving image in creating the exhibition experience. Clips from selected films have been stored on a password accessible site to support the written discussion. The text explores the moving image's capacity to activate sensory capabilities within the realm of human cognition and the ways that this is linked to embodied material processes that underpin art-making and a concept of craft. The additional capacity of film to exist simultaneously in a variety of material and virtual spaces is discussed and attention is directed towards its increasingly active role in interpreting and generating culture.

Study of the language of film and its virtual spaces raises a question about the material presentation of information in exhibitions, (fig. 11) addressed in the third section on text. This section draws on the work of poets to illustrate the way verbal language can be shaped to create sensory as well as intellectual understanding. Two books on histories of writing: calligrapher Ewan Clayton's *The Golden Thread: The Story of Writing* and Tim Ingold's *Lines: A Brief History* draw out important links between the shape of verbal language and material practices of writing in different cultures. These two approaches have been of great interest to a thesis that explores the material processes that inform art-making, concepts of craft and material presence in exhibitions. Contrasts between this and digital language structures are in turn informed by a body of writing from the 1980s by the Czech-born Brazilian philosopher Vilém Flusser, recently translated into English. Flusser reflects on the conceptual shift that an alpha numeric root to programming words represents, reminding us that 'new signs that appear on computer or television screens are



*fig. 09. The Unilever Series: Tacita Dean  
FILM, 35 mm film installation  
Turbine Hall, Tate Modern © Tate London, 2015*

no longer traces engraved on objects' and represent a 'detachment of thought from language'.<sup>(32)</sup> Such shifts are also addressed by makers like contemporary textile artist, Amy Houghton. (fig. 10) Her work *One centimetre is a little less than half-an-inch* invites the viewer to consider the changing nature of text through the interactive use of an analogue typewriter to unravel words on a computer screen.

In the final section, exhibitions are considered through the frame of performance. Concepts of performance take the lead, both as a way of framing the different ways social/physical space is experienced, and as a way of viewing and reviewing the object/subject relationships within

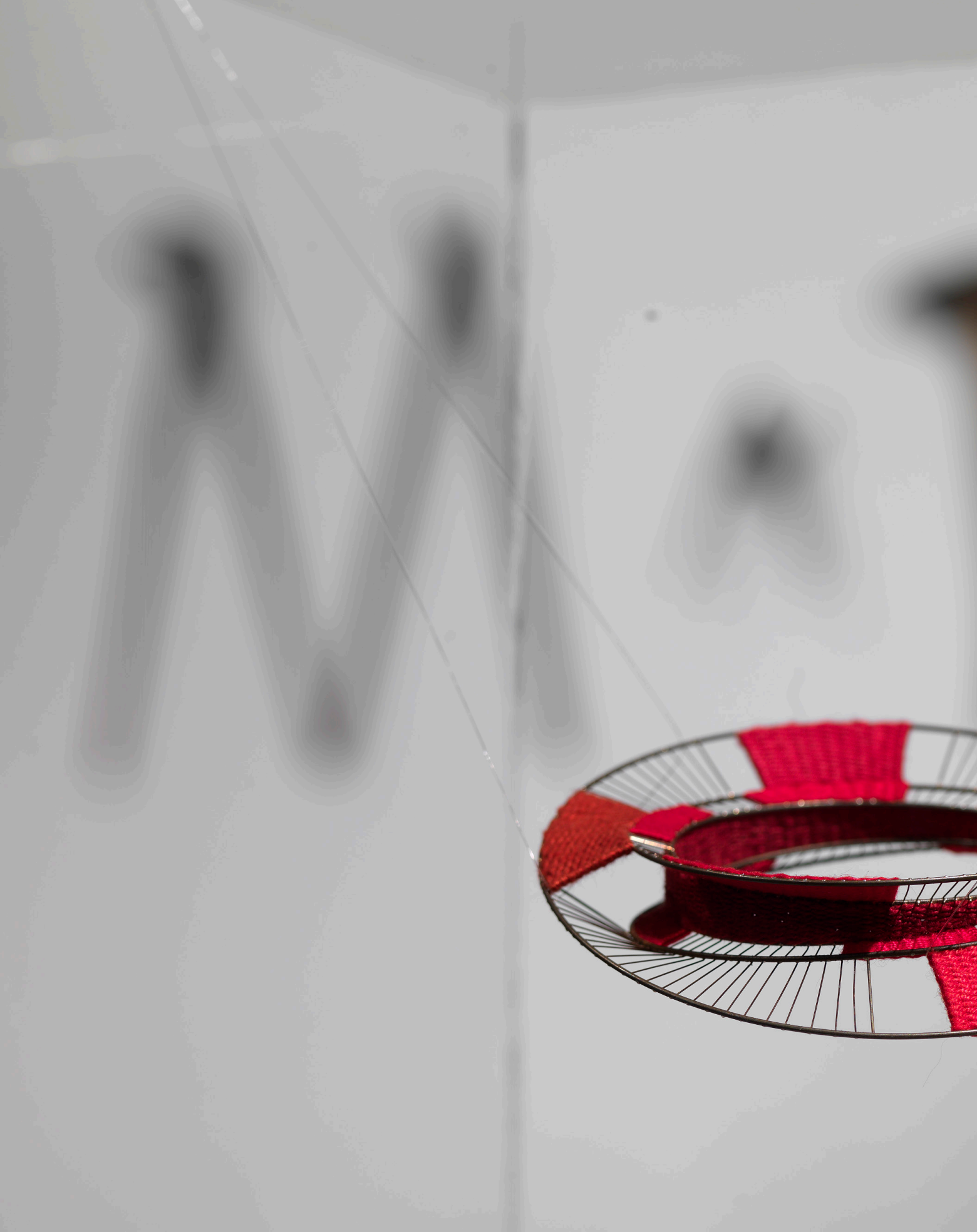
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32 Vilém Flusser, *Does Writing have a Future?* translated by Nancy Ann Roth (USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 6.



fig. 10. Amy Houghton, 'One centimetre is a little less than half-an-inch' 2009, from 'Taking Time: Craft and the Slow Revolution' 2009, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

Overleaf: fig. 11. David Poston, *Bangle* 2010, laser welded steel, cotton thread 6 x 4.1 cm  
From *Matter 4*, Dovecot Studios © Shannon Tofts  
(see page 179 for full discussion of the Dovecot Studios' exhibition)







temporary social space. The exhibition is considered as a performative field, a material theatre of enactment. One particular element of interest is the scale of the performance space. The increasingly large scale of modern museum spaces, as Tanya Harrod comments in her essay *House-Trained Objects* <sup>(33)</sup> makes them 'the antithesis of the domestic space' liable to close down any possibility of sensuous engagement with domestically scaled forms placed within them. How objects can perform in such space is critical.

Releasing the resonance of small but complex objects however is not only activated by relationships of scale but also by material relationships. Artist Katie Paterson's decision to hang her *Fossil Necklace* (fig. 12) in the centre of a deconsecrated eleventh-century Romanesque church in Cambridge as part of her 2013 Kettle's Yard exhibition provides a useful example. This siting created material resonance between the ancient stone fabric of the church and the tiny carved fossils of the necklace: an intimate encounter with materials and time that captured Paterson's artwork with precision. Such temporal resonance between different material objects is given further consideration in the fourth section through reference to the writings of Michael Shanks in the field of archaeology.

*Intimate Ecologies* is a thesis that reflects both on the embodied nature of human thought, and on the practical capacities of the material imagination; a thesis that reflects a shifting concept of craft. It has involved a journey, indirect and unfinished, but precise in its aims, namely to follow the ways in which our formal cultural spaces in the UK, for example museums, create spaces for this kind of thinking and practice. Each stage of the

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33 Tanya Harrod, 'House-Trained Objects', in *A Craft Reader*, edited by Glenn Adamson (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2010), p. 514.

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fig. 12. Katie Paterson, 'Fossil Necklace' 2013  
170 carved beads, each bead approx. 0.5 cm  
St. Peter's Church, Kettle's Yard Cambridge, 2013



process has been guided by a series of museum exhibitions, curated by a combination of artists, makers, museum and independent curators and supported by designers, writers and image-makers. At each point of the journey, the ideas and practices that sit behind different forms of intelligent making, and the expressive objects that are made, are considered and have guided the next stage. Writer and film director David Mamet captures some essential elements of this journey in his notes *On Directing Film*:

*'If a person's objective is truly – and you don't have to do it humbly because you'll get humble soon enough – to understand the nature of the medium, that objective will be communicated to the audience... in addition to what you will, or will not, learn about the medium through your desire to understand it, that desire will be manifested'.<sup>(34)</sup>*

In this research I set out to understand the nature of the exhibition medium and its different manifestations in British museums in recent years. A great many different specialist forms of activity are touched on during this process. Each form is, of itself, replete with experts in the realm of both practice and theory. I owe a debt to these experts and offer apologies in advance for the necessarily general observations that I am making on fields of specialist knowledge as part of this particular enquiry within my own field of knowledge. However I make no apologies for wayfaring in their company. Curiosity about the objects we make, why we make them and what this tells us about what it means to be human, is a fruitful critical position and leads to unexpected social territories and dialogues. Making exhibitions is one way that I have learnt to reflect on that: this is another.

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34 David Mamet, *On Directing Film* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), p. 66.





# EXHIBITION AS STILL LIFE

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*Overleaf: fig. 13. Henri Matisse, 'Goldfish and Palette' 1914, Oil on canvas  
146.5 x 112.4 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York*









In his book *The Craftsman*, Richard Sennett reminds us that hours of practice, and active immersion in working with a material, can produce fluency from which improvisation and deeper thoughts flow. The artist becomes versed in the grammar of the chosen material, and its cultural traditions, fostering an embodied relationship to it. When the art historian and collector Jim Ede developed his home and gallery, Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, he drew attention to the importance of understanding material language as a way of creating a dialogue between different kinds of thinking, juxtaposing found stone pebbles with polished oak furniture, still life paintings with Chelsea porcelain and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska drawings and objects with Lucie Rie pots.

Ede's recognition of the poetic experience activated through the juxtaposition of different kinds of material object, and of the importance of intimate domestic contexts, informs a reading of exhibition-making with a particular relationship to a concept of craft. The intimate spaces and diverse collections of Kettle's Yard suggest that a concept of craft is embedded not only in the studio ceramics, with which it is commonly associated in Western critical discourse. It can also be seen as an active constituent of many forms of sculpture and still life painting. The latter is a genre which takes, as Norman Bryson says, 'the culture of artefacts' as its principal subject. <sup>(7)</sup>

In the following pages, three forms of Western art that have a strong material connection to one another are explored: the painted image in the still life genre, and sculpted/constructed form, as articulated in two broad areas - sculpture and studio ceramics. Works have been selected that have achieved a particularly resonant form of language within these distinct intellectual and material traditions. (figs. 14 & 15) Juxtaposing such works reveals ways in which material objects, when viewed in cultural spaces such as museum exhibitions, may create a poetic experience that is inextricably embedded in the deep geological time of domestic objects.

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1 Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion Press, 1990), p.12.



Left: fig. 14. *Bauhaus Ceramics: Otto Lindig, 'Coffee Pot and Cup', Theodor Bogler, Teapots; Marguerite Friedlaender (Wildenhain), Cups 1923, Photo: Lucia Moholy © DACS*  
Right: fig. 15. *Installation View of Naum Gabo Sculptures, Tate Modern 2014*

An exhibition can itself be thought of as a form of still life: objects are carefully selected to create a subject from which a coherent object, the exhibition, is then derived. In his recent study of Picasso, the art historian T.J. Clark quotes Wittgenstein, who suggested that a close analysis of pictorial form 'offers the possibility that things are related to one another in the same way as the elements of the picture. That is how a picture is attached to reality.'<sup>(2)</sup> The arrangement of particular elements in a still life painting, like musical improvisation, draws on a language that is familiar and social; the skill lies in the compositional arrangement of the objects to give new value to the familiar. Thus the value-giving property of museum exhibitions is embedded in the ways that our relationship to reality can be enacted through the arrangement of materials and objects, as in a still life painting.

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2 T. J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* (England; New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 51.

The house at Kettle's Yard can be read as a form of still life painting, now carefully preserved through Cambridge University Museums, as an example of life lived, as an ordered, aesthetic still life. (fig. 16) However, despite Ede's immense, and generous achievement (the house was donated to the University of Cambridge in 1966), Kettle's Yard can appear, today, oddly dematerialized, and inanimate, despite Ede's desire to create 'a living place where works of art could be enjoyed'.<sup>(3)</sup> In the way that some gardens, adopted as culturally significant by institutions such as the National Trust, can lose vitality through the loss of the individual's intimate vision, so museums always risk this denaturing by a desire to impose, as Tim Ingold suggests, 'culturally transmitted form upon the flux of experience'.<sup>(4)</sup>

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3 <http://www.kettlesyard.co.uk/house/history/> (accessed July 2015).

4 Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment : Essays on Dwelling, Livelihood and Skill* (England; New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 158.



fig. 16. Beckstein Room, Kettle's Yard, © Kettle's Yard 2015

One way to uncover the potential of material for complex expression, is to juxtapose it with other materials, shaping them into unexpected encounters. A recent intervention at Kettle's Yard by the artist Andy Holden, for example, created a very different kind of physical experience of Kettle's Yard as a domestic and public space. His exhibition *Cosmos, Chewy, Thingly Time* re-imagined domestic space through a collage of multicoloured heaps of clay and plaster, table lamps, shelving units, books, paintings which jostled and hung around in fecund disarray, animating the experience of the house/museum as a domestic object. Different rhythms of life were called to mind, through the dissonant material juxtapositions and unexpected arrangements of objects. (fig. 17)



*fig. 17. Andy Holden, 'Chewy, Cosmos, Thingly Time' 2012  
Installation view at Kettle's Yard*

The use of dissonant material juxtapositions to refresh visual language follows a line in the visual arts from Cubist collage to other forms of expression, such as jewellery, where mixing materials of different perceived value became part of the resistance to the visual clichés of the commercial jewellery world. An example is the work of Dutch artist Robert Smit, who paints freehand with acrylic onto carefully fashioned gold objects, holding in tension the wonder of intricate metal craftsmanship with the gestural freedom of the painter. (fig. 18)



*fig. 18. Robert Smit  
Necklace 1991  
Gold, paint  
12.5 x 12.5 cm*

In 2007, the potter and writer Edmund de Waal created a series of installations of porcelain vessels designed specifically for Kettle's Yard, installed throughout the house and the gallery. (fig. 19) Although de Waal cites an interest in reactivating the grammar of display for ceramics, through re-positioning objects in a different relation to architectural space, which he feels 'allows a kind of generative movement'<sup>(5)</sup>, he is curiously silent about the **material** qualities of his work as an activating

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5 Edmund de Waal, *Edmund de Waal at Kettles Yard, mima and elsewhere* (Cambridge: Kettles Yard, 2007), p.117.



*fig. 19. Edmund De Waal  
'Tenebrae No. 2'  
Kettle's Yard 2005*





*fig. 20. Philip Eglin  
'Mixed Marriages' 2011  
Blackwell House, Cumbria  
Overleaf: fig. 21. Philip Eglin  
Group of Jugs 2011  
Handbuilt, thrown, moulded earthenware*





presence for the viewer and a productive space for his aesthetic ambition as an artist. If we wish to create animate arrangements of things, as the sculptor Constantin Brâncuși said, 'we must go with (materials) to the point that others understand their language'.<sup>(6)</sup>

De Waal's hand thrown, celadon-glazed, clay vessels could have set up a series of resonant material reverberations to the intimate lived life that still echoes through Kettle's Yard. Instead there was a leaching of material presence, despite works being brought near to us by being presented on tabletops, along window ledges and on open display. The physical proximity of the work did not, in this case, generate a sense of much closer space centred on the body: the aesthetic experience of 'intimate immensity'<sup>(7)</sup> that Bachelard describes. This experience seems to depend on a more sensuous material immersion than de Waal was able to activate in either himself, or his viewer.

In 2011 Philip Eglin, an artist whose work is similarly rooted in the expressive traditions of domestic ceramics, installed an exhibition *Mixed Marriages* at Blackwell House in Cumbria. (fig. 20) At Blackwell, the M.H. Baillie Scott Arts and Crafts interior - restored by the Lakeland Arts Trust to a period domesticity of copper, oak, metal, paper and stone - was actively reanimated by Eglin's selection and placing of a contrasting series of works in clay. These ranged from cast and modelled female figures, to groups of handbuilt jugs and large vessels. The vivid sensuality of the works seemed to challenge, yet activate, the domesticity of Blackwell.

Eglin's innovative handling of his material language is fostered through hands-on experimental processes with shaping clay and the close observation of historical objects. His blend of intellectual and technical curiosity was seen in *Mixed Marriages* and re-opened an intimate contact

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6 Constantin Brancusi quoted in Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand – Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture* (England: Wiley, 2010), p. 55.

7 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p.183.

with the house and its materials and histories: the material focus was critical. As the sculptor William Tucker argues, material, in some forms of sculpture, is the fundamental determinant of form, through which language is made, and re-made.

Yet, with Eglin's work, we are not back in the romantic medieval revivalism of the 'truth to material' of John Ruskin or William Morris. The importance of dissonance is highlighted. Eglin's jugs are part of the contemporary world, although they are shot through with the threads of the past. For example, his group of jugs, (fig. 21) are in part the artist's visual response to the awkward, animate plasticity of the medieval jug form, to be found in numerous Western museum collections. This reference to historical objects offers one interpretative framework for the installation, connecting the viewer to the temporal persistence of everyday domestic objects. The additional knowledge that the jugs are partly moulded from discarded plastic bottles found around the artist's former studio in Stoke-on-Trent deepens understanding of them. The old and the new collide in a third material space in which the concept of what we value, or what we might consider authentic, is challenged by thoughtful and knowledgeable material practice.

The essential paradox of art objects in general, still life painting in particular, and most displays in museums is that they freeze an experience of reality in order to re-activate it. Their success as a poetic experience depends on this reactivation, when an inert object returns to life in the body of the viewer. Like the act of firing a kiln, which rarely returns identical objects, so similar variations in the experience and attention of the viewer, as well as the skill and focus of the maker may cause an object launched into the world to be stillborn.

This idea of unfreezing is captured in the concept of wayfaring, as described by Tim Ingold in his anthropological studies of different forms of human existence. 'Wayfaring' suggests Ingold 'is our most

fundamental way of being in the world'.<sup>(8)</sup> Movement that is circular not linear shapes human existence: its intimate realities, its conditions of being alive. Lifelines are winding and irregular. They come and go across surfaces and materials, informed by the actions of others, and their irregular shapes are thus intrinsic to the process and perception of being alive in the world.

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8 Tim Ingold, *Lines: a Brief History* ( England, New York: Routledge, 2007) p. 81.



*fig. 22.*  
*Thomas Heatherwick*  
*'Studio Materials House'*  
*1997, Installation for*  
*the Science Museum*

Ingold proposes, 'we need to shift our perspective from the transverse relations between objects and images to the longitudinal trajectories of materials and awareness'<sup>(9)</sup> a shift illustrated by the Thomas Heatherwick installation from the Science Museum. (fig. 22) This anthropological perspective provides an insight into the shape of living processes that inform crafting objects. Making, be it an object or an exhibition, is a form of wayfaring around different forms of material engagement. Immersion in the rigorous and specific demands of shaping matter, or arranging different material objects, deepens a connection to the flux of life. Time given to that immersion unfolds an unconscious thought process, which will inevitably include the everyday world of things and domestic lives, bridging our experience of different sentient ecologies. 'The physical act of making is an inseparable part of the creative process', as Pallasmaa argues 'and the first, and the last reality for the maker is the work itself, the very process of working'.<sup>(10)</sup>

A study of still life painting highlights the way the complex material manipulation of the different elements of which objects are composed can be used to represent them to us, in ways that activate our awareness of them as physical things. Thus, the image of the shadowy jugs in the *Still Life* by Giorgio Morandi, (fig. 23) reminds us, as Neil Cox suggests, 'what it is to co-exist with a world of things and what it is that makes things present and what it is like to be in their presence via the medium of painting'.<sup>(11)</sup> Our attentiveness is raised by arrangement of the subject, within a particular medium, and in this case, by its almost shadowy presence in the overall composition. The dissolving edges highlight the medium, watercolour, as well as blurring the boundary between object

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9 Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (England; New York: Routledge, 2011), p.14.

10 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image – Imagination and Imagery in Architecture* (England: Wiley, 2010), p.107.

11 Neil Cox, *In the presence of things: four Centuries of Still Life Painting Vol 2* (Portugal: Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, 2011), p. 35.



*fig. 23. Giorgio Morandi  
'Still Life' 1962  
Watercolour, 16 x 21 cm*





*fig. 24. Jane Simpson  
'Salmon Pink with Frilly Aubergine Vase' 2000  
Ceramic on formica plinth 110 x 60 cm*

and space. What Elaine Scarry describes as a 'set of instructions for mental composition'.<sup>(12)</sup>

The artist Jane Simpson made a series of ceramic vessels, (fig. 24) following readings of still life paintings by Morandi, re-transcribing the object relationships of his paintings into three-dimensional space. The unexpected transposition from painted image back to thing sets up a new set of relationships to both image and objects. Ian Jeffrey describes this as creating a type of 'post modern turn of mind... a kind of quasi-actuality'<sup>(13)</sup> to arouse the curiosity of the viewer. Yet Simpson's work, as a material object, seems unable to activate the surrounding space with sufficient energy to fully articulate a new experience of it. Paradoxically Simpson's vessels are not sensed as poetic forms, for, unlike Morandi's image, they do not seem to embody the felt presence of material life, only an image of life. The expressive potential of the medium of clay, as well as the poetic symbolism of everyday domestic vessels which so preoccupied Morandi, appear absent in Simpson's work.

Although any object can have personal meaning to an individual through associative connections, in its role as an emotional tool, (as defined in D. W. Winnicott's idea of the transitional object, or Sigmund Freud's idea of the fetish), nevertheless some objects appear to have what the early twentieth-century critic Clive Bell would have described as 'significant form': some objects, paintings, pots or sculpture, seem capable of, as Cox says, 'becoming a depiction of social experience; a beautiful open vision of ordinary things'<sup>(14)</sup> in particularly compelling ways. In other words they offer the potential of a shared aesthetic experience.

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12 Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (USA: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 244.

13 Ian Jeffrey, *The Language of Things* (Cambridge; Kettles Yard, 2003), p. 34.

14 Cox, p. 56.

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fig. 25. Patrick Caulfield, 'Pottery' 1969, Oil on canvas 213.4 x 152.4 cm, Tate Gallery, London



This shared aesthetic experience and the language that surrounds it, can be found, in still life paintings, studio pots and certain forms of sculpture, in the flow of everyday life and in its domestic rituals of cooking, eating, drinking and gathering. These rituals create, a material, dynamic place reminding us that 'language is a material thing to be unmade and remade'.<sup>(15)</sup>

This common ground suggests a possible correspondence between, say, a collection of Clive Bowen clay jugs, (fig. 26) a Patrick Caulfield painted image of jugs, (fig. 25) and Brancusi's carved wooden cup forms. Each work demonstrates an awareness of the imaginative potential of domestic things, although each proposes this potential through different means. This is not to suggest that there is a Platonic ideal of jug-ness, or pot-ness, inherent in each of these cultural artefacts, merely that the domestic vessel remains a common frame of reference and therefore presents a motif around which different expressive transformations can coalesce.

Material things, and our relationship to them, can be better understood by examining the relationships between their different forms (pots, paintings or sculpture), and the formal relationships within them. As Nicolas Bourriaud suggests, we arrive at a heightened sense of the relationship between us and the world when it is mediated through an aesthetic object.<sup>(16)</sup> An exhibition, like a still life painting, needs to compose these relationships with care.

Aesthetic experiences are the response to particular relational compositions of material, orchestrated through the skill of the object maker. They are also the response to the completed image or artefact that emerges from the composition. As Denis Dutton points out in relation to music appreciation,<sup>(17)</sup> memory plays a crucial role. When the

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15 *ibid*, p. 24.

16 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (France: les presses du réel, 2002), p. 42.

17 Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 216.



*fig. 26. Clive Bowen  
Collection of lead-glazed thrown  
earthenware vessels his Devon studio, 2012*

physical forms of jugs, the balance between their archetypal elements (spout, handle, vessel, scale, surface and colour) are given new focus, through imaginative compositions in either paint, clay or metal, our relationship to them is also given new focus. (fig. 27) Acts of pouring and giving, storing and conserving, sharing and drinking are everyday human activities all contained within the form 'jug' and pleasurable memories of those real activities can be triggered when that form is represented in the context of a reflective space: the painted image or the exhibition in a museum.

Reality, as the writer Salman Rushdie, said 'is an artefact – it does not exist until it is made'.<sup>(18)</sup> The painted image, the sculpted, assembled or

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18 Salman Rushdie quoted by Wendy Steiner, *The Scandal of Pleasure – Art in the Age of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p.117. Rushdie was commenting on the work of the German author Günter Grass in particular his ability to expose 'the making of reality' through literary expression in novels such as *The Tin Drum* (1959).



fig. 27. Rupert Spira, *Four Copper Red Glazed jugs* 1990, 7 – 12 cm

thrown form is a making of reality: each form becomes a new physical object which displaces light and space within its frame or volume and also displaces light and space beyond its edge: as Clark proposes 'The things of this world open onto no-things ...what is essential to them is not their detail or texture so much as their degree of extension.'<sup>(19)</sup>

This 'degree of extension' is not only the moment when the physical object takes its place in the world, beyond the maker's studio, but also the moment when echoes of it begin to resonate, through its material connection to other objects and made realities. This is potentially the moment of the poetic image experienced, as the poet Thomas A. Clark suggests, as a form of 'depth, clarity, extent'.<sup>(20)</sup>

Pallasmaa reminds us to refocus attention on the potential of certain objects to embody sensuous, and highly condensed ideas, to which 'the eye assigns names but only the hand truly knows'.<sup>(21)</sup> The potential of exhibitions to release the vitality of the complex range of ideas embedded in such objects depends on the exhibition maker's ability to work with all his or her own intelligences, in Gardner's sense, to create a felt material presence in the exhibition room. In this way, attention is focused on embodied as well as intellectual readings of the objects and the language systems they inhabit. As Griselda Pollock notes in a recent essay for *Tate Papers* exhibition-making:

*'is thus not the application of a pre-given system to an artwork in order to maintain its function as the support of the system. It is the engagement with the working, the*

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19 Clark, p. 39.

20 Thomas A Clark, *Tomentil and Bleached Bones* (Edinburgh: Polygon Press, 1993), p.22.

21 Pallasmaa, p. 44.

*economy of a complex material, intellectual, sensuous, affective and social practice*'.<sup>(22)</sup>

The 'assigning of names' is useful shorthand for shared experience. However, there is a risk that the experience is thought fully expressed by the name, rather than the name representing an entry point into the realm of different forms of embodied human experience. Attention to the qualities and relationships between words, material forms and experience is an attention given and shared by artists in many ways, and is given a particularly useful expression by physical exhibitions. The material roots of all language are part of the discourse of craft. The re-arrangement of materially intelligent objects can draw attention to the diverse forms of dialect that language has always had.

Maintenance of this flexibility of language, through the embodied poetics of material practice, is an important skill for the artist as well as the exhibition maker. The field of sculpture provides a useful guide. As a word, 'sculpture' not only summons up concrete images of cast or carved forms, it has proved flexible enough to be associated with the poetic image in the form of anything from video montages by Douglas Gordon to lumps of lard piled into gallery spaces by Joseph Beuys. But use of the word 'sculpture' creates a close relationship with cultural (i.e. valued) space and by extension physical spaces used to delineate culture, namely museum spaces.

To describe something as a jug, by contrast, summons a domestic rather than cultural image. And yet the persistent, material presence of this

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22 Griselda Pollock, 'What if Art Desires to be Interpreted? Remodelling Interpretation after the 'Encounter-Event', *Tate Papers* 15 (April 2011) <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/what-if-art-desires-be-interpreted-remodelling-interpretation> (accessed July 2015).



domestic vessel form, linking human experience through time, opens a rich seam of cultural life that is anything but prosaic. The basic presence of jug, jar, bowl, pitcher through time gives these forms, as art historian Norman Bryson argues, enormous force: they are part of a slow geological rhythm which sits beyond the changing fashions of table manners and social rituals. The objects of still life, the prime objects belong to the 'aevum... time which has no beginning and no end', <sup>(23)</sup> our experience of them is familiar, memory-rich and social.

The complex blend of traces of the material, intellectual, sensuous and social within an object can create an intimate connection between maker/user and between different users. It is this complexity that creates relationships: relationships between individuals that are predicated on curiosity about the potential of different forms of life, as made manifest in the object. Objects, as American psychologist Sherry Turkle says:

*'bring together thought and feeling : evocative objects bring us down to earth...when we focus on objects, physicians and philosophers, artists and engineers are able to find common ground in everyday experience'.* <sup>(24)</sup>

One contribution the development of a concept of craft has made to the field of art and design is to highlight the fact that the shape and character of objects, their design and manufacture, as well as their consumption matters. A concept of craft has continued to keep a focus on the thinking hand as a critical part of human experience, through which the potential to shape experience, and to transcribe this experience into made forms – be they gardens, pots, paintings, poems or buildings – is demonstrated.

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23 Bryson, p. 139.

24 Sherry Turkle, *Evocative Objects: things we think with* (USA: MIT Press, 2007), p. 8.

If, as Pallasmaa argues, 'one of the primary tasks of art is to safeguard the authenticity and independence of human experience'<sup>(25)</sup> then objects crafted by the thinking hand remain central to cultural life.

However, our collective ability in industrial and post-industrial societies to replicate and produce vast numbers of objects has disturbed the independent realm of private experience that Pallasmaa sees as critical to the task of art. We run the risk of being unable to distinguish the intimate links between material environments, domestic objects and our own daily lives, submerged under the relentless, 'seductive hyperpresence of things';<sup>(26)</sup> the sheer quantity of stuff.

Exhibitions have the potential to stimulate re-engagement with active material ecologies and a sense of the rich human histories inherent in them. In order to deliver this, they need to be born from a full engagement with the material world, to provide an authentic experience of the subject: this is a condition which could be compared to Italian neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese's sense of empathy: 'an unconscious process in which the individual uses his own body as a template that enables him to feel into the other's experience.'<sup>(27)</sup>

The focus on the act of making, as well as of owning, domestic objects keeps the language of the thing alive within its own system. Therefore, when the jug enters a different system such as a museum exhibition, or is the subject of an artist's re-arrangement of formal elements to create a poetic image in a still life painting, the fact that it also pours water in restaurants, holds flowers in the front room, and is still being made for this everyday context, is part of its poetic life.

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25 Pallasmaa, p. 12.

26 Clarrie Wallis, *Patrick Caulfield* (London: Tate Publications, 2013), p. 71.

27 Pallasmaa, p. 69.

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*fig. 28. Tony Cragg, 'Mortar and Pestle' 1986, Cast Iron, 100 cm high*



A number of contemporary sculptors, including Tony Cragg, have explored the terrain between art and everyday objects. A series of works by Cragg entitled *Early Forms* including *Mortar and Pestle* from 1986, for example, (fig. 28) involved the sculptor in re-making the forms of useful domestic things in new materials, and to exaggerated scales, in order to explore the relationships that are embedded in the sculptural forms of everyday vessels.

Cragg's active involvement in the physical shaping, or re-shaping of material in three dimensions, and his expressed interest in hands-on processes as a way of finding 'the life that lies beneath a surface' provides a route towards forms that have psychological significance for the sculptor. <sup>(28)</sup> In works such as *Mortar and Pestle* the psychological significance that the form holds for Cragg hints at the shared significance of everyday domestic environments, re-animated through his re-made object from that environment.

Echoes of the domestic acquire a new significance in Cragg's work through the remaking of the form. In addition, as Rosalind Krauss argues in her much quoted 1979 essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, <sup>(29)</sup> many artists who have aligned themselves with a particular field of sculpture have, usually, been exploring the aesthetic potential of form and material to animate place and space, from Constantin Brâncuși's *Endless Column* (1918), to Robert Morris' felt forms (1976), to Anthony Gormley's *Field* (1989-2003). The removal of objects from their traditional grounds (both physical and cultural) is a way of focusing attention on them by relocating them either in pictorial space, or in exhibition space.

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28 Tony Cragg, *Tony Cragg Sculptures and Drawings* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2011) p. 115.

29 Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, Vol. 8 (Spring, 1979) <http://www.onedaysculpture.org.nz/assets/images/reading/Krauss.pdf> (accessed July 2015)



fig. 29. Cornelia Parker, 'Thirty Pieces of Silver' (detail) 1988, Silver, copper wire, Tate Gallery, London

In 1988 the artist Cornelia Parker selected a series of mass produced silver tableware – forks, fishknives, mustard pots - and crushed them flat with a steam roller before carefully re-presenting them, each new form suspended on wire like a mobile. (fig. 29) The resulting sculpture, *Thirty Pieces of Silver*, is now in the collection of Tate Britain. As Parker says in a Tate interview:

*'I find the pieces of silver have much more potential when their meaning as everyday objects has been eroded. Thirty Pieces of Silver is about materiality and then about anti matter'.<sup>(30)</sup>*

30 <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/parker-thirty-pieces-of-silver-t07461/text-summary> (accessed July 2015).

This desire to refresh our relationship to objects and to find new forms of expression inherent in them by reshaping material language seems common to both Cragg and Parker. However, there is an important distinction. Cragg suggests through his work that processes of making are an integral part of understanding and creating material forms through which ideas can be both forged and expressed. In his series, *Lost in Thought*, for example, shown at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh in 2011, the vivid dynamic of the forms rested, in part, on the ways in which the artist used the processes of constructing and carving wood. In Parker's work, knowledge of such processes seems secondary to the formation of her sculptural ideas around the meaning of objects.

In addition, contrary to Parker's assertion, part of the potency of *Thirty Pieces of Silver* derives from the fact that although the objects' **function** has been eroded by the deformation process, their **meaning** is still intact as their former identity is still visible. It is the making visible of the familiar object as it is in the process of being transformed that gives life to the sculpture. Another example would be the recent 2014 *In the Making* exhibition at the Design Museum, London, curated by furniture design partnership Barber Osgerby, in which familiar objects – a nail, a chair, a lightbulb - were exhibited at a pre-finished stage of their production. The sense of process is common to both: the vital processes of making, so embedded in ideas of craft, underpin the conceptual framework although in Cragg's work the process itself is a more central part of his thinking.

Parker's reshaping and representation of domestic objects offers a particular connection to Western still life painting traditions. She creates a poetic image through engagement with pre-existent everyday objects although, in her work, the represented artefacts are moved out of the pictorial space into the physical space of the museum. By hanging each object in a precise arrangement, the artist manages to invert our understanding of sculpture as a casually represented readymade (there is a more active engagement here by the artist with both artefact and material) and to encourage us to question our relationship with everyday utensils.

Exhibitions that focus on the role of the **maker** of domestic objects as the animating intelligence behind our relationship to everyday utensils remain comparatively rare. Juxtaposing Parker's work with, for example, Simone ten Hompel's Jerwood award-winning collection of silver beakers *Posse* (fig. 30) gives a different inflection to a reading of *Thirty Pieces of Silver*. Ten Hompel's skillful origination of domestic form in silver is a critical value that refreshes our relationship to the material everyday object. *Posse* moves freely between its conceptual image and its use: it is not only a still life, it is still living as the beakers can be used between the intervals of static display.

To some extent, re-presenting objects opens a gateway into another world and gives us the space to experience ourselves and the objects in new ways, it also allows us to enter the activity of interpretation which as art historian Ian Jeffrey points out 'is the game we like to play'<sup>(31)</sup> as human beings. When we are in close proximity to an object, in a place that is encouraging us to move around in its space - a place set apart for attentive looking, such as a museum – we may find that 'familiar objects are given a new kind of intensity'. We become aware of their shape and role, however fleetingly, in 'the specific modelling of our experience'.<sup>(32)</sup>

As Tim Clark observes in relation to the still life painting of Picasso, 'objects... are really only redescribed, in painting, by being put somewhere... somewhere that contains them.'<sup>(33)</sup> When a painting, a pot, or a sculpture is placed in the room of a museum, our experience of that object is activated in new ways. Containment by that very particular space makes the object's presence felt in different ways; it is redescribed to us through the act of exhibition-making.

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31 Jeffrey, p.5.

32 T.J. Clark, p.232.

33 *ibid*, p.128.

*Overleaf: fig. 30. Simone ten Hompel  
'Posse' 2004, fabricated silver beakers, 9cm, Photo: Sussie Ahlburg*







A long-running strand of critical discourse in visual art has been to talk about the way that 'art is made in the gallery'.<sup>(34)</sup> This idea of art-making through context is worth probing more closely, however, because it allows the object, with its qualities as a made thing and as a useful everyday thing, as well as the user's experience of it, to operate more actively. Objects have both material presence and function beyond the gallery: what exactly is it about their presence in a gallery that shifts the nature of our experience of them? This is not an exercise in describing art. It is rather a reflection on the shape and potency of everyday objects, which draws us back to a key concept of craft, and gives consideration to everyday domestic experience.

The 2012 exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, *The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China* included one small historical domestic artefact, a second-century cast bronze ginger grater. (fig. 31) This everyday object is essentially still a familiar object for any twenty-first-century viewer. Its shape, evolved in the second century BC, was determined by its function. The relationship between the bowl and the handle, the raised areas for grating and the pierced areas through which juice could be squeezed, were carefully evolved to transform the root into spice for court feasts.

As the curator of the show confirms, this form is still in use in southern China today, albeit in bamboo, rather than bronze, and indeed it exists in many forms in contemporary Britain. Pleasure in looking at the object rests in the ability, as human users, to compare it with our own experience of similar utensils, to note differences and similarities of material and form and to recall that cooking, the life of the table, is not only part of the experience of contemporary life, but of human life, throughout history.

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34 Bourriaud, p. 40.



*fig. 31. Ginger Grater Second century BC, Western Han dynasty,  
13.3 x 5.2 cm, Excavated at Xianggangshan in 1983  
The Museum of the King of Nanyue, Guangdong Province © Fitzwilliam Museum*

The grater was shown behind glass, although it was set out as it would have been in the Han tomb, with a range of other kitchen utensils to feed the departed Emperor after life. Although the object could not be handled (this would have been one way of creating a direct sensory experience of it), nevertheless the familiarity of the object, the heightened sense of material shaped for an everyday purpose created a strong echo in the mind of the viewer. The small bronze artefact brought the social reality of daily life to the fore, as a direct experience in the space of the museum. Looking at this artefact, held still in a glass case, one also became aware of the precision of its making and the value that was clearly placed on it in the everyday life of the Han court. Thus, an object with little text at all reveals its story through its physical presence in an exhibition, creating a memorable experience for the viewer rooted in his or her experience of everyday things.

Another object created for a very specific function is the bottle rack bought by the artist Marcel Duchamp in Paris in 1914 and subsequently presented in exhibitions in Paris and New York as *Bottle Rack*. (fig. 32) Duchamp's purpose may have been to challenge ideas of art by placing an everyday object in the spaces of art and yet, as Margit Rowell points out in her catalogue essay from *Objects of Desire: The Modern Still Life*, although the object is 'transplanted from one realm of experience to another.... Its phenomenal existence and its aura are the same'.<sup>(35)</sup> In other words, you could return the bottle rack to the Parisian wine cellar for which it was made and it would reassume its original identity. For Rowell, this double identity creates a problem for consideration of the work as having generative aesthetic potential within the fictive, self-contained space of still life, and yet there is another way of considering our experience of the value of the displaced object.

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35 Margit Rowell, *Objects of Desire: The Modern Still Life* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1997), p. 72.



*fig. 32. Marcel Duchamp  
'Bottle Rack' 1914 Galvanised Iron  
74.3 x 40.6 cm*

In his assessment of the achievements of Duchamp as a sculptor, the sculptor William Tucker observes that *Bottle Rack*, by being removed from the everyday and moved into spaces set aside for looking, is enabled to communicate its own abstract properties as a sculptural form: 'image, proportion, structure and use of material - it becomes unrecognisable except as sculpture'.<sup>(36)</sup> Tucker calls attention to the sculptural presence, and also to the formal integrity of the 'function, economy and efficiency' of the useful object. Here, knowledge of the potential of the material, as well as the motif, offers a different sense of the object. Its two identities, a mass-produced utilitarian thing and an art object, are held in productive tension by a resonant sense of the language of a made, material object in everyday life. Tucker's writing draws on his own engagement as a sculptor with material, and this in turn informs his perceptual awareness of the object as crafted material and cultural form. Both are integrated into his critical writing on the subject.

Tucker's reference to making things for use as well as for contemplation (the designed object, the sculpture) can be viewed as aspiring to express the human condition, the experience of how we exist. Displacing certain everyday objects from their ordinary contexts, whether through the curatorial work of displaying historical artefacts (the Han ginger grater) or the artistic work of conscious re-presentation (Duchamp's *Bottle Rack*) can, in itself, generate a new relationship to both the object and its cultural context. However, greater critical understanding of the crafting of the material can, potentially, offer a different, more nuanced reading of the object; it alerts the viewer to what Tim Ingold describes as the 'generative flux of materials'.<sup>(37)</sup>

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36 William Tucker, *The Language of Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), pps 120/121.

37 Tim Ingold, *Being Alive : Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description op. cit.*, p. 31.

One thing that certain studio ceramics and still life paintings have in common is that 'room space is their reality'.<sup>(38)</sup> The intimate, domestic focus implicit in both forms of expression can prevent consideration of them as significant objects and works of art. Yet of itself, the domestic focus creates a significant symbolic framework for the viewer, and is therefore an inextricable part of the interpretative process. Rowell suggests that Matisse's resonant still life paintings, grew from attention 'to the structure of each canvas...generated by the objects themselves.'<sup>(39)</sup> The relationship between the object, and the act of picture making is, in this case, linked through material awareness of the spaces of domesticity. The attentive examination of objects, and then the repositioning and representing of them through the medium of paint, activates the imagination through perception of the life of the table.

For potter and writer Alison Britton, this 'intrusion of living into work' is a critical imaginative space, and the experience of arranging and creating objects, is 'what still life is about, putting things in contexts, holding them still for a moment to take them in'.<sup>(40)</sup> In his book *Looking at the Overlooked – Four Essays on Still Life Painting* Norman Bryson suggests that still life painting links three particular areas of human language and communication 'the life of the table; the domain of signs and the technology of painting'.<sup>(41)</sup>

Bryson's close reading of another historical artefact, *The Kitchenmaid with Christ at Emmaus* by the seventeenth-century Spanish painter Diego Velázquez, explores this further. (fig. 33) This compelling object holds attention, in part, for the way that the paint is skillfully handled to create the presence of the jugs and dishes, giving them equal vitality

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38 T. J. Clark, p. 104.

39 Rowell, p. 50.

40 Alison Britton, *Life and Still Life* (Farnham: University of Creative Arts, 2012), p. 16.

41 Bryson, p. 14.



*fig. 33. Diego Velázquez, 'Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus', c. 1617-1618  
Oil on canvas, 55 x 118 cm © National Gallery of Ireland*

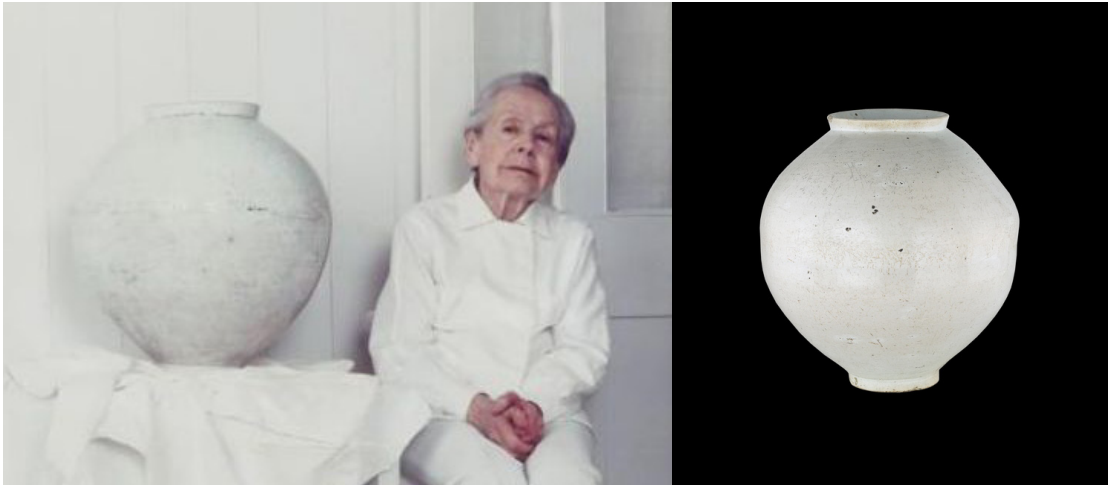
with the human figure; 'the technology of painting' being used with great fluency. The domestic scene is foregrounded, wholly overwhelming the distant, public event, confined to the window space at the top left. This contravenes the conventional understanding of the hierarchical relationship between public and private realms, and gives particular spatial context to the objects.

Velázquez's objects possess a deeply material sentience, experienced through the craft, or technology of painting, and through the illusionistic act of representation in two-dimensions; they resonate as objects of material use rather than as objects of display. 'We can feel the roughness of earthenware, the feel of a glaze, the hardness and coolness of metal, here the sensing instruments are the fingertips'.<sup>(42)</sup> These painted

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42 Bryson, p. 72.





Left: fig. 34. Dame Lucie Rie Seated by the Korean Pot, 1990 Photo: Lord Snowdon  
Right: fig. 35. Choson Dynasty Korean "Moon Jar" 17-18th C A.D. 47 cm © British Museum

artefacts display all the poetry of everyday, handmade things, idealised in the *Mingei* tradition of twentieth-century Japanese thought, as 'a beauty of intimacy'.<sup>(43)</sup> A tradition that is encapsulated in the eighteenth-century Korean *Moon Jar*, from the British Museum, once in the collections of two British studio potters, Bernard Leach and Lucie Rie. (figs. 34 & 35)

A still life painting is able to stimulate a dialogue with the viewer by activating a sense of the thresholds between nature and culture. The best examples of still life can move across levels of reality as both material, made things in space, physical inscriptions in the gallery, defining a space in the world, and images of that world, which thus operate in the imaginatively limitless space of fiction.

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43 The main principles of *Mingei* can be found in the writings of Soetsu Yanagi, published in an English translation by Bernard Leach. Soetsu Yanagi, *The Unknown Craftsman: a Japanese insight into beauty* (Japan: Kodansha International, 1989)



*fig. 36. Paul Cézanne*  
*'Still Life with Ginger Jar and Eggplants' 1890-4*  
*72.4 x 91.4 cm*  
*Oil on Canvas*  
*The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*

Cézanne's *Blue Ginger Jar* 1890 (fig. 36) demonstrates the 'potential for isolating purely aesthetic space'.<sup>(44)</sup> This aesthetic space is activated for artist and viewer through the careful construction of the made image, the technology of painting, in Bryson's sense, and also through the associative links of the subject to the life of the table, to the presence of 'the exquisite large gray-glazed ginger pot holding its own between left and right', as the poet Rilke observed about this painting.<sup>(45)</sup> Everyday experience embodied in domestic ceramic vessels is part of the aesthetic space.

The making and arrangement of domestic objects is thus seen as something which can frame actions and perceptions through the articulation of physical space. This space is, as Pallasmaa argues, an inevitable part of 'our existential world (which) has two simultaneous foci: our body and our home.'<sup>(46)</sup> So what happens when we release the ginger jar from the picture and bring it, as itself, into the spaces of looking? For Rilke and Cézanne, this domestic object offered the potential for imagining; in its material form it held the seeds of aesthetic space. Yet how does the pot itself possess what English critic and writer Marina Warner describes as 'vesch' or 'thing with soul'? What makes it an object 'that resonates and possesses vitality and significance ... imbued with presence and feeling?'<sup>(47)</sup> As American art dealer Michael Findlay reminds us, art is a language with many dialects one of which is embedded in the ceramic vessel itself.<sup>(48)</sup>

Nicholas Rena's 2008 *Jerwood Contemporary Makers* installation *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, (fig. 37) shown at the Jerwood Space, London, comprised a group of outsize ceramic 'vessels as substantial and

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44 Bryson, p. 81.

45 Rowell, p. 20.

46 Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image*, p.125.

47 Marina Warner, Introduction, *Things: A Spectrum of Photography 1850 – 2001* (London: V & A Publications, 2001), p. 7.

48 Michael Findlay, *The Value of Art* (Munich; London; New York: Prestel Publishing Ltd., 2012), p. 129.



*fig. 37. Nicholas Rena,  
'The Ecstasy of St. Teresa' 2008,  
Ceramic, painted and polished 76 x 550 x 425 cm,  
Shown at Jerwood Space, London 2008*

complex 3-dimensional canvases for the simple giving of colour.’<sup>(49)</sup> The jug form itself, re-fashioned, gave the familiar object a new kind of intensity through its ability to activate the space around it as a physical object.

Rena’s objects, as the title suggests, embody ritual – the life of the altar, as well as the life of the table. The acts of pouring and receiving, the function of the jug and the bowl, are put into the space of the gallery through their re-enactment as objects which have meaning in rituals with spiritual as well as secular associations. Their coherence as a poetic image rests in their adherence to the strict grammar of the language of vessel, which allows us to move towards an embodied ‘rediscovery of the basic properties and uses of commonplace objects’,<sup>(50)</sup> as Bryson suggests.

Rena’s jugs relate to Warner’s concept of ‘*vesch*’ through their capture of the symbolic role of the vessel in the space of both ritual and everyday life. They indicate use, and yet they are not capable of use (they are very heavy, thick-walled forms) in any straightforward way: their use resides, as with a still life painting, in their capacity to structure our experience of material space through the arrangement of everyday things.

Rena’s objects focus attention on the way ritual activities and objects are often a response to time passing. They represent stages on a journey through the material world, shadowed by its inevitable loss. The impulse to create objects and images that record human experience is an attempt to stay that loss; as Clark suggests we ‘structure our lives imaginatively in relation to death’.<sup>(51)</sup> Works which structure time, such as still life painting, with its tradition of fixing fleeting social moments have, as art

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49 [www.nicholasrena.com](http://www.nicholasrena.com) (accessed July 2015).

50 Bryson, p.128.

51 TJ Clark, p.246.

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*Overleaf: fig. 38. Philip Eglin, ‘Lampard’s Lament’ and ‘Macheda Celebrates’ 2011 Painted, printed ceramic plates 57 cm, shown at Spode Factory, Stoke-on-Trent*





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fig. 39. Julian Stair  
Installation at former Spode  
factory, Stoke-on-Trent 2011

historian Ernst Gombrich points out, 'a vanitas motif built in'.<sup>(52)</sup> What is preserved is neither the act of feasting, nor the vessels associated with it, but images of them. Exhibition-makers need to structure this experience of time to allow such objects to become active in the mind of the viewer. Specific compositions of material and objects can evoke a sense of time passing, and also a sense of Bryson's *aevum* or deep time.

In 2011 the British Ceramic Biennial hosted a series of exhibitions in the former Spode Factory in Stoke-on-Trent. The decaying 1930s factory building was filled with an array of ceramic objects from industry, small

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52 Ernst Gombrich, 'Tradition and Expression in Western Still Life', in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and other essays on the theory of art* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1971), p. 96.



studios and colleges which ranged from ceramic hip joints to Wedgwood teasetts; from Philip Eglin's large platters (fig. 38) drawing on the Spode pattern book, to vast clay sculptures from the collection of the European Ceramic Work Centre. The factory that had seen the production of so many everyday industrial objects in clay but is now abandoned to weather and time, was temporarily re-inserted into time through the physical presence of new clay objects.

Round a corner, at the back of the building, in a small, damp, grey alcove like the interior of an Italian tomb, sat a series of clay vessels by the British potter Julian Stair: white, grey and black funerary urns and sarcophagi, fashioned from a combination of brick clay, earthenware and porcelain. (fig. 39) Here, in a very particular combination of space and object, the experience of time was brought sharply in focus, by the presence of time lost, by death and decay. This particular installation and its material and cultural context, created a memorable example of the way in which an embodied experience of time can be activated by a particular sensual presentation of objects.

In Stair's work, the poetic image emerges from what Calvino describes as 'time regained in feelings that re-emerge from time lost' <sup>(53)</sup>; the vessels here are both functional, and about function – the containment of ashes after death. When an enlarged version of this collection, entitled *Quietus*, opened at mima in Middlesbrough in 2013, the particular poetry of Stoke did not translate easily into the more formal spaces of the museum. One could admire the technical craftsmanship and understand the concept but the felt experience of time passing was largely lost. The paradox of the museum space became apparent. By creating beautiful spaces that take objects out of time to preserve them, to create an interval in time in which they can be viewed more reflectively, one runs the risk of creating

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53 Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 87.

'a treasure house where objects come to die'.<sup>(54)</sup> Decontextualised and denatured, their ability to communicate is muffled rather than extended by their location.

In formal museums the exhibition-maker is always working against this tension of the neutral, atemporal space. The experience of time, critical to the experience of objects, has to be found in other ways. Material processes, like collage, can be one tool for offering this experience. For example, in 1985 the Tate mounted an exhibition, *St Ives 1939 – 1964*, which brought together sculpture, painting and ceramics by artists who are grouped under the heading of St. Ives artists: Bernard Leach pots, Ben Nicholson paintings, Barbara Hepworth sculpture. Installation shots in the Tate archive show a case of photographs, printed books and sketches which provided biographical background and date line as you entered the show, before you moved into the spaces of the pots, sculptures and paintings. The collage of these contrasting material fragments of life created a resonant sense of time.

The physical fragments acted as a form of prologue to the artworks themselves, rather like the overture to an opera, hinting that all these different motifs and fragments would reappear in the following exhibition. This curatorial approach highlighted the important role memory plays in creating the material experience of the show. It drew attention to Ingold's point that 'the properties of materials are not attributes but histories'.<sup>(55)</sup> The arrangement of materials in this prologue also echoed Ingold's view of social relationships as 'the inherent rhythmicity and its embeddedness in activities that are indexical of a person's belonging to locality and community'.<sup>(56)</sup>

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54 Bryson, p. 128.

55 Ingold, *Being Alive op.cit.*, p. 32.

56 *ibid.*

The material quality of memory and its role in making the connection between different forms of object and thence between artist and viewer was given a different focus in the recent *Memory Palace* exhibition shown at the V & A in 2013. Twenty graphic designers and illustrators from around the world were commissioned to make works in response to a dystopian story by author Hari Kunzru; this story is set in a future world in which recording, writing and collecting art are outlawed. The story's narrator is in prison for attempting to revive the ancient art of memory through some of these practices, clinging to the belief that without memory civilization is doomed. The exhibition was presented as a three-dimensional walk through book of fragments of text and image. One of the contributors, Czech typographer Peter Bil'ak, reflects in a video interview, on the 'joy of moving from the immaterial to the physical world' <sup>(57)</sup> through working with forming and fixing metal type. The interplay of material (the type) and imaginative (the story) processes underpinned both the making and the experience of the work. In the exhibition, Bil'ak made a large wall of reversed type; the sentence was only legible when the viewer walked past the work and looked back.

However the interplay was less successful in comments invited from visitors. iPads were available at the exit and visitors encouraged to tap in comments alongside their email addresses. A day later participants were emailed with an illegible fragment, collaged from multiple individual memory scribbles. This act of memory-giving failed, because it failed to recognize the transaction between body, imagination and environment that informs memory. This iPad souvenir offered the disembodied concept of memory rather than the actual physical experience of it.

Time, as a structuring force in human experience, is an embodied experience. Rachel Whiteread's haunting sculpture *Untitled (Library)*

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57 <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/videos/m/video-memory-palace-peter-bilak/> (accessed July 2015).

(fig. 40) offers an example. As Jeffrey comments, the work takes ‘beauty and appropriateness from the ability to proceed, andante, taking time, at the kind of deliberate pace which gives us space for reflection.’<sup>(58)</sup> Whiteread’s use of the casting process to create a solid object from the form of another object, in this case a shelf of books, evokes a rhythm, as Jeffrey observes, of time experienced. The physical traces of the books that remain visible in the plaster casts evoke a sense of material in transformation; the material process is part of the poetry of the object.



*fig. 40.*  
*Rachel Whiteread*  
*'Untitled (Library)'*  
*1999, Dental plaster,*  
*polystyrene, steel,*  
*170 cm © Guardian*  
*images*

Wendy Steiner points out the reality of failure in reaching after the poetic image: ‘every field of professionals from bankers, to oil painters has only a small percentage of practitioners who perform at an optimal level, the

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58 Jeffrey, p. 31.

level that defines the ideal of the field'.<sup>(59)</sup> The ideal for the purposes of this discussion are object-makers, whose forms, when created, define both mental and physical space in ways which redefine those spaces for the individual at the moment of experience. What Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes as 'the imperious unity, the presence, the insurpassable plenitude which is for us the definition of the real'.<sup>(60)</sup>

The task of the exhibition-maker is to steep him or herself in the works, and the critical discussions, that may define the ideal of the field. The ability then to select works and stage them in ways which define the ideal of the field, at that moment, needs to balance critical distance with embodied immersion in material reality. This is not just the material reality of clay or paint, film or paper, as present in the works selected, it also includes the odd, atemporal but material reality of museum spaces: mdf panels, vinyl, floorboards, light fittings and fabrics. The making of an exhibition can activate material space, or foster a kind of 'presence', in Merleau-Ponty's sense, as the means by which the reality of things may pass into the attention of the viewer, and by which curiosity is first aroused and the time and space for dialogue is activated. As Bakhtin points out dialogue offers the potential 'to expand the repertoire of human creativity',<sup>(61)</sup> and the impact of this on real lives may be profound.

The sense of an exhibition as a very particular material object, with complex languages inherent to it, based on relationships between things, is further examined by the artist Victor Burgin who refers to an exhibition as a 'different discursive space' to a printed text or lecture in which the real experience, 'the need to be precise about the experience overrides

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59 Steiner, p. 156.

60 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non Sense*, p. 15, quoted in Pallasmaa *The Thinking Hand*, pp. 85, 86.

61 James Zappen, 'Mikhail Bakhtin', in *Twentieth Century Rhetoric and Rhetoricians*, edited by Michael G. Moran and Michelle Ballif (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), p. 7.

the need to be understood'.<sup>(62)</sup> An exhibition can create awareness of the making space of language, and of the embodied, material roots of that and of our own experiences. The imagined and real worlds of objects in space can be juxtaposed – watercolours of jugs or vast built reproductions of jugs, as jugs. The play between the two and the possibilities that exist in the liminal space created, are fruitful cognitive spaces.

A refreshed attention to art-making, informed by a concept of craft, could return a different kind of material presence to exhibitions and the physical spaces they occupy in museums - museums that we continue to build with such urgency in the twenty-first century. A study of the imaginative responses to the symbols of everyday life found in certain forms of still life painting, sculpture and studio ceramics , can inform such materially sensitive exhibition making. Otherwise museum exhibitions may become ghost rides : expensive, ephemeral spectacles emptied of the embodied realities of our shifting human relationship to the material world.

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62 Victor Burgin, *Parallel Texts: Interviews and Interventions about Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), pp 88/89.

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*fig. 41. Philip Eglin, 'Leaning Madonna' 2011  
Cast porcelain, 39 cm, Blackwell House, Cumbria 2011*







# EXHIBITION AS MOVING IMAGE

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All film clips mentioned can be found here  
<http://checkthis.com/amandagame>

*Overleaf: fig. 42. The Unilever Series: Tacita Dean, FILM, 35 mm film installation  
October 2011 – March 2012, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern © Tate London, 2015*







fig. 43. Matt Hulse  
'Filmcraft' 2009  
Installation at  
Dovecot Studios,  
Edinburgh, 2009



Orchestration of the relationship between physical exhibition space and the virtual space of film occupies an increasingly central role in processes of exhibition-making. Most exhibitions viewed in museum spaces in the past decade have moving image as an overt presence, both as autonomous artwork and as supporting documentary material. This reflects film's growing dominance in the spaces of everyday life, whether on computer screens, advertising billboards or mobile phones. It is an increasingly familiar form of everyday language. Its significance to a field of making was recognised by the Crafts Council of Great Britain's 2013 exhibition commission, *Real to Reel*, which brought together films documenting makers' practice as well as films which were, in some sense, the maker's practice itself. Film is, as the exhibition byline stated, a material in making. <sup>(1)</sup>

In this section consideration is given to the ways in which film medium can be crafted to deepen the experience of an exhibition and its objects; how the physical presentation of film, in exhibitions, can affect our experience of the medium and how the virtual spaces of film create an

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1 <http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/listings/real-to-reel-film-as-a-material-in-making/> (accessed July 2015).

animate document of the material exhibition encounter between people, objects and space.

As American critic, Susan Sontag observes, in the early days of cinema the experience of films such as the Lumiere brothers' *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station* was triggered by 'wonder that reality can be transcribed with such magical immediacy' <sup>(2)</sup>. As Sontag notes, our relationship to reality was shifted by the 'overwhelming physical presence of the image teaching us to strut, to smoke, to kiss, to fight...to look good in a raincoat, even when it isn't raining' <sup>(3)</sup>. Her suggestion is that it was the physical experience (in a darkened cinema, with an outsized lit projection 'kidnapping' one's body, and thoughts) that created a poetic space in which viewers' imaginative space could flourish. (fig. 44)



*fig. 44. James Jarché  
'A cinema audience pictured using the  
Ilford infra-red process' 1932  
© National Media Museum, Bradford*

Burgin also refers to the physicality of the cinematic experience, highlighting a spectator who, 'in darkness, is emotionally immersed in film but immobile'. <sup>(4)</sup> In the exhibition space, film can follow these cinematic conventions – darkened room, upholstered chairs – separating film from

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2 Susan Sontag, 'A Century of Cinema', *Where the Stress Falls* (New York: Vintage, 2003), p. 118.

3 Sontag, p. 119.

4 Victor Burgin, *Parallel Texts, Interviews and Interventions about Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), p. 188.

objects, or it can be projected in a variety of ways folded into the wider exhibition space. Pallasmaa produces an argument for the cinematic approach, suggesting that 'deep shadows and darkness are essential to overpowering emotional experiences' <sup>(5)</sup>; they create the conditions for an embodied viewer response. However, moving image that is projected directly into exhibition space may create a more vivid experience because it allows the viewer to move position in relation to the projection.

Movement, as a response to an environment generates a 'sense of nearness, intimacy, affection' <sup>(6)</sup>. These qualities are captured in Gallese's concept of empathy which, he suggests, is an unconscious process in which the individual uses his/her own body as a template that enables him to 'feel' into the other's experience. In empathic states we may become more aware of our own experience and become more receptive to the experience of others. This condition of empathy echoes Gardner's articulation of the multiple intelligences through which humans understand and navigate the different environments through which knowledge is formed. By introducing moving images, film offers a critical contribution to exhibition-making in physical space, as it can open out a different form of receptivity in the viewer.

Movement in this context also connects with a concept of craft since, as Constance Classen comments, it brings in strong haptic referents: 'touch relies on movement for its full expression' <sup>(7)</sup>. Although Classen was referring in her text to physical touch, film, by introducing movement creates a heightened sense of the physical world, and this can trigger the memory of a sense of touch. Filmmaker Tereza Stehlíková suggests that filmmakers should use the camera to imitate the function of the

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5 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin – Architecture and the Senses* (England: Wiley, 2011), p. 46.

6 Ibid, p. 46.

7 Constance Classen, *The Book of Touch* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p. 3.

hand, even the whole body, not just the eye 'its movement should convey involvement not distance'.<sup>(8)</sup> Involvement is created through movement and its sensory contexts. Furthermore, in referring to the theoretical work of Giuliana Bruno,<sup>(9)</sup> Stehlikova suggests a link between the experience of movement and the experience of emotion, reinforcing the possibility that moving images in exhibitions can stimulate our capacity for emotional intelligence.

Adamson on the other hand describes film as an 'impersonal and spectacular'<sup>(10)</sup> medium through which human senses are manipulated, but the intimate haptic senses are rarely engaged. There does, therefore, seem to be an inherent paradox in using film to interpret the predominantly haptic world of objects and object-making. As Mark Johnson says 'meaning grows from our visceral connections to life and the bodily conditions of life'<sup>(11)</sup> and, since the production of meaning, or some form of potentially transformative encounter with objects is the intention of an exhibition made in formal museum spaces, how does the distancing, disembodied medium of film enable the production of meaning? Film seems unlikely to stimulate what Pallasmaa underlines as: 'the sensory and embodied mode of thinking that is essential to all artistic work'.<sup>(12)</sup>

An exhibition, like a theatre production, or a film screening takes place in real time in physical space. Going to an exhibition, as artist Gordon Baldwin said, is a form of 'physical activity which can gradually move

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8 Tereza Stehlíková, 'Tangible territory: inviting the body into the experience of moving image' (unpublished PhD thesis, Royal College of Art, London, 2012), p.108.

9 *Ibid*, p. 108.

10 Glenn Adamson, 'The Spectacle of the Everyday', *Out of the Ordinary : Spectacular Craft* (London: V & A Publications, 2007), p. 23.

11 Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body – Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p.108.

12 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand – Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture* (England: Wiley, 2010), p. 17.



us forward'.<sup>(13)</sup> The physicality of the exhibition experience – the lights, sounds, other bodies, materials and objects – is part of the way in which it imprints itself on our memory and imagination. Even when we are unable to touch objects on view, as in museums, the reality of the sensual world is inevitably focused by the phenomenological reality of the material exhibition. Film, in the material context of an exhibition, is another layer of mediated reality, distancing the viewing experience from the existential reality of the pot, painting or sculpture on view.

The way of apprehending the physical objects on display in museums is based on memory of touch, not on touch itself, as things are usually locked in glass cases, or set behind barriers to protect them from the hands of visitors. From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, artists have developed strategies in an attempt to re-sense exhibition spaces in formal institutions. For example, in 1969 the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica, who coined the term 'supra sensorial', created a show for the Whitechapel gallery called the *Whitechapel Experiment*; his show encouraged visitors to wander barefoot across sand, surrounded by free-flying parrots. More recently Danish artist Olafur Eliasson created a sugar mist to envelop visitors in his *Weather Project* at Tate Modern, in 2003/4. The challenge remains, however, that since it is rarely possible to experience all the physical qualities of actual objects, as displayed in museums worldwide, the viewer's sensory engagement needs to be prompted by means other than by the object itself.

To consider the relationship between film and objects in museum exhibition making further, I would now like to refer to a series of film extracts. Each extract is stored on the following site:

<http://checkthis.com/amandagame>

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13 Gordon Baldwin, interview *Objects in a Landscape*, dir: Matthew Partington, 2012.

and has been selected to support particular arguments in the text as well as to offer a direct, if brief, material experience of film itself. Each extract is drawn from a work that, unless otherwise stated, was commissioned for, or formed part of, a physical exhibition.

*Clip 14* shows Takeshi Yasuda throwing a pot. Yasuda is a Japanese-born master potter, who has spent most of his professional life in the UK and is now based in China. He is shown demonstrating the art of throwing, whilst discussing his involvement in an exhibition, *Our British Friends*, selected by American artist Tom Supensky for a museum in Germany in 2008. The film was commissioned from film students at the University of the West of England where Yasuda was then teaching, to be shown alongside pots in the exhibition. It is important therefore to imagine that this film is being viewed in physical space as opposed to on a computer screen, and that it is positioned alongside the tall creamware pot that is shown under construction in the film. By this act of spatial translation, it may be possible to sense the ways in which the movement captured on film arouses a sense of the vitality of the object on view in the museum space, through the use of film's capacity to capture, frame by frame, an animate process of making. This sense of animated process is particularly important as a way of interpreting Yasuda's work. He is engaged in a lifelong 'quest for deeper feeling of presence'<sup>(14)</sup> in all daily objects, through the work of the hand. Giving the making process attention, through the medium of film, has critical value.

Sequences of hands throwing pots on film, however, are commonplace and something of a cliché. What is more arresting about this short film sequence is that the soundtrack carries the sound of the maker's voice. There is a sense of immediacy present in both the image of the fluid throwing and Yasuda's spoken simultaneous reflection. Attention is

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14 Rose Slivka, 'The New Ceramic Presence', in *The Craft Reader*, edited by Glenn Adamson (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2010), p. 531.

focused on the judgement of the maker. This sequence, experienced in an exhibition space, with a finished pot, introduces a critical interplay of sensory and imaginary language. The language of film and the language of object together create a third space, poetic space, which stimulates awareness of the living presence behind the object.

There is relatively little complexity to the film-making: largely fixed camera angle, digital camera, unique light source. The film commission was given to a film student, rather than to an experienced filmmaker. However, this relatively simple example of the craft of film heightens a sense of privileged and unmediated access to the potter's thoughts and actions: a sense that is reinforced by the raw edit with little post-production. The camera appears to be recording reality, rather than the film-maker representing it. The viewer is drawn into the space of the potter, through the central focus on the fluid movements of Yasuda's making. The completed object, when viewed after viewing the film, comes to life with the mental images of its making still active traces in the mind.

Two further film extracts illustrate the wider role that film can play in deepening the experience of objects in exhibitions. Both films were commissioned in 2009 by the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths to accompany the exhibition *Creation II*, curated by Mary La Trobe-Bateman to celebrate the lives of artist jewellers in the UK. The first film clip, (*Clip 8*), directed by Rachael Flynn, shows the jeweller, Catherine Martin, discussing the word *makoto*, a Japanese term which roughly translates as 'sincerity', but also carries the sense of fidelity or devotion. Her spoken discussion of the Japanese word, linked to actions, intensifies awareness of material in transformation and gives insight into the deep, embodied experience, the disciplined stillness necessary to creating her *kumihimo* braids in wire. *Kumihimo* is a traditional Japanese craft of braiding strands of silk to create intricately coloured cords. Martin became a master silk braider in Japan but subsequently adapted her knowledge to the braiding of gold wire. (fig. 45) A critical element of the process is to



fig. 45. Catherine Martin  
Earrings 1999  
Braided 18ct Gold, 5 cm

keep the tension even on the metal wire, while braiding, which involves long stretches of work, over several hours, and disciplined concentration. In the second extract from *Creation II (Clip 7)*, directed by Adam Barnett and Alexander Bikuna, jeweller Dorothy Hogg discusses the significance of tacit knowledge, whilst demonstrating it. Films in an exhibition space can draw attention to the thoughtful use of hands-on knowledge that prefigures the images or objects on show. Awareness grows of the tacit knowledge that is part of the presence of the objects, in the physical space we co-occupy.

Film, in this context, provides a bridge across 'the logical gap between our capacity of cognition, experience and action, on the one hand and our capacity for verbal articulation, on the other'.<sup>(15)</sup> As with both

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15 Yu Zhenhua, 'Tacit Knowledge/Knowing and the Problem of Articulation', in *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical* 32 (3) (2003-4): 13.

Martin's and Yasuda's film clips, the viewer is taken into the space of the maker, but in a particularly concrete, constructive way. Hogg's words, and actions, in tandem, demonstrate the range of intelligences at work to produce resonant objects; they show that in 'the higher stages of skill, there is a constant interplay between tacit knowledge and self-conscious awareness'.<sup>(16)</sup> The film reveals this interplay, giving insight into the artist's imaginative space, as reflected in her own voice, in real time, for the viewer.

*Objects in a Landscape* (filmed by Matthew Partington for the York Museums Trust in 2012) follows the potter and sculptor, Gordon Baldwin, in his studio : it became the film that accompanied Baldwin's major retrospective at York Museums and Galleries that year. In this example, the single studio location of the previous extracts is extended and brings in a more active use of montage. In the first extract (*Clip 2a*) Baldwin discusses some of his activities and interests - the music of John Cage, the act of drawing, the importance of physical process to his thinking. The sound of his voice overlays a series of shots of the artist constructing a clay form, sitting in a kitchen chair and close ups of finished drawings in the studio. (fig. 46)

The directed gaze of the film camera, with its ability to focus the viewer on significant detail, draws attention to Baldwin's hands: sculpting form, describing gestures in the air. The decision to focus on particular hand movements as a way of creating a portrait of the artist may reflect the interests of the filmmaker: Partington is Director of the *Recording the Crafts* archive at the University of West of England. However these images of hand movements, collaged with images of finished drawings, reinforce a sense of the narrative significance of physical mark-making to this artist's work. When such a sequence is viewed in physical space

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16 Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London; New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 2008), p. 50.



*fig. 46. Gordon  
Baldwin working  
in his studio 2012*

alongside actual objects, the montage of moving images activates a different experience of the work, sensed through different intelligences. The camera moves the viewer between the personal making space of the artist, and the wider spaces and objects of his life. Bachelard's regard for the poetics inherent in our domestic environment is evoked in this intimate film portrait: poetics with strong links to a concept of craft. Through the course of the film we move, with the camera from 'deep intimacy to infinite extent' <sup>(17)</sup> as the focal length of the camera moves us outward from Baldwin's hands to his drawings and finished objects followed by immersion in the landscapes from which he draws inspiration. We return to the exhibition space enfolded in the images we have been observing.

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17 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, USA: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 184.

Each of the films cited above extends the experience of objects in exhibition spaces, by bringing in the voice, and body of the maker and by showing moving images of works coming into being. Nevertheless, each still reinforces Adamson's aforementioned reflection of the distance between maker and viewer. Contact with the maker and processes of making are enhanced, but a full sense of participation in the studio/making space is limited. The material encounter proposed by the exhibition is somehow reduced. There are two sources to the problem: one lies in the extent to which the filmmaker can develop the language of film in response to the material encounter; the other comes from how the film is screened in the exhibition space.

Two films by artist filmmaker Matt Hulse suggest different sensory possibilities for film in exhibitions. The first film *Lightworks – many hands* 2010 (*Clip 6*) was commissioned for the textile exhibition *Follow a Thread* at Dovecot Tapestry Studios. The subject of the film was the weaving of the Easter Day tapestry designed by William Crozier; (fig. 47) the film was presented, as unmediated projection, as an exhibit/object in its own right rather than as a supporting text to the exhibited tapestry. Hulse's skilful use of the poetics of filmcraft created an experience of sensuous materiality: you can almost smell the wool.

Hulse uses the camera to create worlds as well as to reflect them. He manipulates the language of film to intensify a material experience: the exaggerated close up of the tapestry warps, the weaving together of footage shot on black and white film stock with digital colour, the amplified soundtrack of the tightening of the warps. All these elements are stitched together in the film to form a new reality, one which gives Pallasmaa's suggested experience of 'an enhanced haptic sensation, rather like the swimmer senses water against her skin'.<sup>(18)</sup> Hulse is

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18 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image – Imagination and Imagery in Architecture* (England: Wiley, 2011), p. 36.



*fig. 47. David Cochrane, Master Weaver working on 'Easter Day' 2009, wool and cotton tapestry designed by William Crozier, woven by David Cochrane, Douglas Grierson, Naomi Robertson 183 x 243 cm © Dovecot Studios*

directing us, but not to in order to tell us how a tapestry is made. His evocation of the material world, through his command of film language, is suggesting how we might experience tapestry from the maker's viewpoint. Hulse has generated a poetic image by using film's immersive capabilities as a montage of sound, image and movement to create a new form of awareness.

Hulse's sensitising of the viewer's awareness through montage, draws on the power of image association. In his use of this technique, Hulse acknowledges a debt to Soviet film-makers of the 1920s and in particular to Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). Hulse's ability with



the camera and in the editing suite to select and connect images in order to summon up a sensuous experience depends on a particular ability to connect the viewer to his or her own embodied associative capacities. Italo Calvino underlines this form of poetic spatiality: 'The poet's mind works according to the process of association of images that is the quickest way to link and to choose between the infinite forms of the possible and the impossible'.<sup>(19)</sup> The moment in which the colour red seeps into the frame we are prepared to understand a 'real sense of things'; this produces in our minds an image that 'gives suddenly, all at once, the shock of life, the sensation of breathing':<sup>(20)</sup> an experience of embodied material reality. However a friction persists, in Hulse's work, as in all complex works of art, between experience and imagination. The images are not reality, and as Antonioni described in his film *Beyond the Clouds*:

*'we know that behind every image revealed, there is another image, more faithful to reality, and in the back of the image there is another, and yet another behind the last one and so on, up to the true image of the absolute mysterious reality that no-one will ever see'*.<sup>(21)</sup>

The intangible element on which the poetic image turns is never fully material, nor graspable by the hand.

Nor is the material object fully graspable by hand however, even if held. As American philosopher John Dewey pointed out in the 1930s, 'the conception that objects have fixed and unalterable values is precisely

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19 Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 91.

20 Constantin Brâncuși, as quoted in Eric Shanes, *Constantin Brâncuși*, 1989, as quoted by Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image*, p.45.

21 Pallasmaa, p. 88

the prejudice from which art emancipates us'.<sup>(22)</sup> Any idea that physical objects represent physical reality in a straightforward way needs to be discounted: this is something which the juxtaposition of film and object can reveal. Pallasmaa discusses the ways in which 'cinema constructs spaces in the mind'<sup>(23)</sup> through which we interpret and then inhabit the world around us: the image of the space and the real space become intermingled in our minds.

Pallasmaa cites recent neuroscientific research that shows that the area of the brain in which images are formed, and the area in which information coming into the brain through the eyes is processed are the same.<sup>(24)</sup> The internal and external image world are physically linked. This link has been understood for millennia by any practising artist: namely that the flow between imagination and material environments is constantly active, each informing the other. The moving image world of film represents this sensual flow and thus has the ability to represent material reality to our experiencing self.

A re-invigorated sense of material, an apprehension of material origins, found in moving images, reactivates awareness of the sensory realities of everyday objects and spaces. 'Bringing things to life' as Ingold argues, 'is a matter... of restoring them to the generative fluxes of the world of materials.'<sup>(25)</sup> The rigorous, and thoughtful filmmaker, as well as the object maker, with his or her intimate engagement with substance and medium, and the honed ability to transform surfaces between the two, plays a critical part in releasing the potential aesthetic power of material environments.

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22 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (USA: Peregrine Press, 1980), p. 93.

23 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema* (Helsinki: Rakennustieto Publishing, 2007), p. 27.

24 Pallasmaa, p. 22.

25 Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement Knowledge and Description* (England; New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 29.

The second film by Hulse, *The Manual*, was commissioned to accompany the exhibition *Matter 1*, curated by Adam Paxon for the Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh in 2010. It explored the work of metalworker and self-styled digital crafter, Drummond Masterton. The way the film was positioned in the exhibition space deepened the intimacy of contact between film and objects. The film was projected directly onto a blank wall roughly two metres across. At every point the experience of the exhibition was influenced by immersion in the projected images, light and sound of the film. The film extract (*Clip 9a*) gives the opening sequence and the images (figs. 48, 49 & 50) show its relationship to the space of the exhibition and its objects:



fig. 48, 49. Installation Shots of 'Matter 1', Dovecot Studios, 2010 © Shannon Tofts

The projection bathed the exhibition space not just in moving image and sound, but changing patterns of light that animated the space and the objects within it. The animation drew the viewer to the film but it also drew

*Overleaf: fig. 50. Installation Shots of 'Matter 1', Dovecot Studios, 2010 © Shannon Tofts*





the viewer back to the object as the pattern of light illuminated a part of the metal surface. The film represented Drummond Masterton's working life as a collage of activities in different spaces: training on an exercise bike, (*Clip 9b*) manipulating code on screen, aligning milling machines for precision cutting. Masterton's experience was brought into the viewing space through the immersive presentation of the moving image. Content and presentation were aligned to give a sense of the relationship between imagination and practice within the critical tradition of object-making which, as Pallasmaa reminds us, 'is an astounding sedimentation of images and experiences...an endless excavation of layered, internalised and shared myths, memories, images and experiences'.<sup>(26)</sup> The exhibition visitor entered the space of the maker, not voyeuristically (as in television reality shows) but in direct ways that actively engaged different senses.

Material awareness, in a world 'so full of made and possessed things that..we're losing sight of the relationships between materials, time and attention they require',<sup>(27)</sup> is a critical value, as Little suggests, to an exhibition experience. In the space of an exhibition, everything is made from something – whether it is the building that houses the show, the temporary set-build that creates the space, the objects that house the DVDs, the floors, lights etc. – not just the objects that are being displayed and explored.

The juxtaposition of the contrasting qualities of the animate material object and the immaterial imagistic qualities of film in the exhibition space can, as *The Manual* demonstrated, create a living space within which to interrogate this question of material consciousness more closely.

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26 Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image*, p. 138.

27 Ruth Little, 'Stewardship, connections and ecology: contexts for the development of talent', transcript of lecture given to Edinburgh Festival 2011. [www.amplifiedevents.co.uk/ruth-little-stewardship-connections-and-ecology-contexts-for-the-development-of-talent/](http://www.amplifiedevents.co.uk/ruth-little-stewardship-connections-and-ecology-contexts-for-the-development-of-talent/)

Analogue film is, in itself, of course, a material (like metal, or clay); this quality was exploited by Hulse in both these films, in which analogue and digital film capture were spliced together. In her 2011 Turbine Hall commission *Film* for Tate Modern, (fig. 42) the artist Tacita Dean revelled in the deep saturations possible with 35mm film stock ; her celebrated capture of the Green Flash (the almost apocryphal light cast by the sinking sun over the sea in tropical climates) on the chemical emulsion of the celluloid showed that sensuous reality could be translated by this causal chemical reaction in ways not available to digital tools.

This raises the question of whether increasing use of digital capture can limit sensory experience. Online space has in recent years, given a wholly new space for film. A film made to be projected as part of an exhibition can be reshowed in other physical spaces and can be transmitted, globally, through the space of the internet. This readily available space without walls encouraged the Helen Hamlyn Research Centre for Design at the RCA to commission filmmaker Delmar Mavignier to create two-minute films of each of its exhibiting Research Associates in the 2012 exhibition, *Design for the Real World*. In the conventions of this online world, two minutes is considered to be the maximum attention span. The commission was predicated on the fact that these short documents would thus be easily assimilated into the virtual world and extend the space, and time-frame, of the exhibition. *Clip 12* gives one example showcasing the research of Katie Gaudion with the Kingwood Trust.

One of the challenges of this virtual space as a way of experiencing objects through film is the density of other images present as well as the lack of immersive embodied experience of the moving image. In the 1970s, Susan Sontag was already drawing attention to the impact of the camera on our perceptual space, talking about 'photographic ways of seeing';<sup>(28)</sup> the mass of still and moving images now present in our on-line lives may

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28 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2008), p. 89.

create what Burgin describes as a form of 'prosthetic unconscious'<sup>(29)</sup>: a space where mental free association, through which our individual imaginations are formed, becomes a bound association controlled by the algorithms of the computer.<sup>(30)</sup> This 'prosthetic unconscious' may intensify a critical separation from our own bodies/bodies of knowledge: from the space occupied by craft.

In his *Introduction to Antiphilosophy* (2012) Boris Groys suggests that the physical installation of computer terminals with visible wires, plastic shells and glass screens in the exhibition space 'cools down internet media'.<sup>(31)</sup> The visible presence of the hardware sensitises our awareness to the fiction of what is being shown. This argument was developed in response to Marshall McLuhan's 1964 text on *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* in which McLuhan divided different media into 'hot' or 'cold' categories depending on their capacities to involve or stimulate the viewer. However Groys, in this argument, continues to treat material in a distanced, disembodied way. The argument being built throughout this research is that intimate practices of art-making, with pencil, hand, paintbrush or graving tool deepen a critical and subconscious relationship with the material world, creating a more attentive relationship to objects and their environments, and to the social relationships held within them.

In museum exhibitions, mass-produced plastic DVD screens used as the supporting frames for film act as a crude disruption of the poetic space generated by careful juxtaposition of film and objects. The inert material qualities of the equipment undermine the poetics. In the case of the Gordon Baldwin exhibition, the full potential of the film's narrative was blocked by York Museum's decision to show it on a standard DVD player, adjacent to the main installation: the physical object and its location created a separation between object and film, experience and viewer.

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29 Burgin, p.192.

30 *ibid.* p. 191.

31 Boris Groys, *Introduction to Antiphilosophy* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 216.

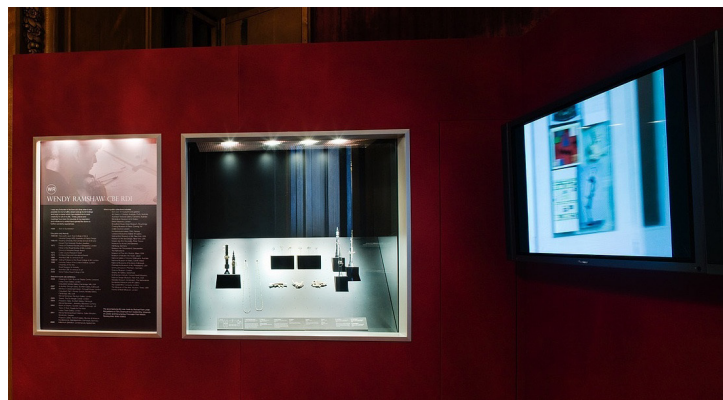


Deeper awareness of material objects in space, drawing on a concept of craft, can influence the way we consider the space of projected film, in exhibitions, both physically, and poetically. If you deliberately introduce a standard readymade monitor, as in the case of Amy Houghton's *One centimetre is a little less than half-an-inch* from the Birmingham exhibition *Taking Time: Craft and the Slow Revolution* (fig. 51) that is one thing; to introduce it into an intimate space without full awareness of its aesthetic impact can undermine the subject and objects of the exhibition. (fig. 52) This will limit the ways in which the language of film supports, and is supported by, material sensitivity, so crucial to a concept of craft.

*fig. 51. Amy Houghton, 'One centimetre is a little less than half-an-inch' 2009, from 'Taking Time: Craft and the Slow Revolution' 2009, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery*



*fig. 52. Wendy Ramshaw, installation shot from 'Creation II: an insight into the mind of the modern artist jeweler' 2009, © The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths*



In 2005 the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam commissioned *Notion/Motion*, a film about the artist Olafur Eliasson. The film was directed by Jan Schmidt-Garre with cinematography by Thomas Bresinsky and formed part of the process leading up to an Eliasson exhibition of the same name at the museum. The film offers different insight into the interplay of material environments that allows film to be generative in exhibitions. Eliasson as a subject has particular significance, since he takes the intimate nature of the exhibition encounter as an active point of reference for his own artistic output. In the film, interviews with the artist and his collaborators are layered with images of the exhibition installation and with the finished installation of moving image projections. No physical objects are present in the final exhibition, bar the materials which form the exhibition space: there is no focus on the objects and subjects of craft, and yet the presence of making, and objects hovers like a shadow across the whole production.

The film includes a long recorded interview between the artist and the art critic Adrian Searle. In the interview, Eliasson expresses his interest in the 'whole register of body language' and its relationship to feelings and their 'potential connection to reality'. He uses museum space, and the medium of film, to expand a sense of relationship to life, as experienced phenomenologically: 'what we feel when we read our surroundings is when the surroundings become real.'

The opening sequence (*Clip 3a*) shows the artist walking across engineered floorboards constructed to trigger the wave patterns that appear on the large projection of water, when depressed. The real action triggers a simulated response. Yet, as we can see from a later extract, the real action (*Clip 3d*) is triggering an actual object (a sponge) to fall and rise over a pool of actual water. Moving image and material environment are fused, physically, by the viewer in the exhibition space by their movements in space. On the one hand this artistic device can be read as a reference

to Bourriaud's idea of relational aesthetics, articulated by Claire Bishop as 'a desire to activate the viewer...by inviting his/her participation to generate the meaning of the work'.<sup>(32)</sup> In this case the activation involves physical activity rather than merely mental association.

And yet does the experiment slip into the danger of entertainment that Eliasson clearly wishes his work to resist? *Clip 3c* shows a sequence from the artist Hans Richter's 1921 film, *Rhythm 21*, which is cited as an influence by Eliasson in the film. In Richter's pared down, monochrome film, a series of simple geometric forms are projected at different scales across the screen. As the forms shift, a sense of space receding and emerging is created, prompted by the illusory spatial rhythm of the film, which provokes a heightened awareness of our own physical presence in space. The poetic image is achieved through an intense engagement with the possibilities of the medium and like all such images it 'takes us to the moment of the first innocent, but immensely potent encounter'.<sup>(33)</sup>

The processes described in the Eliasson film convey a strong sense of a collaborative enterprise, on an industrial scale, as the constructive force behind the artistic expression with moving image. It is an immense production, like a Hollywood film with all that implies in terms of materials, time and money. Richter's film, in contrast, generates a similar interrogation of perceptual reality with the same directness as the simple camera capture of Takeshi Yasuda throwing a pot, then deforming it, allowing gravity to shape form. Both these clips are experienced as 'small, tough explosions of exactitude'<sup>(34)</sup> with the powerful compression of the poetic image. Both represent direct experience and body memory,

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32 Claire Bishop, 'But is it installation art?', *Tate Etc.* 3 (2005): <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/it-installation-art> \_\_\_\_\_ (accessed August 2015).

33 Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image* p. 88.

34 Edmund de Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2010), p. 16.

physical experiences which it is Eliasson's intent to encourage us to experience. Yet the scale of Eliasson's enterprise seems to distance the viewer from the unexpected and evocative combinations of embodied imagination. A more intimate and direct encounter with subject, and objects, feels present in Richter's film as well as in Hulse's work in which the viewer's imagination is not directed but activated.

The visitor to the Eliasson exhibition does participate in the creation of the moving image work but the conditions of participation are pre-determined by the artist. As Groys suggests, the visitor has 'become one of the exhibits' <sup>(35)</sup> and this reduces the potential of the visitor's own lived experience to create the material encounter of the exhibition. The 'spectacular', distanced and mediated space that Adamson fears is the space generated by film also becomes the space of the physical exhibition. In addition we are watching a film about the moving image; a doubling of the distance between person and material encounter.

A comparison with the film *Self Made* by British artist Gillian Wearing allows further exploration of individual participation in relation to the material encounter of film in exhibitions. *Self Made* was created as an autonomous artwork and premiered in an exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 2010. Wearing's film focuses on the lives of seven individual members of the public, selected through an open call; each is filmed taking part in a series of workshops in which they create personal narratives that explore their individual memories, fears and fantasies. The film captures the process from the first meeting of the group to the final enactment of their narratives in constructed mini dramas.

To some extent, the viewer/visitor has become, as with Eliasson 'one of the exhibits'. However, in contrast to *Notion/Motion*, but linked to the filmed interviews with the makers discussed earlier, the voice of each

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35 Boris Groys, p. 217.

individual is allowed to take form in its own way, guided, in this instance, by a professional acting coach. As a viewer, one gains a sense of identity emerging on film, and this activates awareness of one's own identity as a form of emergence. The viewer/visitor is not just an instrument used to activate the artist's vision, but is also exploring his/her own vision: a sense of agency is given. The tightrope walk between active participation and passive encounter is something the film teases out with particular skill, offering insight into the potential of film in the exhibition encounter.

In *Self Made Wearing* is directly addressing the complex interface between experience and reality in a world dominated by CCTV, reality television and mobile phone instant imaging. All individual experiences have become, to extend Sontag's point about photography, infected by the eye of the camera. Individually experienced material realities have become filmic. We are all, suggests Wearing, performing to camera in everyday life, whether consciously or otherwise. Her own film offers ways of working with this reality to make our own space: the viewer is prompted to become the maker.

Wearing's work draws on participatory traditions of devised theatre, but also highlights the documentary potential of film in relation to exhibitions. This potential exists as film can record the material exhibition encounter and thus extend the exhibition experience beyond the frame of a single exhibition. The film *Self Made*, as document, allows others, beyond the seven individuals to participate in the processes on show. In addition, the film was replicated as a DVD, which allowed the document to be taken into the private viewing spaces of the individual.

The potential of film to extend the exhibition experience after the physical exhibition has finished is exemplified in a further moving image work: the film/document *The Artist is Present* directed by Matthew Akers and Jeff Dupre, in association with the Marina Abramović exhibition at the

Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2012. (fig. 53) The film captures two particular elements of interest to this enquiry into the role of film in exhibition-making and a concept of craft. Firstly, the film continues to act as a live document of a temporary exhibition/performance after its completed run, giving a dynamic experience of a temporary material space, as experienced through moving image. The space and time of the exhibition, as well as the performing space of the artist, is thus extended through the film, not merely as static archive but as living artefact.

Secondly, Pollock's concept of intimate dialogue as an active constituent of the aesthetic encounter is made manifest. Abramović's removal of the mediating physical object – painting, pot, sculpture – from the exhibition encounter refocuses attention on this intimate human exchange. The intimate exchange is then represented through another mediating

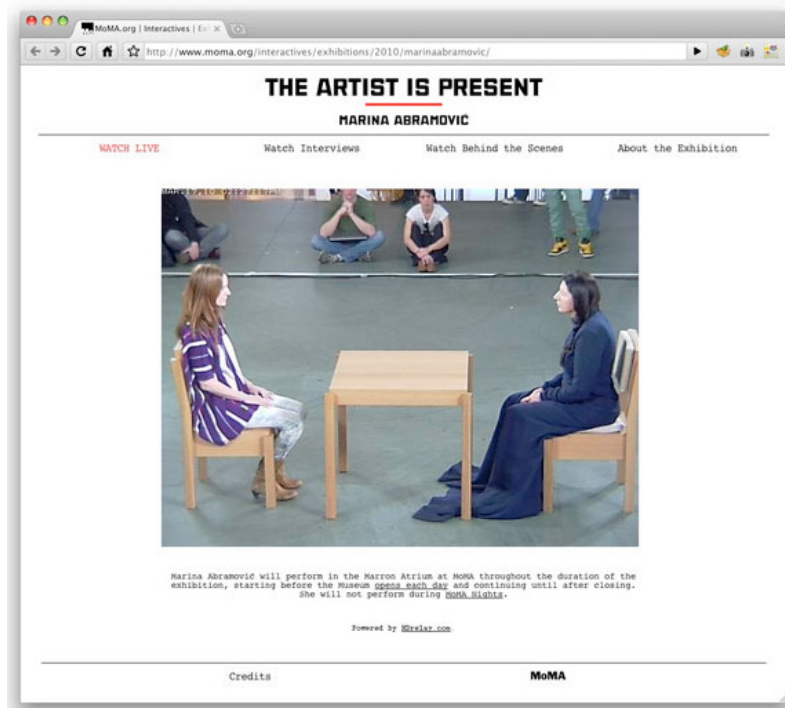


fig. 53. Marina Abramović, 'The Artist is Present' 2012, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

object/artwork, the film. The film is no longer the supporting text for the material object in the exhibition space; it becomes the material object itself, documenting a live encounter within an exhibition.

The image shows Abramović in the exhibition galleries of The Museum of Modern Art, performing a new work as part of her exhibition *The Artist is Present*. For six days of each week, for three months, Abramović sat in a chair, in the exhibition galleries whilst individuals queued to sit opposite her, without speaking, holding her gaze for a time period controlled by the visitor, usually around 5 - 10 minutes. The film recorded the process leading up to the exhibition, documented wider aspects of the artist's work and gave insight into this particular performance by combining footage of the event with reactions to it from visitors to the museum. The film shows the encounter between artist and visitor as something unspoken but highly charged. The time given by both individuals to a direct face-to-face encounter creates the work.

Experience of time is complex, and the way makers and exhibition-makers work with this vital element can create a deepened sense of attentiveness in an exhibition, as Abramović's work demonstrates. Film, with its capacity to re-time captured experience, by speeding it up or slowing it down and archiving it beyond the moment, gives it critical capacities as a medium. The writer Milan Kundera suggests that 'memorising is related to slowness whereas speed results in forgetting'<sup>(36)</sup>: all films can be manipulated to slow down our experience of the fleeting moment, or to create a repeatable image of the vanishing image, as with Dean's image of the Green Flash.

In her 1999 polemic against the rigidity of the Western conception of time, Jay Griffiths tells the story of the Inuit in *Pip Pip a Sideways Look at Time*:

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36 Milan Kundera, quoted by Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image* p. 78.

*'the Inuit tell tales which begin 'long ago in the future' – a beautiful expression of mythic time playing trickster to linear, logical conceptions'.<sup>(37)</sup>*

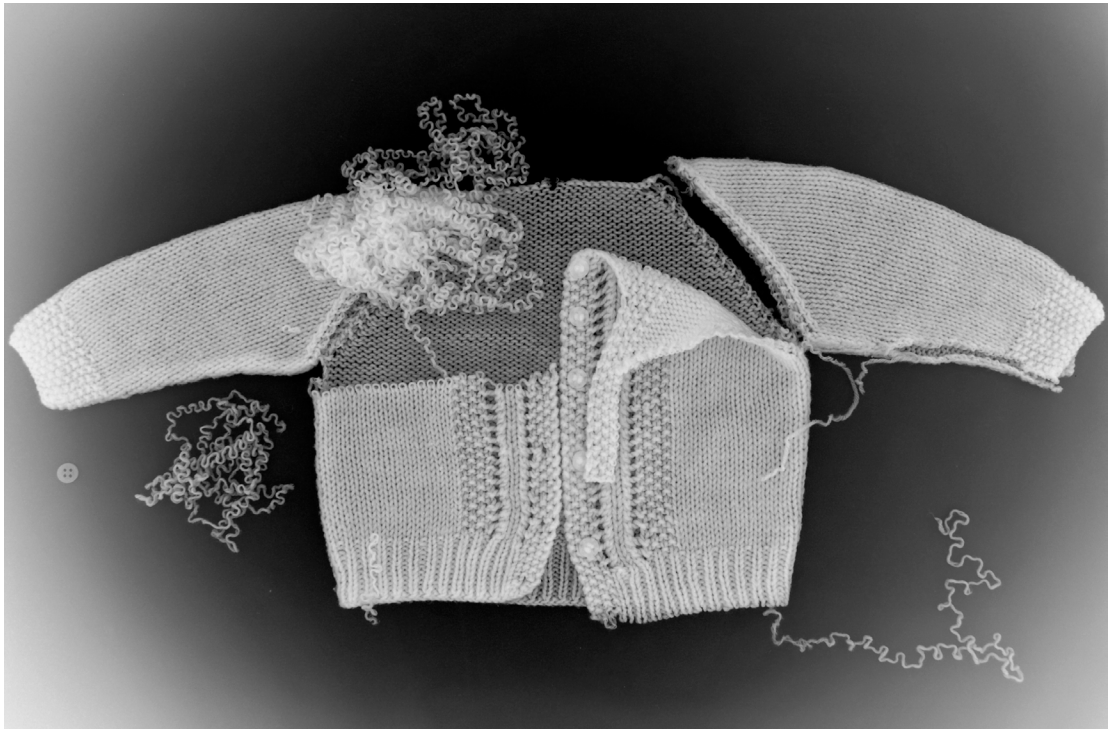
Film has the capacity to be an exact medium for documenting time with its 'trickster' capacities of cut and paste, fast forward and rewind. It reminds us of our own circular and unreliable memories which collapse real time into imaginative space; a space where new ways of thinking take form. In a further excerpt from Hulse's film *The Manual*, (Clip 9d) Drummond Masterton comments on the time it takes to do something well. The viewer is immersed in time in a fully embodied sense (the physical breathing as Masterton trains on his exercise bike), as well as in a chronological sense (the opening sequence as the maker recites a list of co-ordinates as the screen lightens) and in a narrative sense (the almost balletic sequence of the CNC milling machine, isolated and slowed down to the pace of breathing). Hulse's manipulation of the speed of the actions captured on film creates a tension between the actual process shown and the experience of it. Locating the film alongside other forms of expressive object, in the exhibition room, this filmic experience of time intensifies awareness of the time world of other kinds of object.

In 2008 exhibition commissioning agency *Craftspace* in Birmingham, led by curator Andy Horn, in conversation with maker Helen Carnac, started an online conversation about the relationship between time, memory and experience within a concept of craft. The resulting exhibition *Taking Time: Craft and the Slow Revolution* opened at Birmingham Art Gallery in the autumn of the following year and toured to ten venues around the UK. The show drew together film, photographs, objects and performances drawn from a broad base of UK and international artists from designing,

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37 Jay Griffiths, *Pip Pip : a sideways look at time* (London: Harper Press, 1999), p. 49.





*fig. 54. Amy Houghton,  
'Cardigan Study' 2008,  
Still from stop frame animation*

making and visual art backgrounds. All the works consciously dealt with time in different ways.

Amy Houghton's work *Cardigan Study* (fig. 54) offered a particularly strong example of the use of moving image to focus attention on time. Houghton used stop-frame animation to show a child's cardigan being slowly unravelled. Through this medium, the treasured object is shown in relation to the transforming experience of time. By animating and slowing down the unmaking of it, the time taken in the act of making is brought into focus.

The relationship between time experienced through film, and time experienced as part of reality, can be in constant interplay in an exhibition as in the example above. This mitigates against the danger of the museum space as a place where time has stopped, with evidence of the flow of human activities (which has created the objects) removed. As Ingold discusses, this risks, 'turning ways along which life is lived into boundaries within which it is enclosed'<sup>(38)</sup> This lack of flow is the paradoxical heart of both this research and exhibitions in formal museums spaces.

When Bachelard articulated his sense of the shape of poetic time, he created another dimension in which to think about the role of time in the experience of exhibitions. For Bachelard,

*'every poem...contains the element of time stopped, time which does not obey the meter, time which we shall call vertical to distinguish it from ordinary time which seeps past horizontally along the wind and the waters of the stream. Whence this paradox, which we must note quite clearly; whereas prosodic time is horizontal, poetic time is vertical'.*<sup>(39)</sup>

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38 Ingold, p. 145.

39 Gaston Bachelard, quoted by Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image* p. 78.

Any analytical process, including this research, aims to drill vertically into the sedimentary layers of a subject, (in this case craft), through certain selected transects (in this case museum exhibition spaces). This sense of vertical movement offers the possibility that some of the poetic time, Bachelard's 'vertical time' present in poetic forms, may be revealed. Yet this analytical drilling process constantly reveals connecting multi-directional threads that re-immense both subject and object into a different experience of time: the streams and flows of what Bachelard calls prosodic time. Thus the temporal paradox of 'vertical research' becomes evident: the attempt to step out of prosodic time, described by Ingold as 'the alongly integrated knowledge of the wayfarer integrated in practical understanding of the lifeworld,'<sup>(40)</sup> may destroy its meaning and coherence.

Immersion in a study of imaginative object-making reminds us that the poetic image depends on prosodic flow for nourishment: art springs from the experience of the everyday world. So, it may follow that the vertical drilling risks, as with the impatient digging of the foundations for a new building on an historic archaeological site, destroying something that is not yet known and is in some form unknowable. Vertical time in this sense is the antithesis of poetic time. Poetic time may be where horizontal and vertical axes meet: the prosodic flow of everyday life interrupted by the appearance of a material object, or exhibition, that gives the same everyday life poetic form. The practice and concept of craft can be seen to exist in this intersection.

The following three opening sequences of films highlight this intersection of different time worlds that moving image can introduce to an exhibition. The first sequence (*Clip 4a*) is taken from a film shot in 1987 to accompany a Crafts Council exhibition entitled *David Garland 'Painter in Clay'*. To the contemporary viewer, the slow pace of the film is striking – long shots of

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40 Ingold, p. 154.

landscape, buildings, the natural world, pastoral music creating a cultural sense (over the space of thirty seconds) of integrated living through time. In contrast, the opening sequence of *Prick Your Finger* commissioned by the Crafts Council to celebrate their fortieth anniversary in 2011, (*Clip 15*) brings together a dizzying churn of image fragments, the background base beat of punk metal soundtrack, a whirlwind of fleeting images – things flashing past as through the window of a high speed train (over the space of one minute). The sense is of fragmented life, out of time, restlessly unfixed instead of slowly emplaced.

Certain observations arise. There is the technical distinction that the Garland film was shot on video rather than spliced together from digital capture. The production values, to an extent, reflect the means of production. The twenty-five years that have elapsed between the production of the two films have seen a significant technological shift. This has changed the emphasis from careful capture of images, in the analogue world, to careful reconstruction of rapidly captured images in the digital world. The *Fugaziisms* images were largely captured on mobile phones. There is skill and craftsmanship in both camera work and the editing suite. However, the difference between time spent composing and capturing images at the time of the encounter, as opposed to editing rapidly acquired images after the event, is not just one of technology. The question is in which film is the viewer offered a more direct experience of the poetics of the prosodic flow of life.

The actual sequence is shorter in the Garland film than in the *Fugaziisms* clip – thirty seconds versus one minute. The experience of time seems more active in the compressed time period of the Garland film. The rapid sequencing of the film created by *Prick Your Finger* may imply a poetic expression of the experience of contemporary making, - messy, unstructured, vivid – but the viewer is left distanced from both objects and concept. The craftsmanship of looking for the right expression is, as

Calvino suggests in relation to writing, to arrive at a form that is 'concise, concentrated and memorable'.<sup>(41)</sup> The conciseness is critical to poetic affect. The deep possibilities of film's imaginative worlds are released by the attentive craftsmanship of its making.

In well-crafted and inventive filmmaking, the viewer becomes immersed in what Ingold describes as 'social time' in which time is 'intrinsic to tasks.... we perceive temporality... in the very performance of... tasks.'<sup>(42)</sup> Whether it is Hogg talking about her apprehension of detail, (*Clip 7*) Abramović and her audience in silent contact, Eliasson describing his experience of the analogue modelling skills of Thorstein (*Clip 3b*) or Garland voicing the time taken to throw a pot, whilst throwing it (*Clip 4c*): in each case we experience the 'inherent rhythmicity and... embeddedness in activities that are indexical of a person's belonging to locality and community.'<sup>(43)</sup> We have, however subconsciously, become participants in time, rather than merely observers outside it, through encountering a film that expresses the rhythms of making. Through our deepened understanding of such rhythms, a rich encounter between maker and viewer is created.

This is not to suggest, however, that languorous rhythm is the only productive way of generating poetic encounters through film in exhibitions. Although a deliberate pace, which gives space for reflection, is valuable when constructing an exhibition, or making a film, proceeding only at this pace would be like offering the experience of music only through the rhythms of a funeral march. As David Garland says in the sequence on applying a handle to a jug (*Clip 4d*), or as he demonstrates in his fluid gesture of mark-making, (*Clip 4e*) you need to act quickly and decisively when working, both in response to the practical demands of

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41 Calvino, p. 57.

42 Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Dwelling, Livelihood and Skill* (England; New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 196.

43 Ingold, p. 325.

the medium, (and indeed the environment). There is also the challenge in balancing the speed and mental agility of the thought process with the careful making/constructing of the expressive form. Film is however a useful tool with which to create a varied pace and rhythm within the exhibition space.

In the context of this research, the experience of making and of handling objects can be brought into focus through film. Moving image creates an enhanced sense of the haptic elements of both processes through its introduction of movement and by tracing that movement, as Stehlikova suggests, through using the camera as an extension of the hand. The medium introduces not only physical movement, but also light, sound and voice into the physical space. Sensory engagement in exhibitions is stimulated by these elements and can be orchestrated to great effect by the careful crafting of all elements of film's language – montage, close-up, sequencing and pace. These qualities of film can offer an enhanced sense of active involvement with the works on show.

The ways in which films are projected in relation to other exhibited objects can either extend or diminish the experience of the film, and



*fig. 55. Bishop Marshall  
'Cinemagoers watch a 3D  
film' 1953  
© National Media Museum,  
Bradford*

of the subject/object relationships depicted. Deepened awareness of material worlds, and processes of making, activated through a concept of craft can stimulate sensitivity to ways of materially presenting film in exhibition spaces: the setting for the projection; the apparatus through which it is projected; the inter-relationship between moving image and solid object. (fig. 55)

The friction between intangible film and physical pot, woven tapestry and the moving image of hands creates a poetic space. Film shown in exhibitions can deepen understanding of technical practices of making and also reveal more intangible elements of thinking that particular forms embody. In order for this to happen the craftsmanship of the filmmaker needs to match that of the object-maker and a dialogue be forged between the two realms of practice.

Such a dialogue, in an exhibition space can reveal that 'the task of the arts seems to be to defend the comprehensibility of time, its experiential plasticity, tactility and slowness'. <sup>(44)</sup> The friction between the material/immaterial (the object/the film) can move the viewer towards this 'experiential plasticity'. The language of film when orchestrated alongside the language of paint and clay, can show a world that is sensory, haptic, everyday, a world that we all inhabit with a fully critical material consciousness.

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44 Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image* p.78.





# EXHIBITION AS POETIC TEXT

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*Overleaf: fig. 56. Hanna Tuulikki, 'Guth an Eòin | Voice of the Bird' (detail) 2014, musical score from original performance 'Away with the Birds' 2014, Island of Canna*



Handwritten text in cursive script, possibly containing the word "aaiibh" and a downward arrow.



Vilém Flusser describes language as the ‘net in whose threads and knots, we think, feel, desire and act... a language charged by concrete experience.’<sup>(1)</sup> Flusser’s concept of verbal language, expressed through metaphors of making, highlights the deep material taproot of language. This points to the critical fact that meaning in exhibitions comes not only from the selection and arrangement of words to express content in a literary sense (text), but also from their material presence – letterform, material, scale, spacing (letter). In addition, how the words sound (voice) and thus ‘speak to the part of the imagination that is susceptible to the patterning of sounds’ also has vital bearing on their sense and meaning.<sup>(2)</sup> The shifting relationship between the three elements creates a dynamic place in which to consider how we can reach what literary critic, Elaine Scarry describes, in relation to the experience of fiction, as a kind of ‘imaginary vivacity... revealing deeper structures of perception.’<sup>(3)</sup>

However, in a museum exhibition text tends to draw its material structure and, symbolically, its authority from traditions of the printed book: the book is irrevocably associated with knowledge in the Western world, and is a form of text, as Groys suggests, that is marked by ‘unawareness of the body.’<sup>(4)</sup> Pallasmaa also remarks on the disembodied conception of verbal language suggesting that ‘the traditional Western attitude has stubbornly maintained the view that language and thinking are purely incorporeal’.<sup>(5)</sup> The shape and materials of writing in exhibitions are only considered in relation to their contribution to making legible this disembodied conception of language.

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- 1 Vilém Flusser, *Does Writing have a Future?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 153.
  - 2 Christopher Reid, *Sounds Good: 101 poems to be heard* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. x.
  - 3 Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 9.
  - 4 Boris Groys, *Introduction to Antiphilosophy* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 213.
  - 5 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image – Imagination and Imagery in Architecture* (England: Wiley, 2011), p. 27.

In an exhibition, the dislocation of text from material presence constrains its meaning by denying what Scarry describes as ‘the yearning to incorporate’ our lived experiences, and in particular our experience of art. She quotes Wittgenstein’s suggestion that ‘when one sees something beautiful - an eyelid, a cathedral – the hand wants to draw it.’<sup>(6)</sup> We want to draw it in - interiorise it - in order to layer it amongst the other fragments of experience that we have stored.

Writers and artists, and in particular poets and letter makers, tend to adopt a more embodied, material conception of language. In her assessment of the way in which words shape imaginative experience Scarry suggests that works of art create three levels of perception: ‘immediate perception’, ‘delayed perception’, and ‘mimetic perception’.<sup>(7)</sup> She considers ‘the light-filled surface’ of a Matisse painting, (fig. 13) or our immediate physical surroundings, as part of the experience of ‘immediate perception’, musical scores as examples of the second, and verbal language / literature largely to belong to the ‘mimetic’ category since, as she says, we are required to reproduce in the non-actual world, under ‘instruction’ from the artist the images that the words describe, without actually physically experiencing them.

Text and words occupy physical space in an exhibition: they have the possibility of triggering immediate perception through the shape of the letters and the materials onto which, or from which, they are inscribed. So, for example, this preparatory drawing by Gary Breeze (fig. 57) is sensed, at first, as a drawing: it occupies Scarry’s category of immediate perception.

Breeze’s text also leads us on to Scarry’s second perceptual level – delayed perception. The structuring of the hand-drawn words as they come into focus, slows down our reading so meaning emerges slowly

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6 Scarry, p. 244.

7 Scarry, p. 7.

AND IN THIS HE SHEWED ME  
A LYTL THYNG; THE QUANTITE  
OF A HASYLNOTT, LYENG IN  
THE PAWME OF MY HAND AS  
IT HAD SEMED. AND IT WAS AS  
ROWNDE AS ENY BALL. I LOK  
-ED THER UPON WITH THE EYE  
OF MY UNDERSTONDYNG & I  
THOUGHT WHAT MAY THIS BE?  
AND IT WAS ANSWERED THUS:  
IT IS ALL THAT IS MADE

*fig. 57. Gary Breeze  
'Drawing for Quantity of a Hazelnut' 2010  
pencil on paper 40 x 40 cm*

and with some ambiguity, as with a poem. The form of the poem, or in this case unfamiliar word forms on the page, acts as a guide to the rhythms and sounds that the physical marks represent: the delayed act of perception does not at first pass through verbal forms to create the perceptual experience.

The hand-drawn musical score, *Away with the Birds*, by contemporary artist Hannah Tuulikki, (figs. 56 & 58) elides visual and aural perception, its form echoing the flights of birds and the scoring for eight voices echoing birdsong.

The Breeze drawing and the Tuulikki score seem to hover in the gap between Scarry's categories of immediate, delayed and mimetic perception. It is this entanglement of material presence, aural rhythm and hand drawn gesture which seems to enlarge their communicative potential as text, voice and letter in physical space, as when being viewed in an exhibition. At first sight, the gesture of the line is seen

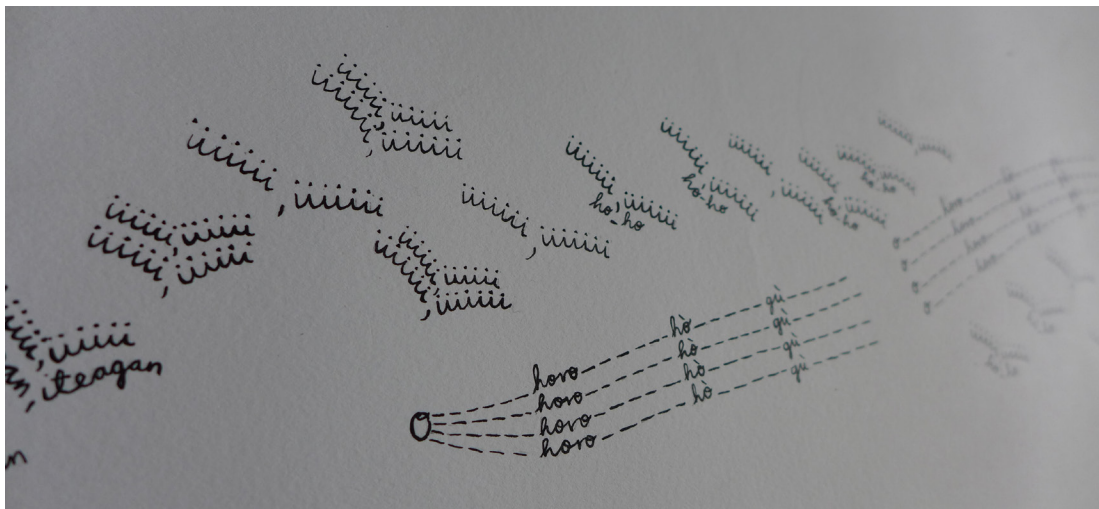


fig. 58. Hanna Tuulikki, 'Guth an Eòin | Voice of the Bird' 2014, musical score from original performance 'Away with the Birds' 2014, Island of Canna



and experienced as a material object, as with any form of hand drawing, before the content is verbalised, and before meaning is translated into words in response to the physical marks.

The marks on paper are traces of movement from the world that activate a response in what neuroscientist Antonio Damasio describes as the 'transient core self', by which he means the conscious living being, below the level of words, constantly shifting in response to the physical environment.<sup>(8)</sup> The gestures of line are able to summon deep perceptual knowledge, since, as Ingold proposes in relation to drawing, a 'freehand line can convey something of the texture' of living surfaces.<sup>(9)</sup>

In the case of the Breeze lettering, we are left immersed in the role of the words in the construction of 'mimetic perception', or the imaginative reconstruction of meaning that the text can stimulate. The words come from a fragment of text by the fifteenth-century mystic Julian of Norwich; Breeze is based in Norfolk and is particularly interested in working with words that have been written there. The Norwich text offers an intense, visionary expression of the wonder of the natural world, as a form of mystic, divine revelation, translated into words. The sensual vision of the words has been framed by the artist's material shaping of them, in space.

Scarry's theoretical framework calls attention to the ways in which a material conception of language links a range of perceptual worlds. Study of the work of poets provides a useful reference point in this discussion of the material basis of language. The poet's ability to create richly associative, imaginary worlds by recalibrating the relationships between words, and re-investing them with the rhythms of movement

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8 Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: body, emotion and the making of consciousness* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 172.

9 Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (England; New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 166.

and speech makes a useful contribution to considering the verbal experience of exhibitions. John Berger suggests that ‘poetry’s impulse to use metaphor, to discover resemblance, is not for the sake of making comparisons...it is to discover correspondences’.<sup>(10)</sup> The interweaving of all communicative elements of an exhibition, of which words are one part, could be viewed as a multi-layered poetic form, through which correspondences between things may be found to exist.

Berger refers to poetic language as something that is inescapably original, meaning at the same time a ‘return to origin and that which has never occurred.’<sup>(11)</sup> This sense of poetry’s originary potential could be connected to Richard Sennett’s discussions on the different ways humans communicate knowledge; he argues that ‘we have to return emotionally just to the point before ...habits were formed, in order to provide guidance’.<sup>(12)</sup> Sennett’s observation also draws on Bachelard’s concept of emergence<sup>(13)</sup> as a critical value to generating and responding to creative practice. Sennett’s thinking touches on the value of childhood experiences of words and language ‘before habits were formed’. The balance between different forms of knowing need to be uppermost in an exhibition text writer’s mind: *connaître* – perceptual and sensual; *savoir* – to know with the mind.

The image (fig. 59) is taken from a series of images collected by the British Library as part of their ‘Playtimes’ research project<sup>(14)</sup> which examined the changing nature of children’s games in the digital world. The image

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10 John Berger, ‘The Hour of Poetry’, *John Berger Selected Essays*, edited by Geoff Dyer (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), p. 451.

11 Berger, p. 452.

12 Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London; Allen Lane/Penguin Books Ltd., 2008), p.186.

13 ‘*The poetic image is an emergence from language, it is always a little above the language of signification. By living the poems we read, we then have the salutary experience of emerging.*’

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. xxvii.

14 [www.bl.uk/learning/news/childrensgames](http://www.bl.uk/learning/news/childrensgames) (accessed May 2014).



*fig. 59. Image from  
'Playtimes: a Century of  
Children's Games and  
Rhymes', © British Library*

is a succinct reminder of the physical rhythms that shape language from early years. These rhythms were memorably captured by the research undertaken in the UK in the 1950s by Peter and Iona Opie published in 1959 as *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*; in it nursery rhymes, sayings and games were documented from region to region throughout the UK.

The chapter headings which the Opies used to analyse and structure their findings are listed below: a reminder of the inventive, yet socially purposeful, way we both create, then inhabit, language from an early age:

*'just for fun; wit and repartee; guile; riddles; parody and impropriety; topical rhymes; code of oral legislation; nicknames and epithets; unpopular children – jeers and epithets; half-belief; children's calendar; occasional customs; some curiosities; friendship and fortune; partisanship; the child and authority; pranks'*

The Opies' investigation into the physical and sometimes random (*some curiosities*) rhythms that underpin language formation might contribute to our consideration of language use in exhibitions. It could also be connected with the tacit rhythms embedded in processes like drawing and making. Language can be crafted in an exhibition, to become a generative part of what Damasio describes as 'the circle of influence between existence, consciousness and creativity'.<sup>(15)</sup> Text, voice and letter can be interwoven to draw out this 'circle of influence' for the viewer, mirroring the different forms of artistic practice that the exhibition has been devised to illustrate. The way that words are made and perceived in this material context is an important part of the way that meaning is made.

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15 Damasio, p. 316.

In the introduction to his 1935 anthology *The Poet's Tongue*, the English poet W.H. Auden described poetry as 'memorable speech'<sup>(16)</sup> emphasising the everyday origins of poetic language. The contemporary poet, Thomas A Clark reflects on this point, suggesting that: 'Imaginative space is not the cul-de-sac of daydreams: it is not a temptation but a practice'.<sup>(17)</sup>

Clark's use of the word 'practice' suggests the relationship between active imaginative space and daily life. Other poets give voice to the sensory experience of material environments, reminding us how word use can connect with different forms of perception. Contemporary poet, Kathleen Jamie's stanza from her poem *Landfall* can be used as an example:

*When we walk at the coast  
and notice, above the sea,  
a single ragged swallow  
veering towards the earth –  
and blossom-scented breeze,  
can we allow ourselves to fail*<sup>(18)</sup>

The poet's crafting of language evokes her own experience, but also invites the reader into the experience by the precise selection of words and word patterns. The reader is not instructed to see something but is allowed to sense it at the moment of happening: there are echoes here of Berger's concept of the originary force of poems.

Part of the reality of being in the world is defined by our use of verbal language, as Flusser points out '(verbal) languages have passed through

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16 W.H. Auden, *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 327.

17 [www.cairneditions.co.uk/On\\_Imaginative\\_Space](http://www.cairneditions.co.uk/On_Imaginative_Space). (accessed July 2015).

18 Kathleen Jamie, 'Landfall', in *The Tree House* (London: Picador, 2004), p.15.

the filtering and caustic grid of the alphabet for thousands of years, and in this way, they have become powerful and beautiful, delicate and precise instruments'.<sup>(19)</sup> In an exhibition, the way that we play these instruments can be tuned by listening to poets who play them with such imaginative craft and intensity.

The following poem by the distinguished American poet Emily Dickinson (1924) shows how this fine-tuning of words can create a form of magic carpet to transport the reader to imaginative worlds by evoking sensual experience. Mimetic and haptic perception are held in tension by the precise poetic form:

*There is no Frigate like a Book  
To take us Lands away  
Nor any Coursers like a Page  
Of prancing Poetry –  
This Traverse may the poorest take  
Without oppress of Toll –  
How frugal is the Chariot  
That bears the Human Soul –*<sup>(20)</sup>

With just forty words, Dickinson conjures four different images of travel and moves our thoughts between the material and the immaterial to 'awaken an echo in the body... they arouse... a carnal formula of their presence'. As Pallasmaa argues this carnal formula gives the work of art its sense of life.<sup>(21)</sup>

This poetic voice in text can be used to create a dialogue with the reader and to keep alive ideas of difference, and ambiguity, embedded

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19 Flusser, p. 65.

20 <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/182908> (accessed July 2015).

21 Pallasmaa, p. 43.

in complex objects and experiences. A poem is not an explanation it is a multi-layered proposition. The film director David Mamet's emphasis on the importance of 'understanding the nature of the medium' in order to communicate through it, reminds us that the poet's ability to immerse us in the quiddity of verbal language is of great value. The literary critic Terry Eagleton captures the distinctiveness of poetic text as a form of communication in the following statement: 'by and large, legal and scientific language aims to constrict meaning, whereas poetic language seeks to proliferate it'.<sup>(22)</sup>

Gell's argument is that art is defined by its complexity. This complexity can be seen in poetic language; its potential, as Eagleton says, to proliferate meaning. Such forms of language may thus suggest a more precise verbal equivalence for complex objects in an exhibition, whatever physical form they take.

The poet selects and arranges individual words with care, often creating a very concise, and compressed, form of writing. Poetic form is found by these selections, a process which corresponds closely to curatorial practice. Such distillation, or compression, can create an image of the world that is precise, but not directive, allowing the opportunity for dialogue between writer and reader. The process is in marked contrast to the elaborations of academic discourse, or to the conciseness found in some exhibition text and labels: this very concision sometimes demonstrating Flusser's point that 'there is a certain critical point at which the use of Occam's razor castrates a text rather than circumsizing it.'<sup>(23)</sup>

In recent doctoral research rooted in exploring text in exhibitions at the Tate galleries,<sup>(24)</sup> Sylvia Lahav quotes Pauline McManus: 'that the

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22 Eagleton, p.110.

23 Flusser, p. 43.

24 Sylvia Lahav, 'Interpretation in the Art Museum' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Institute of Education, London, 2011), p. 73.

average literate person has the ability to process print at the rate of 250 – 300 words per minute, and this means that the museum visitor can read 20 words or more in five seconds’.

However, processing speeds and comprehension speeds are not synonymous. The concept of redundancy, as understood in the field of information theory, aired by Eagleton in his discussions of poetic form, may provide a useful guide. The interest of the poem framed by this concept is that it inverts linear understanding of how ideas and information are communicated, since a poem is both ‘crammed with meaning... and entirely communicable. Yet it is very low on redundancy since it is the kind of text in which every element counts.’<sup>(25)</sup> In information theory, too great an increase in information results in a loss of communication between writer and reader as there is too much material to digest. However poetry as a dense, ‘semantically saturated’ form of writing still retains its ability to communicate.

Eagleton suggests that part of the reason for this is that poems are examples of play. The critical force of his suggestion lies in a common human relationship to the value of play, formed in early years. ‘It is in play that we come into our own as human subjects. And poetry is among other things a memory-trace of this primordial sense of being accepted for what we are.’<sup>(26)</sup> If we think back to the *Playtimes* image from the British Library and Berger’s concept of poetry’s originary force, Eagleton’s sense of the playful art of poetry is persuasive. Exhibition text may be more effective if freed ‘from a loveless marriage to a single meaning’ and allowed to play with using words in new ways.

Eagleton also quotes Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman, who suggests that poetry’s ability to unfold many layers of information in condensed

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25 Eagleton, p.57.

26 Eagleton, p. 58.



form comes from the fact that a poem 'exists at a conjunction of contexts'. He describes poetic structure as a system of systems in which words act as a kind of 'switching mechanism'<sup>(27)</sup> between one system and another. The aesthetic effect is achieved through the selection and juxtaposition of words to create a collision between one system and another: phonic, metrical, symbolic. The importance lies in the friction between the regularity of the system and the playful deviation from the system by different words, achieved by their positioning in the text. The use and placing of the words 'ragged' in Jamie's poem, *Landfall* and 'prancing' in Dickinson's poem *There is no frigate*, are good examples.

There are also many systems in operation in an exhibition: the linguistic ones described here by Eagleton, but also the non-verbal systems which relate to colour, form, material and spatial awareness: it is in these relations that meaning takes form. In a paper written in 1967 on *Style, Grace and Information in Primitive Art* the social anthropologist Gregory Bateson talks about the ways in which 'what we know through the senses can become knowledge in the mind'.<sup>(28)</sup> He emphasises the fact that sensory awareness is a form of systemic knowledge that will influence communication and understanding. The interface between sensory intelligence and other 'levels of mind' gives an exhibition its uniquely poetic agency in a world of big data and constant transmission of information by text, twitter and blog.

Professional graphic designers and typographers are usually in charge of deciding on the forms of letters, and their spatial arrangement, in museum exhibitions. However, as a group they are seldom intimately connected to the different kinds of object on show. There is already a distance between

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27 *ibid*, p. 58

28 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an ecology of mind: collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution and epistemology* (St. Albans: Paladin, 1973), p. 107.

the text-maker and the object-maker, a distance that may be embodied in the way the text is inscribed in the gallery. In addition, as Sue Walker points out in *Typography and Everyday Life*, 'new technologies give non expert designers control over the visual organisation of language'.<sup>(29)</sup> This increasingly means that the shape, and arrangement, of words in exhibitions depend on the typographical capabilities of machines at one remove from the experiencing human body.

The Crafts Council text collage, created for the 2010 exhibition *Lab Craft: digital adventures in contemporary craft*, illustrates this shift in technology, with its range of codes, letterforms and patterns. (fig. 60) The physical presentation of the information panels is functional, but not visually striking. In some sense, the cut and paste, mixer-deck look of the panel echoes the layers of language found in the exhibition it introduces. However, it is a language of surfaces not processes, and as such is the very antithesis of a concept and practice of craft. There is a sense that the visual organisation of the words has been guided by the capabilities of computer processes, with little regard to the materially rich potential of letterform.

In an exhibition, the broad contract of the letterform as a legible code is widely understood - even though as sculptor and typographer Eric Gill points out "legibility, in practice, amounts simply to what one is accustomed to".<sup>(30)</sup> The reference to Gill brings material processes of designing and making letterforms to the foreground. Contemporary artists and designers with hands-on knowledge of letter forming, such as Gary Breeze cited above, or Richard Kindersley, remind us of the instability of legible codes by the ways in which they are able to carve new relationships between text, voice and letter through the process of remaking and representing the individual elements. Practice of the

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29 Sue Walker, *Typography and Everyday Life* (Harlow: Pearson, 2001), p. 2.

30 Eric Gill, *An Essay on Typography* (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 44.



fig. 60. Introductory Panel 'Lab Craft' 2010, London Design Festival 2010, © Crafts Council

craft of letterforming, either by carving into stone or wood, or moving ink across paper and vellum, creates a strong physical connection to the history and culture of word use.

In 2010, Richard Kindersley created a display for Contemporary Applied Arts in London that traced the development of the alphabetic script in Western cultures through a study of Roman inscriptive traditions. (fig. 61) Kindersley used drawing, letter rubbing, carving and printed letter text to draw the viewer into relationship with the shape and patterning of letterform in physical space. Material histories and creative processes were demonstrated in the conjunction of objects which, unlike the collage



fig. 61. Richard Kindersley, 'Drawing with Objects' 2010, installation shot CAA, London

from *Lab Craft*, deepened a sense of presence of not just the objects but individual words: 'Words: hard and lovely as diamonds (which) demand to be seen, freed in space; words are wild, sentences tame them'.<sup>(37)</sup> Works such as these show us the direct links between visual and verbal expression.

A study of a series of recently viewed exhibition labels (figs. 62 & 63) may help to illustrate some of the above points. The first is taken from the sculptor David Nash's exhibition at Kew Gardens in 2012, the second from the British Ceramic Biennial in Stoke-on-Trent in 2011. The Stoke label exemplifies what Sennett describes as 'dead denotation': the words

31 Dom Sylvester Houédard quoted by Rick Poynor, 'Modernism and Eclecticism: Typographica 1949 - 1967' (unpublished MPhil thesis, Royal College of Art, London, 1998), p.131.

fig. 62. David Nash label  
from 'David Nash at  
Kew Gardens' 2013  
Royal Botanic Garden

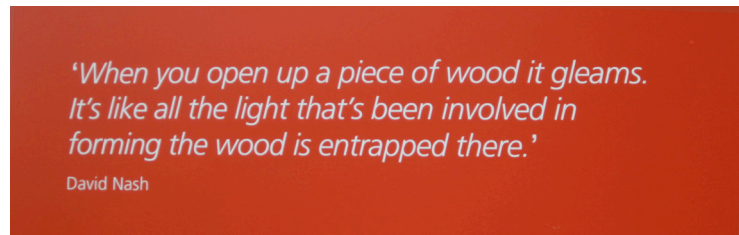
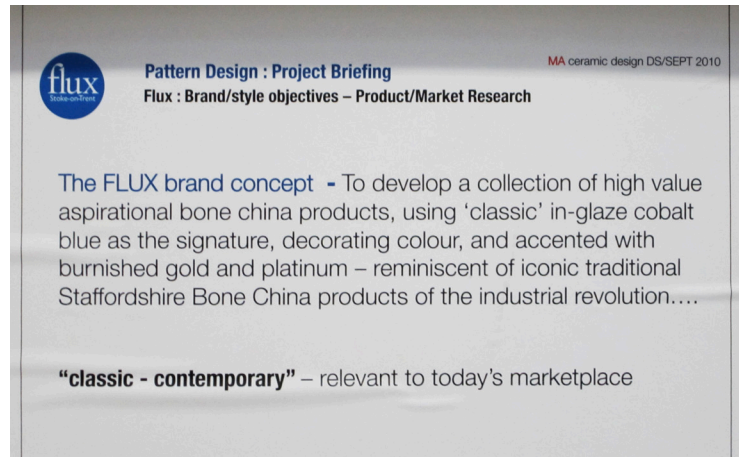


fig. 63. Flux label  
from British Ceramic  
Biennial,  
Stoke-on-Trent, 2011



distance the viewer from the work and its origins. Nash's words, in contrast, show how a more poetic use of language can capture essential elements of the work. The viewer is invited to share the experience of wood that is part of the sculptor's conceptual and expressive domain. Nash reflects on his own experience of material so that his 'unpacked tacit knowledge becomes expressive instruction for the viewer'.<sup>(32)</sup>

Through its handwritten form, the left hand label, (fig. 64) included in the 2011 Barbican exhibition devoted to the Dutch architect, Rem Koolhaas, gives a sense of intimate access to an architect's thought. The directness of the handwritten note is echoed in the more formal, but still handwritten form of the right hand label, (fig. 65) crafted by curator Adam Paxon for the 2010 Dovecot show of the work of jeweller Lina Peterson.

32 Richard Sennett, p.184.

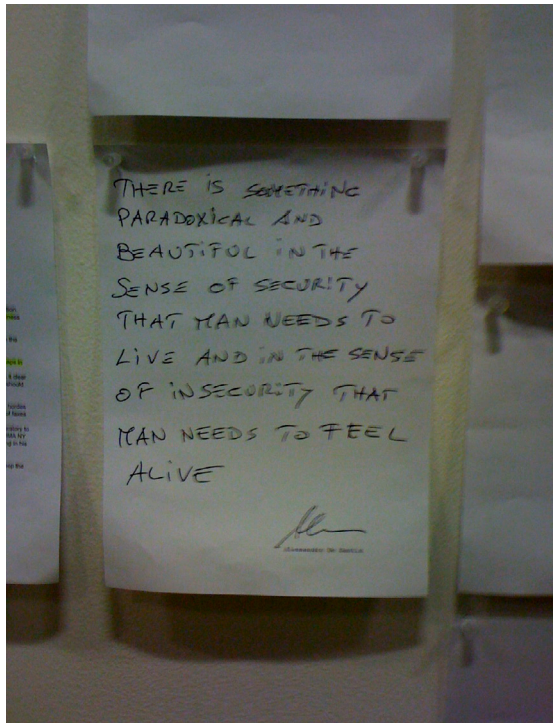


fig. 64. Handwritten note from 'OMA: Progress' exhibition, Barbican, London 2011

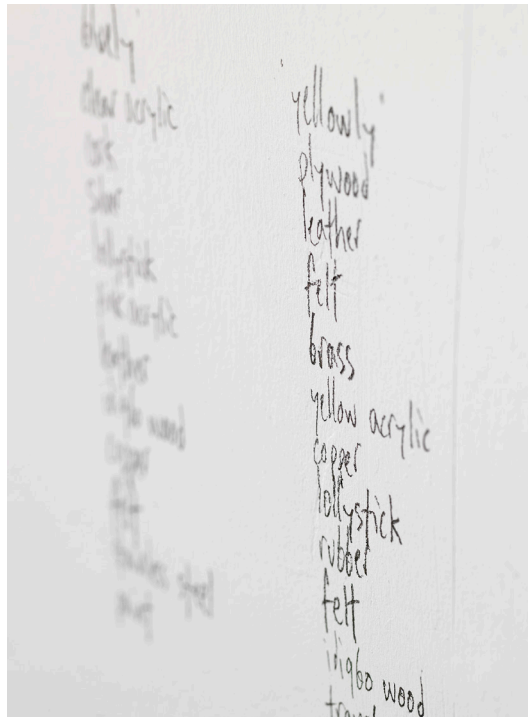


fig. 65. Handwritten Label for 'Matter 3, Lina Peterson' 2010, Dovecot Studios

The label from Rothe House museum in Kilkenny, Ireland (fig. 66) gives a particularly striking illustration of Scarry's sense of 'imaginary vivacity'. The conjunction of hand drawn illustrations, and handwritten text, suggests the human histories of making embedded in the objects on display. In the exhibition, the sense of close observation, lent by the use of the symbolic form of the sketchbook, drew the viewer's eye first to the label information and then back out to the objects in the space. The encouragement to move between label and object, connecting the kinds of information contained in both, returns us to the discussion in the previous section of the value of movement in unlocking deeper cognitive capacities. This label also reminds us in form and content that the hand is an important human faculty in producing both ideas and objects.





*fig. 67. Exhibition Titles,  
Matter Series,  
Dovecot Studios 2010  
© Shannon Tofts*





practice. Lina Peterson's improvisational approach to jewellery making in everyday materials was echoed in the use of pink duct tape; David Poston's mastery of tools was shown through their use as the material of the text.

Paxon gave the viewer a sense of participation in language through the exhibition experience. He granted the visitor, as Eagleton suggests in relation to poetry, 'the actual experience of seeing meaning take shape as a practice, rather than handling it simply as a finished whole'.<sup>(34)</sup> Like the sculptor Tony Cragg and all those who handle material in direct and poetic ways, Paxon 'sees material as having a balloon of information around it'<sup>(35)</sup> which can be used to give expressive force to text in exhibitions.

The installation shot of *Matter 3* (fig. 68) suggests how the spacing of text and the forming of letters can embody the artist's voice. The shapes and patterns on the wall were created by jeweller Lina Peterson to connect the space of the galleries more closely to her works on show. The direct mark-making, using potato prints, echoed the low-tech, improvisational approach to jewellery making that typifies Peterson's work. The colour and pattern provided a visual frame for her name which was then hand drawn on the wall by the curator, Adam Paxon, following the installation of the show. This approach allowed maximum flexibility in spacing the letters to create an effective dialogue between all elements of the show.

The spatial arrangement of things in an exhibition, as observed in the opening section on still life, is important, and this includes the arrangement of words. If the artist's conceptual journey is one which is primarily informed by his or her engagement with the embodied experience of thoughtful making, then this quality needs to be voiced in the show, through the arrangement as well as the content of the text.

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34 Eagleton, p. 68.

35 Tony Cragg, *Tony Cragg* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2011), p. 109.



*fig. 68. Installation shot,  
'Matter 3' 2010  
Dovecot Studios  
© Shannon Tofts*

Ewan Clayton describes the history of the material culture of writing as a form of bodily engagement in knowledge: 'rich in sensual information and channels of knowing.'<sup>(36)</sup> However text in an exhibition does not just inhabit the material environment described above; it also lives in a more distanced and mediated realm, as US critic Rose Slivka foretold in the 1960s: 'The most powerful voices of our environment – electronic and atomic, inner and outer space, speed – are invisible to the naked eye.'<sup>(37)</sup>

In 1995, 26 million of us used the internet globally, by 2012 that figure had risen to 2 billion.<sup>(38)</sup> As Clayton points out, 'each generation has to re-think what it means to be literate in their own times'.<sup>(39)</sup> In our time this means that we are increasingly following a mode of thinking which depends on digital codes, namely on one that 'is structural, systems-analytic, cybernetic'.<sup>(40)</sup> Flusser's argument in *Does Writing have a Future?*, suggests that on the one hand we risk the detachment 'of thought from language... as programming is rising up from alpha numeric codes, becoming independent and separating itself from language'.<sup>(41)</sup> On the other hand the digital codes invented by humans which in their binary structure have deep roots in the material world, such as weaving offer 'a method... of giving meaning to quantum leaps in the brain from outside – they can more rapidly trace the lightning flashes of the mental circuits that capture and link points distant from each other in space and time'.<sup>(42)</sup>

The rapid, associative thinking Flusser describes here is often linked with the capabilities of the artist's or writer's mind. Following Flusser,

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36 Clayton, p. 344.

37 Rose Slivka, 'The New Ceramic Presence', in *A Craft Reader*, edited by Glenn Adamson (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2010), p. 531.

38 Jeremy Black, *The Power of Knowledge: How Information and Technology Made the Modern World* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 360.

39 Clayton, p.3.

40 Flusser, p. 147.

41 Flusser, p. 61.

42 Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 48.

one can see how virtual language may enable new ways of creative processing for artists and curators. The poetic voice need not be lost in this technological transition. As Flusser points out, a sense of history is valuable to counter the growing cultural anxiety that our relationship to language, and hence to one another, is being undermined by technology: 'each time a technical threshold is crossed, observers have the sense that technology is getting the upper hand, and each time, it turns out the new technology opens new creative possibilities'.<sup>(43)</sup>

Nevertheless his observation on the nature of the change is acute. We have moved, he says, from lines to particulate nets; the way we structure thought in these new systems will change. And as Clayton emphasises, digital codes are fashioned from bits and points of light rather than alphabetised inscriptions; this will inevitably mean a different relationship to deep wells of language use. As Calvino observed, 'mental lightning flashes' need to be balanced by the 'craftsmanship' of Vulcan – the slower forging of words to create the right temper of meaning. The material world of making and a concept of craft thus remain vital points of reference for the production of words for exhibitions.

One way that museums have been expanding the information space of exhibitions is by adopting and adapting barcode systems. Barcodes were originally developed in the 1990s by commercial retailers to track and store information about commodity distribution. The Quick Response (QR) code, for example, was developed by the car industry in Japan to track multiple components. It takes the visible form of a small, fragmented square symbol, which is often printed alongside objects, or at the bottom of text panels. The form of the symbol is suggestive of the stamp often found on Japanese ceramics or on Chinese seals. Viewers who own Smartphones with QR readers installed can scan the code, which is then

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43 Flusser, p. 75.

translated into online URL links containing further and different networks of information about the objects on view. A project pioneered by National Museums Scotland with the University of Edinburgh, *Tales of Things*, 2011-2013, allowed the viewer not only to access more information about eighty selected museum objects, but also to add their own information to the object stories being collected on a central website. As the website says 'Tales of Things is a simple way of adding memories to physical objects to share with others'.<sup>(44)</sup>

This invitation to the viewer to add their own words to the objects in *Tales of Things* highlights one of the ways in which digital tools have increased platforms of participatory communication across spaces of exhibitions and their objects. However data on the content and quality of the dialogue affected, and its impact on the relationship to the objects in question, is scarce. This leads one to consider psychologist Sherry Turkle's description of the impact of digital processes on communication, discussed in her 2011 TED lecture *Alone Together, Why we expect more from our technology than from each other* :

*'Human relationships are rich and they're messy and they're demanding. And we clean them up with technology. And when we do, one of the things that can happen is that we sacrifice conversation for mere connection. We short-change ourselves'*.<sup>(45)</sup>

Artificial intelligence studies active in the 1970s and 1980s in universities such as MIT in Boston and in Edinburgh explored the functions of the human brain in creative thinking. The final conclusion reached was that

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44 [www.talesofthings.org.uk](http://www.talesofthings.org.uk) (accessed July 2015).

45 [www.ted.com/talks/sherry\\_turkle\\_alone\\_together](http://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together) (accessed July 2015).

'mathematical precision, embedded in computer codes turned out to be an inappropriate model for complex behaviour'. <sup>(46)</sup> In other words, the complex web of human experience, both individual and social, requires the body as well as the algorithms of the mind to create meaning. In a physical space with objects, words and people our full range of intelligences is at play calibrating, recalibrating and improvising new relationships with all around us. Words can be crafted in many material forms to allow this complex interplay of intelligences to develop in an exhibition.

This is not to suggest, however, simple binary opposition between material and immaterial fields of verbal language and communication, Clayton's career, for example, tells us otherwise. His original training as a calligrapher, a form of meditative and material practice with roots in early medieval Europe led to a later career as a member of the research team at Palo Alto in California; seedbed of what was to become the Apple empire. Clayton talks about the opportunities that opened out to him, professionally and intellectually, through his grounding in lettercraft with the eminent calligrapher Edward Johnston. The successful visual qualities of early Apple software programmes and the haptic qualities of touch screen technology seen in iPhones had their roots in material practices of writing.

Clayton's multi layered experience demonstrates the continuing value of material knowledge to new contexts of communication. His 'search for ways in which to encourage the mysterious process that somehow transforms knowledge about something into instances that we personally feel and experience as truth' <sup>(47)</sup> is a journey of great creative quality, suggesting that the practice of a craft leads one not to bills of quantity but to experiences of quality. Curatorial attention to rich histories of

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46 Black, p.362.

47 Clayton, p. 343.

writing, as well as to more abstract critical discourse, seems vital if different forms of knowing are to be released by exhibition text.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of an exhibition is that it, unlike a building, a book or many objects of art, is conceived as a temporary, time limited event; from the outset it is an ephemeral thing. Although by virtue of its regular repetition as an activity in many Western cultures, an exhibition develops a ritualistic quality – and therefore takes on the guise of a more permanent fixture – it is nevertheless generally only in existence in UK museums for somewhere between one and six months. It is the mayfly in the field of human expression.

It is perhaps something of an unexamined cultural fact that so much energy and financial resource is expended on such impermanent activities. Although parallels can be drawn between an exhibition and a theatrical or musical performance – also high value, time limited social activities – plays are often performed on more than one occasion, surviving in the forms of printed texts and music continues to be recreated through its written scores.

Although certain exhibition subjects, particularly those focusing on canonical art historical subjects, are revived with great regularity (Matisse, Modernism, Morris), many others are not. Furthermore in scholarly museum archives such as the Victoria and Albert Museum, labels, text panels and installation photographs of text are rarely, if ever, retained, so there is little chance of seeing how an exhibition was verbalised at the time.

Text, in a temporary exhibition, thus inhabits something of a temporal paradox. Great attention is paid to panels and labels which follow the authoritative format of the printed book. Yet the text inhabits, in temporal terms, a space more akin to oral speech: the words only activating the



dialogic space of communication in a fixed place and context, for a fleeting moment.

Susan Stewart suggests that in European history the dialogical reality of oral communication is gradually displaced by 'the specialised values of performer/spectator' that emerges through the formation of particular literary traditions in the eighteenth century. <sup>(48)</sup> She argues that this results in a more distanced dialogue between writer/reader, exemplified in the 'realms of the 'spectacle, the stage play and the novel', in which the mutual contexts of 'making and use' <sup>(49)</sup> are shifted. If one considers the exhibition as a form of both spectacle and theatre, in Stewart's sense, then the reality of experiencing text in exhibitions is always working against this loss of conversational intimacy.

One of the ways that Clayton differentiates between writing and speech is by reminding us that in writing, 'substrates can last for a long period... it goes on for far longer than someone can talk without pause... it can be revisited'. None of this is true of the text in exhibitions. Instead, exhibition text seems closer to the 'choreographed signals between speaker and listener' that Clayton attributes to speech. <sup>(50)</sup>

The sense of movement and gesture implied by Clayton's use of the word 'choreographed' suggests the possibility of writing as an embodied performance which 'as it unfolds, traces a temporal shape like a passing musical phrase'. <sup>(51)</sup> The letterforms that we encounter in time, in an exhibition, may thus be critical to conveying a sense of inscriptive movement and gesture that embeds the time of their making. The viewer

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48 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (USA: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 4.

49 *ibid*, p. 4.

50 Clayton, p. 349.

51 Clayton, p. 353.

then decodes them as the text is experienced. This creates ‘different patterns of intensity in our neuronal firings’<sup>(52)</sup> as Clayton puts it; patterns are created which may strongly inform our capacity to experience the content on view in both the words and associated objects. The textual affect may therefore be derived less from a traditional typographical approach but more from the gestural fluidity of graphism – from letter forming as a kind of mark-making which creates a ‘rhythm that shouts, cries, whispers, enchants, repels or captures.’<sup>(53)</sup>

Ingold also draws a graphic analogy, proposing that ‘writing is a species of line making’, like drawing,<sup>(54)</sup> and suggests that words ‘are remembered as gestures not images’.<sup>(55)</sup> In reading the presentation of jeweller Charlotte de Syllas’s signature, (fig. 69) one is mentally redrawing the gestures of signing the name and making a rapid connection between these graphic forms and the dynamic human subject – intensified in this case by the accompanying portrait image. The effect would be quite different if the name was placed in standard printed letter forms since the hand-drawn is a form of expression which is constantly notating time in its shifting register of marks.

In his 2013 text *Visual Time: The Image in History*, the American art historian Keith Moxey suggests that consideration of works of art needs to be framed by an awareness of the tension between ‘heterochronicity’ and ‘anachronicity’.<sup>(56)</sup> The first concept compels a recognition that experience of time is varied and culture specific, it is not just represented by the chronological sequencing privileged by Western historical

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52 *ibid*, p. 353.

53 <http://www.monicadengo.com/ideas/texts/poetics-space>  
(accessed July 2015).

54 Ingold, p. 122.

55 Ingold, p. 135.

56 Keith Moxey, *Visual Time: The Image in History* (USA: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 96.



fig. 69. *Installation Shot, 'Matter 2' 2010, Dovecot Studios © Shannon Tofts*

thought. His concept of 'anachronicity' touches on the aesthetic affect of works of art that, echoing Elaine Scarry's ideas of immediate perception, recognises that certain images or objects create particular disruptions of our temporal experience.

Linear time, for Moxey, is 'upset by the action of the visual'.<sup>(57)</sup> Moxey's sense of time is captured in the artist Sian Bonnell's photograph, (fig. 70) included in the exhibition, *Things: A Spectrum of Photography 1850 – 2001* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2002. Bonnell frames disparate objects that hint at traditions of Dutch still life painting, freezing the image of an ephemeral readymade sculpture of cakes and jelly moulds.

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57 *ibid*, p. 96.



*fig. 70. Sian Bonnell  
'Putting Hills in Holland' 2001  
C Type Colour Print 46.5 x 60.5 cm*

*Right: fig. 71. Installation Shot from the exhibition 'Patrick Caulfield, The British Library and Tristram Shandy' at Laurence Sterne Trust 2005 showing Patrick Caulfield 'A Pause on the Landing' 2005, sample tapestry woven by Dovecot Studios*



The artist intentionally creates a subversive image of Dutch domestic life that 'upsets' linear time in its meshing of art history, temporary arrangements of domestic objects (that look like hills), <sup>(58)</sup> and images of landscape. But how do these qualities in visual images relate to the shape of text in exhibitions?

In his meditation on the qualities of the European novel, Milan Kundera reflects on the 'enigma of collective time', <sup>(59)</sup> the time of nations and their histories in which the temporal bounds of individual life can be shifted by the overlapping chronicities of fiction and social space. Kundera's exploration of the 'enigma of collective time' seems close to Moxey's concept of heretochronicity; they both present multiple experiences of time, in different cultural and spatial settings. This is an enigma since, at one level, one cannot rationally explain or verbalise how time is experienced, or what is being experienced, at the individual level in relation to the collective moment; yet in terms of individual identity and cultural chronologies, the collective moment is in some sense the essence of the individual time-world.

Kundera uses the example of Laurence Sterne's novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Gentleman* (1759) to highlight the circular nature of time experienced inside the pages of fiction writing. In Sterne's novel, the compilation of details, asides, returns and digressions locks the action into one constantly revolving frame. Sterne's fiction suggests 'a poetry of existence...in digression', <sup>(60)</sup> where conversations and words move us sideways into a different temporal experience. Sterne's verbal meditations on time prompted the artist Patrick Caulfield to create a design for tapestry, *A Pause on the Landing*, for the British Library, woven

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58 Sian Bonnell, 'Putting Hills in Holland', in *Things: A Spectrum of Photography 1850-2001*, edited by Mark Haworth-Booth (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004), p. 208.

59 Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 16.

60 Kundera, p. 162.

by the Dovecot Studios. The image (fig. 71) shows a woven sample exhibited at the Laurence Sterne Trust in 2005. One form of poetic perception (Sterne's novel) provoked another (Caulfield's tapestry design). The experience of time was the material link.

I am not sure what the effect would be of giving the art of writing labels about Chinese pots, for example, to Kafka, Kundera or Sterne; however imagining the possibility, and thus the fullest possibilities of anachronicity in Moxey's sense, unlocks something. Ideas form of the ways in which language in exhibitions can have clarity, without fixity; possibilities emerge of a new kind of exhibition text.

Experiments have been realised in this area. In 2010 the London based artist project agency *Artangel* commissioned an installation called *The Concise Dictionary of Dress* linking psychoanalyst Adam Phillips with fashion curator Judith Clark.<sup>(61)</sup> Phillips wrote a series of word definitions, prompted by the human relationship to dress, which were used by Clark as a catalyst to a series of clothing and fabric installations in Blythe House, the V & A's London archive. The definitions were formed in the manner of dictionary definitions but subverted the scientific approach to meaning. 'Creased': the line designed by use' was one example. Viewers were led through the back corridors of the building and given word cards to read in front of each installation. Questions or conversation during the one-hour tour were forbidden. A certain poetic voice emerges from the project on reading the online reports, but the words dominate, rather than dance with, the object; the space for the viewer still feels constrained both by the directive installation and by traditional textual authority. The image/object is secondary.

Bateson points out that certain kinds of practice 'would be falsified if communicated in words, because the use of words (**other than poetry**)

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61 [www.artangel/projects.org.uk/2010/projects](http://www.artangel/projects.org.uk/2010/projects) (accessed July 2015).

would imply that the message is a fully conscious and voluntary message' <sup>(62)</sup> whereas artistic practice operates at the interface of the conscious and unconscious. Furniture designers Jim Partridge and Liz Walmsley reacted against this 'falsification' by deciding to exclude text from their touring design show *Sitting and Looking* in 2010. (fig. 72) Instead of using labels and panels to guide the viewer, they provided orientation through the positioning of a series of dramatic blackened oak benches, chairs and tables, made by them; this brought the viewer into close contact with individual objects and also with the concept of the exhibition. Thanks to the sensory invitation of the sculptural forms, the viewer could follow the designers along an associative visual journey that linked together disparate objects to uncover poetic correspondences, through the eyes of the maker.

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62 Bateson, p. 110.



fig. 72. Installation Shot from 'Sitting and Looking' 2010 Dovecot Studios



The verbs of the title – sitting/looking – suggested that both these human activities, although **taking** time, were also **making** it in ways that allowed a different perceptual experience to emerge. Partridge and Walmsley, with combined backgrounds in dance and furniture design, created what psychologist Daniel Stern describes as the ‘Gestalt of vitality’ in the participatory concept of the show, embedded in the title, (a rare piece of text inscribed in the space), as well as the way those words were supported by the selection, rhythm and pacing of the objects on show. <sup>(63)</sup>

Questioning the role of text in the public space of an exhibition finds an echo in other artistic responses to text in public space elsewhere, outside the walls of the museum. Since the nineteenth century, instructional text has seeped across the surfaces of our towns and cities, as this still extant Victorian street sign from Southwark in London demonstrates. (fig. 73) The proliferation of words is the result not just of civic demands but of commercial imperatives, and is increasingly created in response to new materials and technologies - neon, moving image, digital print. Most forms of such text are designed to sell us things on the move: the flashing neon of Times Square, New York, the illuminated digital signboards on the Hammersmith Flyover in London, the posters on the side of city buses or inside train carriages.

American artists such as Barbara Kruger, in the 1980s, or Cuban born Félix González-Torres in the 1990s, have found ways of using, and subverting, these textual intrusions into civic space with dramatic billboard works placed within the city environment. Their works call attention to the way text in public space can build, rather than undermine, intimate relationships to social space. Text works like these, by virtue of

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63 Daniel Stern, *Forms of Vitality : Exploring dynamic Experience in Psychology, the Arts, Psychotherapy, and Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).



*fig. 73. Victorian street sign  
in Dyce Street, Southwark*



*fig. 74. Barbara Kruger  
'Untitled/Titled' 2014  
installation shot at Modern Art Oxford*

their busy public locations, insert a private moment into the public arena. Works are often then transported into the museum or gallery space, as in the recent work, by Kruger at Modern Art Oxford. (fig. 74) Whether the text retains its radical potential, decorating the white cube as opposed to the city street, is less clear. Art historian Ralph Baylor suggests in his blog on González-Torres, <sup>(64)</sup> that the image and the space both vibrate with the same emotional tone and thereby, to large extent, cancel each other out.

A different radical response to the erosion of intimate voice in civic space has been the riot of spraycan graffiti that took hold in America and Europe from the 1960s onwards. Clayton suggests that the graffiti artist's reclaiming of linguistic authority from the State in public places:

*'became one of the most innovative events for letterform design (in public space) that the roman alphabet has experienced for many centuries... and demonstrated the importance of the ability to name things; the physical pleasure and aliveness of embodied movement, and writing's innate sense of risk'.* <sup>(65)</sup>

This comment highlights the way that the act of writing, the craft of letter-making, gives agency and life to the writer. Graffiti/making letters in public space became a way of writing oneself into history, challenging authority, establishing a social group and making one's voice heard. Art museums soon co-opted and mediated these new signs of life, as can be seen from the career of Andrew Zephyr Witten in New York or the mysterious UK figure of Banksy and his progress from Bristol street

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64 <https://onceandfutureartblog.wordpress.com/2013/02/10/felix-gonzalez-torres-felix-gonzalez-torres/> (accessed July 2015).

65 Clayton, pp. 324/5.

to solo show, *Exit through the Gift Shop* at Bristol Museum in 2010. The museum's perceived position as textual author/authority is revealed in this process.

London's *Poems on the Underground* project, led by American poet Judith Chernaik, is one of the few examples where institutional introduction of text into public space has had a more explicitly intimate, and creative, imperative. *Transport for London* replaced commercial notices in selected London tube trains with a series of elegantly typeset examples of poetry, in English, from around the world. The success of these poems with the ten million daily tube travellers led to a popular series of publications (most recently a collective volume, published by Penguin in 2012) and continues to be supported by *TFL* with grant aid from Arts Council England and the British Council.

The *Poems on the Underground* project, different artists' appropriation of readymade public texts, and the impulse to make graffiti all illustrate what Flusser describes as texts with 'syncopated rhythms' <sup>(66)</sup> that wake up the reader through their contradictions, or disjunctures. These textual disruptions create a kind of friction through which an interest in words and their meanings can be rekindled. Such disruptions might be described by forging a concept of aesthetic friction, a concept that describes the kind of affect found in the collision of conscious and unconscious responses to word as idea, and word as physical object, in particular material environments.

This concept can be explored further through the example of two contemporary textile works (figs. 75 & 77): one is a quilt created by visual artist, Tracey Emin, in 2010 and the other a printed silk banner, shown via a detail, created by designer and textile professor, Norma Starszakowna in 2009/2010.

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66 Flusser, p.44



fig. 75. Tracey Emin  
'Hate and Power can be a Terrible Thing' 2010  
multi media quilt 270 x 206 cm, Tate Gallery, London

The Emin quilt draws on the graphic traditions of popular political slogans and banners, as well as on oral speech, to create a work which fuses text and image. The example from the *Occupy* demonstration in London in 2012 (fig. 76) makes the connection clear, both in choice of material and arrangement of text.

The difference, however, between Emin's seemingly naïve quilt and the 'real' political banner becomes evident. In the case of Emin's work, the selection and spatial arrangement of the words, the selection and composition of fabric fragments, and the use of colours and textures is highly sophisticated. The stitches may be crude and the scrawled writing in biro on one of three small panels at the bottom right of the quilt, with the words: 'In 1982. A year so many conscripts did not get home... because you, you killed them all' may not be fine letterforming, but the composition is nonetheless a complex, crafted object.

Aesthetic friction is achieved through re-presenting the perceived crude letterforms of popular protest as a carefully constructed art object,



*fig. 76. Occupy demonstrations outside St. Pauls Cathedral London 2012*

destined for an art gallery and its audiences. There is also a friction between the symbolism of the quilt, or banner form, as something associated with either communal, constructive women's work, or political comradeship and the distancing violent tone of the text. The insertion of one verbal language system (popular street protest) into another (the art object) also recalls Eagleton's idea of the 'switching mechanism' present in the language systems of poems.

Norma Starszakowna's banner also takes the form of a layered collage of text, fabric and letterform, the whole effect suggestive of a city hoarding, or building, pasted with tattered fragments of political slogans, papers and graffiti. As with Emin's quilt, Starszakowna chooses the textile medium to give aesthetic coherence to her expression, but here the friction arises from the contrast between the highly crafted, and exquisitely realised, printed form and the ephemeral, illegible fragments of text which are preserved in the careful craftsmanship of the banner but cannot be read or understood. In an approach similar to that of the Catalan artist Antoni Tàpies, Starszakowna pays attention to the marks that anonymous individuals leave in public space, preserving these living fragments of text as a kind of act of impossible memorialising of human experience.

In conclusion, text in museum exhibitions represents a particular genre of verbal expression hovering in the spaces between Scarry's concepts of immediate, delayed and mimetic perception. The shape and tone draw their authority, largely, from printed text conventions developed through the form of the book in Europe from the fifteenth century onwards. Nevertheless, the reality of exhibition text is that it occupies a time/space continuum of a very different, and more ephemeral, nature than the book.

In this context Susan Stewart's concept of 'conversational reciprocity'<sup>(67)</sup> offers insight, suggesting that the intimate relationship between maker

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67 Stewart, p. 4.





fig. 77. Norma Starszakowna  
'Wall Series' (detail) 2009/2010  
silk, digitally and screenprinted 300 x 50 cm

and user, present in conversational language, allows genuine dialogue; this is made less possible by the distancing affect of formal literary traditions. The 'constant flux between words and meanings; of meanings' pursuit of words; and words' escape from meanings' <sup>(68)</sup> is given deeper significance by the actual physical encounter between people and words in physical space, i.e. in an exhibition. Even if an exhibition is not accessing the full range of non-verbal expression – bodily and aural – active between two people speaking face to face, its forms of language can more closely approximate this through attention to the selection, material forms, and spatial arrangements of words within the physical exhibition framework.

A study of the wordcraft and rhythms of poetry can point to a different relationship to language, realised both as text, voice and letter. Poetic form, when echoed in gestures of handwriting, and in the tacit knowledge of material lettercraft, has the potential to unlock the embodied oral voices of Auden's 'memorable speech'. The poet offers different ways for the exhibition-maker to develop the interface between writer and reader; artist and viewer, and between the encounter and the object.

The role of text in exhibitions is therefore not simply a means of introducing information into the social space, it also acts as a direct contributor to the aesthetic effect of the entire language system of the exhibition and to an understanding of language beyond the walls of the museum. 'A shilling life' said Auden ' will give us all the facts', <sup>(69)</sup> it is the experience of facts –the intimate relationship to the making of facts - that creates and disseminates knowledge.

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68 Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 2013), p. 14.

69 Auden, p. 150.

Finding verbal equivalence for the material, sensory knowledge embedded in a world of making, and a concept of craft - knowing as *connaître* as well as *savoir* – requires the poet's understanding of language. Tuning exhibition text with the skill of the poet may allow a more fruitful dialogue between writer and reader to explore the rich but different ecologies of expressions of the human. Words, ideas, materials and visual objects come together linked by the thinking hand. The poem, not the explanation, then becomes the word world and the exhibition offers the precise but infinitely proliferating experience of a poetic text.

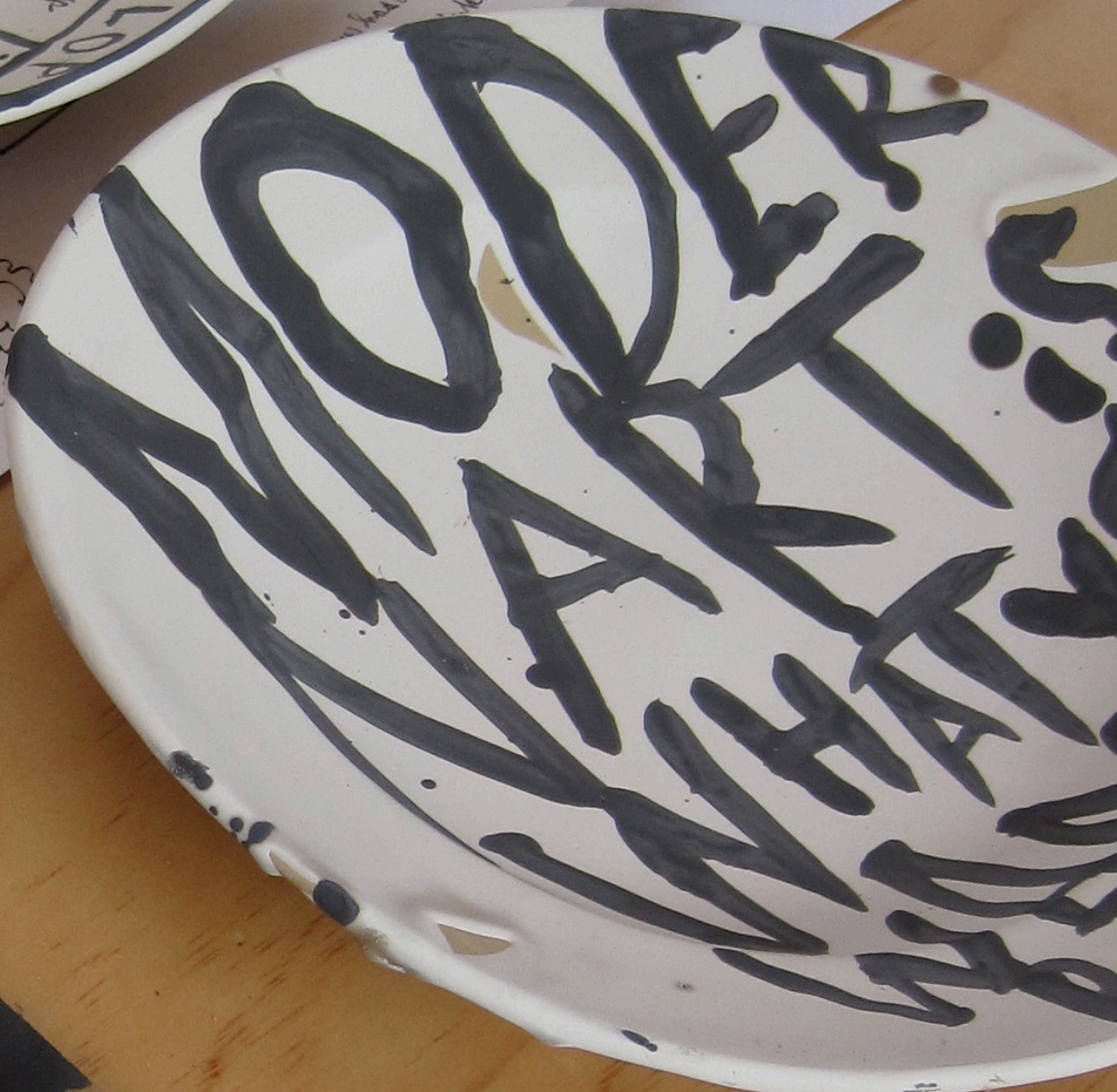
*Overleaf: fig. 78. Martin Popplewell,  
Works in Progress New Zealand Studio, mixed media 2010  
Forty's argument about 'the constant flux between words and meanings' is given material  
form by these recent works from New Zealand artist Martin Popplewell.*





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# EXHIBITION AS PERFORMANCE

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*Overleaf: fig. 79. Siobhan Davies Studios, 'A Series of Appointments' 2012  
from ROTOR, Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh © Shannon Tofts*









The principal actor in the performance of craft is *homo faber*, the maker. The multiple intelligences that sit behind thoughtful acts of making are captured well by the Scots word 'makar': a word used to refer to makers of poems as well as physical objects. The words, and their affiliated practices, suggest both scholarship of a field of activity and active and experimental practice within that field. The term exhibition-maker, as opposed to curator, has been used predominantly throughout this research to keep the persona of *homo faber* centre stage. The intention is to make explicit the maker's central role in generating the objects from which flows the entire structure of social relationships that underpin exhibitions.

It is in the collective space of making that artistic achievement, as Pallasmaa observes, <sup>(1)</sup> can primarily be realised; this provides a bridge to the ideas and practices embedded in the word performance. The maker enters into the social realm through engagement with the tacit knowledge embedded in his/her craft /form of expression. Whether such knowledge is held in the form of poems, pots, films or jewellery is irrelevant to a concept of value. In all cases, immersion in accreted layers of language and human experience, embedded in pre-existent objects or texts, creates the staging for the work from which concepts of value can emerge. Through time, works that introduce a new form of poetic space become visible when the performance by the maker, within the chosen field of expression, finds purchase not only in the wider context of ideas but when the performance meets the user. 'Great poetry is possible only if there are great readers' as the poet Walt Whitman said. <sup>(2)</sup> Performance therefore, with its histories in both collaborative conversations and human encounters, offers a useful tool with which to consider exhibition-making and its relationship to a concept of craft.

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1 For an architectural perspective on the collective spaces of making, see Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand* (England: Wiley, 2009), p.63.

2 Quoted by Pallasmaa, p. 145.

Performance has its roots in the world of theatre and in particular in its sub discipline of scenography. Pamela Howard's definition of scenography as 'a seamless synthesis of space, text, research, art, actors, directors and spectators that contributes to an original creation'<sup>(3)</sup> suggests strong correspondence with practices of exhibition-making. Howard's definition has particular critical value, as it highlights the role of the viewer in creating the work; a role that is rarely highlighted in texts on exhibition design or curatorial practice. Scenography, as a discipline, also focuses on responses to space and objects, and on the way that material encounters channel the kinaesthetic experience of performance. Scenography, as a field of cultural and critical enquiry, can inform exhibition-making by linking the intimate, sensory fields of social encounters with material objects.

A concept of performance also brings with it ideas of movement, carnival, and procession, recalling Obrist's suggestion that the origins of exhibitions are to be found in the medieval European religious practices of parading symbolic objects through the streets of towns and villages on feast days.<sup>(4)</sup> These processions also had secular origins, something preserved in European festivals such as the Processions of the Catholic Kings in Granada, Andalusia and Running the Bulls in Pamplona. In 1997, a chased silver mace, made by contemporary silversmith Michael Lloyd, was commissioned to mark the opening of the Scottish Parliament. The object was paraded through the streets of his hometown, Castle Douglas, to mark its symbolic entry into, and role within, the new Scottish cultural identity.

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3 Pamela Howard, *What is Scenography*, p. 120, quoted by Joslin McKinney and Phillip Butterworth, *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 4.

4 Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Ways of Curating* (London; New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 2014), p. 26.

Traditions of carnival are reflected in some of the more explicitly performative aspects of contemporary craft practice, such as those described by the word 'craftivism'. 'Craftivism', as its American originator Betsy Greer defines it, is a worldwide movement that operates at the intersection of craft and activism.<sup>(5)</sup> Its language is often rooted in communal traditions of textile crafts – knitting, stitching – and results in a form of 'soft' graffiti, with small banners and knitted elements wrapping the hard forgotten edges of cities and towns, worldwide. The main British manifestation, *Craftivist Collective*, founded by Sarah Corbett in 2009, has made museums and cultural venues regular venues for politically motivated stitch-ins; one of these was held at the Hayward Gallery in London to accompany a Tracey Emin exhibition.<sup>(6)</sup>

More formal material-focused performances, without such evident political overtones, make regular appearances on contemporary museum schedules. One example is ceramist Keith Harrison's performance *Moon*, created to mark the end of his ceramic residency at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2013, and shown at the De La Warr pavilion.<sup>(7)</sup>

In the performance, Harrison, dressed in protective white overalls, destroys a ceramic replica of a drum kit to the sound track of the Who's *My Generation*. Harrison's performance deploys carnivalesque subversion of a concept of craft as a form of intimate material practice, through the destruction of something that has been carefully made. But, as in traditional carnival, the inversion calls attention to the qualities of the practice that is being undermined.

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5 <http://craftivism.com/books/craftivism-the-art-of-craft-and-activism/> (accessed July 2015).

6 <https://craftivist-collective.com/our-story/> (accessed July 2015).

7 <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/keith-harrison/> (accessed July 2015).

The word 'performance' has wide currency in contemporary language,

*'the act of performing; a carrying out of something done; a piece of work; manner or success in working; execution esp. as an exhibition or entertainment; an act or action; the power of capability of a machine, esp. a motor vehicle; an incident of awkward, embarrassing behaviour;'* <sup>(8)</sup>

However, in all definitions the word 'performance', like the word 'exhibition', implies a sense of a social, time-bound activity which brings together a particular combination of people, objects and space – be these objects, props, musical instruments, works of art – to create an experience which is drawn from and creates collective memory.

In the 1970s French philosopher and social theorist, Henri Lefebvre evolved three concepts of space in order to consider its influence on human movement and activities: perceived space; conceived space and lived space, demonstrating that space is simultaneously a concrete and conceptual medium. <sup>(9)</sup>

The museum gallery can be considered as an example of the first concept, perceived space: its structure will influence movement and behaviours following Lefebvre's notion that 'activity in space is restricted by that space'. <sup>(10)</sup> The exhibition designer or architect's blueprint for a gallery can be used to illustrate Lefebvre's second concept of conceived space. The diagram, drawing, or increasingly, the computer rendered image (fig. 80) and virtual modeling software, conceives and wholly constructs

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8 Catherine Schwarz, George Davidson, Anne Seaton, Virginia Tebbit, editors, *Chambers English Dictionary* (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers Ltd., 1988), p. 1078.

9 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1991, quoted in Mckinney and Butterworth, p. 191.

10 *Ibid.* p. 190.



*fig. 80. Artists impression of the Kengo Kuma design for Victoria and Albert Dundee*  
©V & A Dundee

the space, prior to its material existence. Virtual tools now dominate the planning and creation of space in most architectural practices bringing with them the risk of creating greater distance between the designer's intimate spatial knowledge and the conceived form of the design.

Lefebvre's final concept of lived space focuses on the subjective experience of space. This is space of intimacy, constantly shifting through time as a free imaginative response to different environments. This relates to Bachelard's concept of 'poetic spatiality' <sup>(11)</sup> as a form of knowledge. The performance of an exhibition, focusing on this concept of lived space, allows the viewer to move into, and around, the designed environment in ways that draw on independent experience of lived space. The emphasis shifts to individual experience rather than being on predetermined and abstract structures.

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11 Bachelard quotes the poet Rilke 'through every human being, unique space, intimate space, opens up to the world...' Bachelard, p. 202.

However, the processes that surround the production of a museum exhibition usually operate consciously in perceived space (the museum as cultural authority); tacitly in conceived space (exhibition design as logical and directive) and only rarely in lived space. Although great attention is paid to the positioning and lighting of objects, the creation of explanatory text and labels, and directing the flow of individuals from one area of the exhibition to another, attention is rarely focused on the spatial knowledge and hence imaginative capacities of the viewer.



*fig. 81. Studio Mumbai, Construction and Installation Shots from '1:1 Architects Build Small Spaces' 2010, Victoria and Albert Museum*

An understanding of lived space in relation to exhibitions can be gained by comparing two examples held in London in 2010 and 2008 respectively: *1:1 Architects Build Small Spaces*, an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2010, curated by Abraham Thomas, and American sculptor



Richard Serra's solo show at the Gagosian galleries in 2008. In the V & A exhibition a series of seven distinct, small structures were presented as intimately scaled proposals for domestic dwellings and located in different spaces throughout the museum. Each structure was just large enough to allow the viewer to walk into and around it. In one example, by Indian architects *Studio Mumbai*, a concrete cast was made of an existing two-storey Indian city infill dwelling, which was then re-created in the cast court of the museum by Indian craftsmen, flown over specifically to undertake the work. Bijay Jain, *Studio Mumbai*'s director, felt that the critical and intimate relationship between artisan and architect was exposed by representing the reality of the Mumbai dwelling in the cast courts of the London museum. (fig. 81)

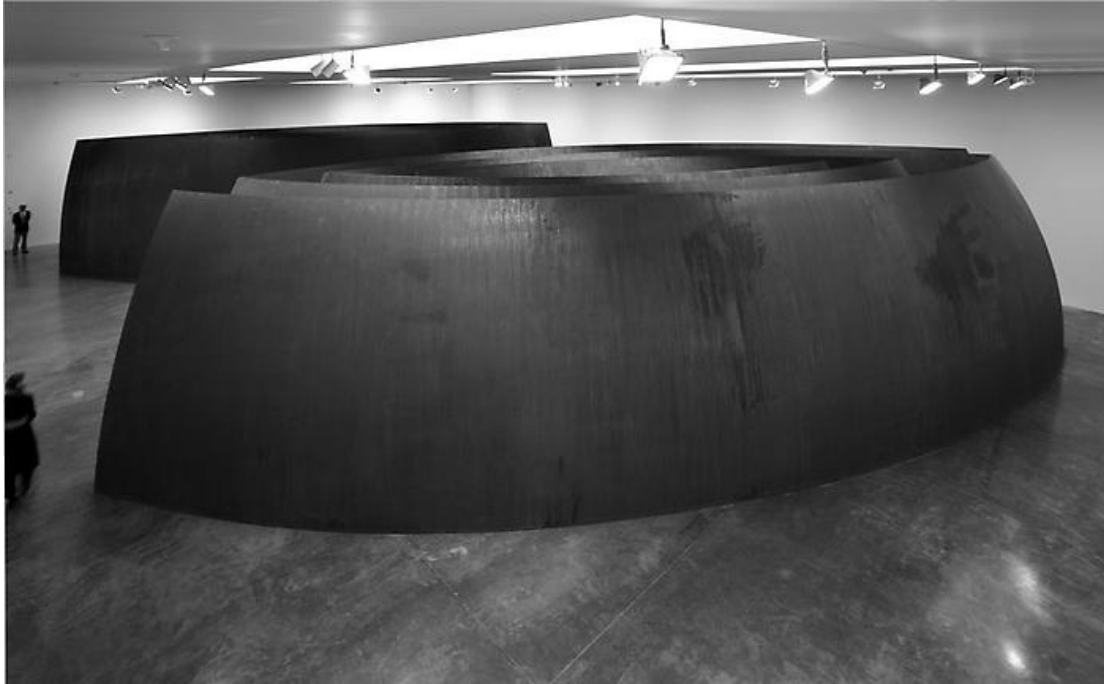
Thomas revealed his curatorial interest in these same intimate human relationships in an article in *Architecture Today*, in which he laments 'a weakened capacity for empathy, compassion and participation in the world around us', suggesting that 'the impact of materials, and processes of making can help clarify the meaning of architectural work' and by inference human capacities of empathy, compassion and participation.<sup>(12)</sup> Visitors commented on 'how the spatial experience made them think about the senses'<sup>(13)</sup> and the reviewer Edwin Heathcote responded to the 'visceral, intimate power, embodied in the intimate spaces'.<sup>(14)</sup> Each comment suggests that the scale of the space, its material qualities, as well as the invitation to occupy it, enhanced the experience of it as poetic. Inhabiting these spaces awoke a sense of the poetics of dwelling through the invitation to come into close contact with material construction.

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12 Interview with Abraham Thomas, *Architecture Today* (209) (July 2010).

13 Visitor Survey, *1:1 Architects Build Small Spaces*, V & A Exhibitions Archive.

14 Edwin Heathcote, 'Architects Installations at the V & A' *Financial Times* (July 2010).



*fig. 82. Richard Serra  
'Open Ended' 2007/8  
Weatherproof Steel 380 x 182 cm © Gagosian Gallery*

The Gagosian gallery's exhibition of Richard Serra presented a series of large, curving fabricated steel sculptures. These filled the principal spaces which, like the work *Open Ended* (fig. 82), encouraged the visitor to move into the internal volumes created, as with the V & A architectural installations. Once inside the maze-like structures, you followed the directional curve of the wall until you emerged again into the gallery space beyond. Although as a physical experience of space the sculptures possessed a powerful spatiality, their monumental scale awakened embodied echoes of a very different kind. The strong directional moulding of space, and the prohibition to touch the corten steel wall, limited the sensory potential that had been present in the V & A show. The viewer was denied an intimate experience and instead a sense of distance and passivity was generated within the controlled orientation of space.

Spectacular, and monumental art, and indeed the industrial processes through which it is created, runs the risk of silencing the 'polyphony of



*fig. 83.*  
Robert Morris,  
'Bodyspacemotion  
things' 1971,  
Tate Gallery, London

our senses' that spaces can activate.<sup>(15)</sup> The material presence of Serra's work seems to echo the efficiencies of the processes of production with its distancing effect between maker and user. In contrast, the invitation to the viewer to inhabit the V & A structures – to get up close, to touch and explore them – offered a sensual experience of lived space. What these two examples highlight is that cognitive experience of objects in exhibitions is rooted in their performance in relation to lived space: to the sensory material world which we all inevitably inhabit and subconsciously draw on as part of our perceptual apparatus.

In his introduction to the 2010 Hayward Gallery exhibition *Move: Choreographing You*, Director Ralph Rugoff talks about the need for 'an expanded awareness of how we can physically interact with our environment using our entire bodies as a tool for gathering experience and knowledge.'<sup>(16)</sup> This show focused attention on certain performative practices that have found their way into museums since the 1960s; in one way or another, these have explored the relationships between people, objects and space. For example, Robert Morris's 1971 exhibition at the Tate Gallery described as 'choreography for exhibition space' (fig. 83) gave visitors 'instructions to act' by installing a series of mobile wooden structures that the visitor could climb over, balance on and pick up. Such was the success of the invitation that the show had to close after four days over fears for visitor safety.<sup>(17)</sup>

Rugoff's idea of expanded physical awareness has particular resonance for exhibitions and events which explore overtly body-centred practices such as dance and jewellery. In 2008 the contemporary jeweller Dorothy Hogg became one of the first Crafts Council sponsored residents in the

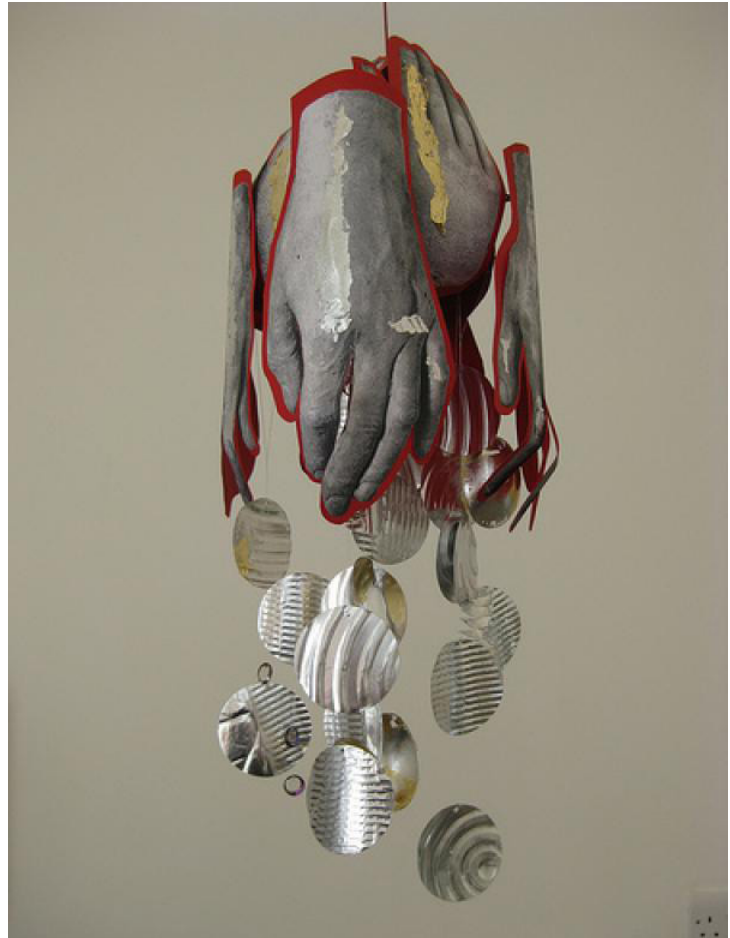
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15 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin – Architecture and the Senses* (England: Wiley, 2010), p. 41.

16 Ralph Rugoff, *Move Choreographing You* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2010), p. 7.

17 Rugoff, p. 73.

fig. 84. Dorothy Hogg  
Stamped silver charms for  
'The Chain of Talent' 2008  
Victoria and Albert  
Museum, London



new Sackler Education Centre at the V & A in London. As part of her residency, Hogg worked with visitors to create a series of pendant charms for a chain. This became a vast necklace, *The Chain of Talent*, (fig. 84) that looped its way through the corridors of the museum. Hogg created an expanded physical awareness of the lived spaces of the museum by re-shaping and animating them with the jewel.

The participatory element of this work explored the museum space and its relationship with jewellery objects as well as the relationship between these elements and the moving human body. The element of performance

was critical 'as an act of unpacking what is buried in the vault of tacit knowledge.'<sup>(18)</sup> Hogg's experience as a jeweller allowed her to find a way of using the intersection of words, actions and objects, as in theatre, to shed light on the hidden corners of knowledge and experience.

In a recently discovered manuscript, produced towards the end of Lefebvre's life, the philosopher writes about the potential for an 'architecture of enjoyment'.<sup>(19)</sup> *Jouissance* is the French word used and it brings in a different nuance to the English word 'enjoyment', evoking a deeper sense of sensual pleasure and desire. The architecture of *jouissance* focuses attention on bodily experience of space rather than abstract concepts of form.

Swiss architect Peter Zumthor with his concept of 'atmosphere' suggests another way of thinking about this.<sup>(20)</sup> 'Atmosphere' is achieved when all elements are aligned: material compatibility, sound and temperature of the space, the material body of the building and its relation to surrounding objects. In 2011 Zumthor was invited to create the annual temporary summer pavilion for the Serpentine Gallery in London. Working with landscape designer Piet Oudolf, Zumthor created a simple black wooden rectangular structure, which had, at its centre, an enclosed courtyard, much like a Roman villa or Moorish court garden, open to the elements; the centre of the pavilion was planted with a design of flowering grasses. Long integrated benches followed the internal shape of the rectangle, with other moveable chairs and tables available to create convivial circular gatherings at various points along the way; these did not, however, impede movement along the paths around the courtyard and the planted area. (fig. 85)

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18 Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London; Allen Lane/Penguin Books Ltd, 2008), p. 184.

19 <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/toward-an-architecture-of-enjoyment> (accessed July 2015).

20 Peter Zumthor, *Atmosphere* (Basel: Birkhauser, Verlag AG, 2006), p. 21.



*fig. 85. Peter Zumthor  
Serpentine Pavilion  
2011 London*

Over the course of four separate visits, the structure showed its relationship to lived space. The pavilion was crowded with visitors of all ages and nationalities – silently sitting, relaxed, laughing, moving about, engaging in impromptu conversations with other visitors. Zumthor's structure offered a concrete example of the effect of Lefebvre's architecture of *jouissance*.

So what was it that allowed the space to direct such internal forms of vitality in those inhabiting it? Perhaps it was, in part, the effect of theatre designer Adolf Appia's idea of rhythmic space;<sup>(21)</sup> something Appia partly created by theatrical orchestration of light and shadow. To enter Zumthor's central courtyard one passed through a dark corridor, and then moved into the light-filled courtyard. Even when it was raining, it still appeared to focus and draw in the daylight to create maximum wash of light to the space.

This attention to light was vital, not merely as a way of directing the gaze. As sensate beings, humans are likely to respond in a sub-conscious way to light as a life giving force. An example of the effect of light on exhibition visitors was given dramatic focus during Olafur Eliasson's *Weather Project* at Tate Modern in 2003/4. Installation shots show people dancing, lying down, and moving towards the light source even though the 'sun' they were responding to was a simulation created by electric light and mirrors.

In Zumthor's pavilion the experience of natural light was intensified by the presence of grasses which moved as people brushed past them and danced in any air currents inside the structure. The shadows of the grasses traced moving patterns across the stone of the paths like

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21 For a discussion of the different elements, including lighting, associated with Appia's concept of 'rhythmic space' see <http://www.kvl.cch.kcl.ac.uk/appia2.html> (accessed July 2015)



a living drawing. The experience of this recalled the perceptual affects described by Scarry in relation to particular forms of imaginative writing. Scarry suggests that the description of movement of one surface against another ignites an imaginative response in the reader, citing a passage from Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* in which the author describes shadowy images from a magic lantern moving around the surfaces of a darkened room. <sup>(22)</sup>

In the pavilion, the seating areas were partly in shade as the roof structure overhung the benches, creating a sense of seclusion and privacy whilst retaining contact with the open areas where there was more movement and light. In this way Zumthor's building seemed to echo the conventions of movement between private/public life that are found in the ideal spaces of city streets, something explored in the pioneering fieldwork of the American urbanist Jane Jacobs in the early 1960s. <sup>(23)</sup> Even with several hundred people occupying the space at any one time, a feeling of privacy and stillness was retained. One sensed that the congregation of strangers was becoming, through inhabiting Zumthor's material object, a participatory human performance in ways that represented the space of each individual. Zumthor himself trained as a cabinetmaker before moving on to the study of architecture. His role as *homo faber* was actively expressed in details of the architectural structure.

Zumthor's material object brings attention to another critical actor in the exhibition: the object itself. Cognitive scientist Don Norman suggests that most of the complexity of everyday knowledge lies not in people's heads but in the objects with which people surround themselves. <sup>(24)</sup> And as Antony Hudek demonstrates certain kinds of object have the ability

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22 Scarry, p.11.

23 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1992), pps 61 – 63.

24 Don Norman, *The Psychology of Everyday Things*, p. 96 quoted in Mike Pearson, Michael Shanks, *Theatre and Archaeology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p. 96.



*fig. 86. Clare Twomey  
'Trophy' 2006  
Victoria and Albert Museum*

to 'elucidate the multi-facetedness of objects and things in general... a complex world of varying textures and densities'.<sup>(25)</sup> Allowing such objects to perform their role, to be visible, is a vital concern for an exhibition-maker as it touches on the forms that knowledge takes and the way it is shared and developed.

This question of visibility is a complex one; it is not just a matter of placing a spotlight on the object in question. One needs to activate all the dynamic registers of staging, movement and performance and the relational registers of different kinds of language - material, spatial, sensual - to release the object's visibility to different viewers. In exploring exhibition-making through the lens of performance, the importance of different registers of knowledge is becoming evident. Nevertheless there is common ground. Despite the immense variety of objects and widely differing perspectives on objects, their very familiar presence in daily life, as Don Norman points out, forms a significant link between curator and exhibition visitor and allows the meaning of the object to be activated in multiple ways.

In 2006, the artist Clare Twomey installed her *Trophy* project in the cast court of the V & A. (fig. 86) In this project Twomey, who studied ceramics at Edinburgh College of Art, collaborated with the Wedgwood factory to produce four thousand blue Jasperware birds which were scattered, on open display, around the museum space. Members of the public were invited to an event and were encouraged to take away a bird. As an additional part of their participation, the same visitors were also invited to email through details of what had happened to the birds in their new homes. One email, quoted on the artist's website, encapsulates some of the responses that came in:

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25 Anthony Hudek, 'Introduction', in *The Object: Documents of Contemporary Art* edited by Anthony Hudek (London; Boston: Whitechapel Gallery/MIT Press, 2014), p. 14.

*'I chose this particular bird because I like the cobalt colour – which reminds me of the decoration of the Japanese ceramics I collect – the jaunty angle of the tail, and its particularly sharp beak. He's now living on my bookshelf with other miscellaneous objects, including Japanese and Indian gods, a Statue of Liberty cow and pink Eiffel tower'.<sup>(26)</sup>*

Twomey's blue birds have taken their place in homes all over the world, and, as this particular email tells us, continue to perform a role in their new environment because of the owner's way of exploring his or her knowledge and identity through the staging of objects. In addition, Twomey observes how the presentation of these objects in the value-giving spaces of the museum, made from a material (Wedgwood Jasperware) with perceived value and created with technical care, built a particular frame within which the objects could perform and become visible for the viewer.

The centrality of human/object relations within performance, and the influence of performance practice on the concept and spaces of museums are demonstrated by both of these examples. Archaeologist Michael Shanks goes one stage further by suggesting that, since a concept of society and culture is inconceivable without artefacts, then the artefact constituted the nineteenth-century museum which in turn continually re-constitutes the value of the object – his example resting on the study of a fifth-century Greek perfume jar. No perfume jar, no museum: no museum, no sense of valued object. An artefact, suggests Shanks is a 'multitude of data points',<sup>(27)</sup> each of which can perform in relation to new and changing environments and this plays an important role in the constitution of social networks and cultural ecologies. The exhibition is

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26 [http://www.claretwomey.com/trophy\\_info.html](http://www.claretwomey.com/trophy_info.html) (accessed July 2015).

27 Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p. 100.

the critical tool through which such a performance can take shape and the object, in this analysis, is the key actor.

Lefebvre's use of the word 'meshwork', quoted by Ingold <sup>(28)</sup> is illuminating here as a way of understanding the repetitive re-enactments of relationships between place, people and objects and the values revealed by them, through time. The word suggests a densely layered fabric that has concrete, as well as abstract qualities: it can be felt as well as intellectually understood. Makers of things often have a particular capacity to expose areas of this fabric through their material skill and knowledge acquired through hands-on engagement with shaping objects. Archaeologists, who adopt a forensic approach to identifying and understanding fragments and objects from different periods, in order to uncover ways in which social practices were enacted in different cultures, define their role through the relationships they aim to establish between people and objects. What both groups highlight is that 'objects are not so much there to be seen, as to be used'<sup>(29)</sup>: they exist in life as well as in exhibitions.

Archaeologists are an important group to include amongst the cast of characters who perform the role of staging objects in contemporary culture. This has been recognized in recent years by a series of projects linking archaeologists and contemporary makers, including the Museum of London archaeologists working with goldsmith Jacqueline Mina to explore the qualities of the Spitalfields hoard (1999/2000), silversmith Alex Brogden working with the Goldsmiths' Company to remake the Corieltavi bowl (figs. 87 & 88) or Stephanie Moser and her team at Southampton University offering a residency to lettercutter Gary Breeze in 2008 in order to explore the material histories of boatbuilding in the UK. This

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28 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.117-8, quoted by Tim Ingold, *Lines: a Brief History* (England; New York: Routledge 2010), p. 80 – 82.

29 William Forsythe, quoted by Rugoff, p. 107.



*fig. 87. Silversmith Alex Brogden demonstrating how the Corieltavi bowl was made 2011*

*fig. 88. Corieltavi Bowl, c. 100BC 11cm © The Goldsmiths' Company*

interdisciplinary contact deepens understanding of the central role that material knowledge and intelligent making plays in forging connections between different cultures through knowledge of material culture. These examples also emphasize the social dimension to knowledge creation so relevant to ideas of performance.

As Shanks comments:

*'In securing knowledge we rely upon others. This reliance is a moral relationship of trust, crucial to knowledge is knowing who or what to trust – knowledge of things depends on knowledge of others'.<sup>(30)</sup>*

Harry Collins echoes this comment in his idea of the collective and social nature of knowledge: 'knowledge is the property of people rather

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30 Pearson and Shanks, p. 47.

than documents', <sup>(37)</sup> Staging a museum exhibition can create a place of trust, offering a kind of contract between maker/performer/object/viewer that allows knowledge to be explored and revealed without competitive boundaries in what might be described, in psychological terms, as a safe space. An exhibition-maker in this space is like the conductor of an orchestra, drawing together all the different registers of individual energy, and knowledge that underpin exhibitions to negotiate a final performance that is coherent but respects everybody's share and role in shaping the collective work. The collective nature of the work is demonstrated by the images overleaf of a work-in-progress and finished exhibition. (fig. 89)

Shanks expands this idea of collective practice further through his concept of a performative model in relation to his discipline of archaeology. He applies this concept to one of its most fundamental investigative activities: the excavation of the historical site to uncover

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31 Harry Collins, 'The TEA Set: Tacit Knowledge and Scientific Networks', *Science Studies* 4 (1974), 165-186.



*fig. 89. Setbuild and installation shot 'Out of the Ordinary: Spectacular Craft' 2009  
Victoria and Albert Museum © Crafts Council*

facets of human experience, through time. He looks at all the different elements that surround this activity including the relationships that are found and forged between people and places to negotiate the proposed excavation, the way these are developed through the management of the site, once under investigation, and the ways in which the classification and dissemination of the found fragments add new relationships. He describes the 'ecology of mobilizing resources' as the vital force - political, economic and social - in the performance of archaeology. Performance is seen 'as generative of materials produced before, during and after the event, not only technical information but personal experience'. <sup>(32)</sup>

Transposing Shanks' concept of the performative model to the world of exhibitions, we can examine the way all these relational activities, the early stages of negotiations and 'mobilising resources', forge the qualities of the exhibition itself and underpin the relationships between people and objects within the exhibition. So, for example, a well-understood negotiation in this context concerns the loan of objects from private or public collections. The economic and political reality of such loans – too expensive to transport, too fragile to travel, uncertain authorship or attribution, too demanding a set of loan conditions – will have a direct impact on the shape of the show. At the same time, during the process of the negotiations, a delicate network of relationships is forged beyond the museum that will, in turn, become part of the next exhibition performance. This illustrates the point that the curator and exhibition visitor are not the only participants in the process of creating an exhibition. The roles and relationships that need to be performed behind the scenes for the exhibition to take place can be as influential on the creative performance as any more binary concept of author/audience.

In her essay '*Meteorologica*', commissioned as part of the document to mark Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project*, (fig. 90) Susan May describes how the artist devised a plan to work alongside all her Tate colleagues

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32 Pearson and Shanks, p. 57.





*fig. 90. Olafur Eliasson  
'The Weather Project' 2003/4,  
Tate Gallery, London*

in order to examine some of these often hidden relationships and their influence on mediating the experience of the artwork. The artist proposed to enter into and subvert the conventions of practical museum planning, by, for example, sending out fictional press releases about unexpected weather conditions appearing in the museum building.

Eliasson's creative focus on the stage management of exhibitions draws on his interest in probing the nature of mediation, in museums, as a way of arousing the perceptual curiosity of the viewer; this in turn 'reminds the viewer that the only truly dependable reality comes from within.'<sup>(33)</sup> The performer is in fact the viewer who can create his or her own performance with the given materials of the exhibition/stage space.

David Littlefield points out that exhibitions 'become a practice of focusing meaning or affecting a relationship between frame and framed... some objects require mediation/performance to fulfil their potential'.<sup>(34)</sup> For objects to be allowed to perform fully, their framing and staging in an exhibition is critical; the staging will in turn influence our movement around the space and our actions within it.

In 2007 the International Council of Museums published the following definition of the concept of a museum:

*'The museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment'*.<sup>(35)</sup>

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33 Susan May, *The Weather Project* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), p.27.

34 David Littlefield, 'Installation and Performance', in *Handbook of Interior Architecture and Design* edited by Lois Weithanl and Graeme Booker (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 230.

35 <http://uk.icom.museum/?s=Definition+of+a+Museum> (accessed July 2015).

This statement provides a universal framework for the professional role of museums in material culture and is used to guide museum practice internationally. In considering concepts of performance, the most important of aspect of the statement concerns the museum's role in exhibiting the 'tangible and intangible heritage of humanity'.

The twentieth-century Polish theatre director Tadeusz Kantor's concept of a bio-object offers a point from which to think further about these less tangible elements. Kantor saw objects in the theatre space as a form of extension of the actor – physical forms of psychological and emotional states <sup>(36)</sup> - which were used to extend or restrict the bodily movements of the actor as in the 1975 production of *Dead Class*. (fig. 91) Kantor's actors, often amateurs, improvised performances led by the material qualities of found objects (bicycle wheels, old chairs) as well as by their less tangible potential. The mundanity of the objects, like Duchamp's readymades from the world of art, became capable of activating individual emotional/imaginative capacities through their restaging in theatrical space.

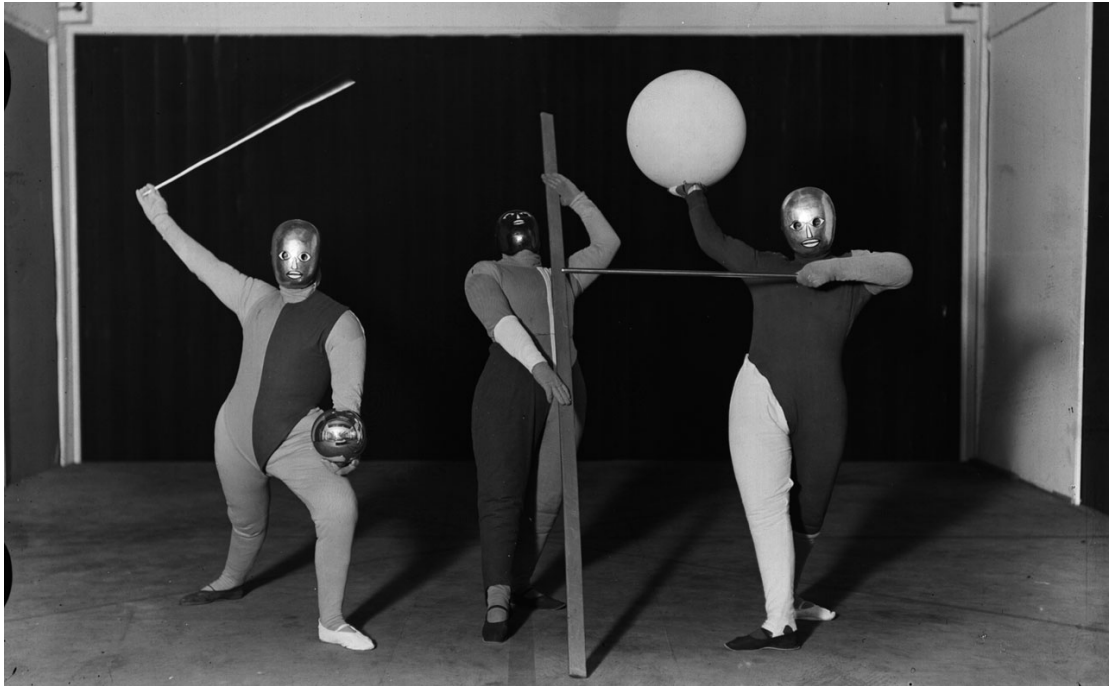
In Kantor's work, as in an exhibition, ideas are explored through two interrelated means: the actor's relationship to an object's physical attributes, 'the tangible' and the ways in which these attributes give form to different cultural and social contexts, 'the intangible'. Aesthetic dialogue is created when an object (be it painting, old floorboard or perfume jar) is activated to embody these intangible elements in concrete form. To return to the concept of aesthetic friction proposed in the last section, such friction is achieved in the performative context by the tension between the fixed weight of the object and the moving body of the subject.

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36 McKinney and Butterworth, p. 61.



*fig. 91. Tadeusz Kantor  
'Dead Class' 1975  
Krzysztofory Gallery,  
Krakow*



*fig. 92. Oskar Schlemmer  
'Teatro Bauhaus' 1927  
Erich Consemüller.  
© Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau*

Relationships between objects and the moving body, critical to a concept of performance and performance art, owe a debt to the work of early twentieth-century designers such as Oskar Schlemmer. (fig. 92) At the Dessau Bauhaus, Schlemmer explored his concepts of abstract form, and two and three- dimensional spatial geometry, through a series of carefully orchestrated performances. Dancers were clad in padded cloth or papier mâché costumes, in primary pigments; they were given objects to guide movement and their limbs, and movement, were extended and restricted by the attachment of rigid poles or restrictive costume. His investigation of the spatial relationships between actor/dancer and environment created a body of work which avoided narrative or symbol, and was not:

*'based on any particular 'intellectual' considerations. It grew rather out of inventive aesthetic pleasure in mixing opposites of form, colour and movement and shaping the whole into something which conveyed significance and an underlying concept.'*<sup>(37)</sup>

Schlemmer's comments reveal his interest in inventive material practice, practice which is present in a concept of craft. His comments also shed light on something akin to Lefebvre's concept of an architecture of *jouissance*; movement in physical space shaping pleasure and desire. Seen from a contemporary perspective, Schlemmer's work seems to underline the experience of being human in a European world that was becoming increasingly mechanised.

In 2012 echoes of his experiments could still be found on the European stage, in one of the performances of the UK cultural Olympiad, *Machina*,

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37 Oskar Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, 1990 quoted in Mckinney and Butterworth, p. 28.



*fig. 93. Conrad Shawcross, Set Design for 'Machina' from 'Metamorphosis: Titian' 2012  
Computer controlled mechanical system, halogen light, steel and aluminium*

from *Metamorphosis, Titian* 2012. In this performance Royal Ballet dancers danced in an elaborate series of *pas de deux* with a giant mechanical creature, designed by sculptor Conrad Shawcross. (fig.93) The creature's movements replicated the movements of the human dancers through the use of body movement sensors strapped to the dancers' frames.

Schlemmer's concept of the body as the site through which human experience and activities can be shaped and understood, has been a continuous thread running through performing arts, although, as choreographer Siobhan Davies pointed out in a recent interview, the concept takes on different nuances in the world of dance and the world of visual arts.



fig. 94. Siobhan  
Davies Dance  
Studio  
'Table of Contents'  
2014, ICA London

For the trained dancer, the body is shaped through intensive regimes of movement to develop a fully integrated tool through which to explore the expressive dimensions of human experience. For the visual artist, the body is the inevitable site of experience, within which all acts of imagination are performed. The intense focus on action, gained through a dancer's training, creates a different interpretative community to that attaching to a visual artist.

In a recent Davies work *Table of Contents*, shown at the ICA, London, (figs. 94 & 95) the visitor's experience was given life and focus by the disciplined movement of the dancer. All those entering the gallery became instantly part of the activity, as with Clare Twomey's *Trophy*. However, unlike many participatory visual arts performances, in which the viewer can feel like a lab rat directed to perform by the artist, the direction to participation with Davies' work was less overt.



As the visitor moved into the space, the eye was caught by the actions of pairs of dancers scattered around an empty room, each helping the other to enact a series of gestures and movements. A tall rectangular table was placed at one side of the room, off-centre, and this acted as a magnetic gathering point for the dancers, between sequences. During these pauses discussions took place about what the recent movements had triggered for the dancers and thoughts were shared about the next steps. Visitors were sitting around the edges of the room, or moving to the table with the dancers to participate in the discussions.

Wolfgang Iser's concept of the 'wandering viewpoint' <sup>(38)</sup> provides a frame for the experience. In *Table of Contents*, each viewer could decide which set of movements being performed in different locations, could be selected for closer attention. With individual attentiveness active, the spectator could then experience the dancers' movements as an echo in their own body; the dancers' extremely disciplined and thoughtful process, sensed like filmic slow motion, seemed to make this possible. In *Table of Contents*, the lack of direction and the careful movement created a receptive atmosphere that allowed thoughts to unfold. It became gradually clear that a process was underway, a process that explored traces of movement/body memory from previous performances; this was being used as a way of understanding how movement and choreography might be archived to maintain the original experience in new forms. No text or lecture had explained this; it emerged from the performance under way in the exhibition room.

At the heart of *Table of Contents* lay the human/object/space relationships critical to any act of exhibition making, activated here by the skill and fluidity of the dancers, the exploratory conversations at the table and the movement around the space with a changing group of visitors entering

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38 Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading, a theory of Aesthetic Response* 1978, quoted in McKinney and Butterworth, p.172.



fig. 95. Siobhan Davies Dance Studio, 'Table of Contents' 2014, ICA London

and leaving. All this activity coalesced around the table as both a tangible place to meet, and an intangible symbol of collective gathering. The performance was anchored by the object which also symbolically concretised the collaborative practice under way.

In a subsequent interview Davies' colleagues commented that the introduction of the table had **created** the performance in some important way. Unlike the Robert Morris installations and other forms of performance art, the viewer was not being asked to perform to the instructions or ideas of the artist, but was instead asked to participate in an emerging awareness of bodily movement in relation to space and objects. New forms of language began to emerge rooted in a 'symbolically significant sensuous manifold'.<sup>(39)</sup>

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39 Paul Crowther, *Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-Consciousness*, 1993, quoted in McKinney and Butterworth, p. 191.

fig. 96. Caroline Broadhead  
'Above/Below' 2011  
Bath Abbey



In 2011 artist Caroline Broadhead created an installation in Bath Abbey, *Above/Below*, which drew on her longstanding exploration of textiles and clothing as intimate parts of performing identities. (fig. 96) Earlier works such as *The Waiting Game* at Upnor Castle in Kent in 1997, working with choreographer Angela Woodhouse, involved a dancer standing almost immobilized in a web of fabric within an historic space. In this work, one sensed the metaphorical weight of history through the vast flow of cloth.

*Above/Below* comprised a horizontal screen, just above head height, created from lines of nylon thread strung across the nave of the abbey.

As the light caught the threads and cast unexpected shadows, the viewer moving through the abbey was drawn to stop, shift their position and look at the surrounding space from a different angle. The barely visible threads seemed to fade and reappear with the movement of the viewer, creating new relationships with the material environment and with the experience of looking. The experience privileged a non-verbal, sensual engagement with space, recalling choreographer Robert Wilson's instruction 'to think with ones eyes'.<sup>(40)</sup> The active engagement of the viewer, subtly set up by the insertion of the threads into the stone building, created a *mise-en-scène* in which Roland Barthes' concept of 'obtuse meaning'<sup>(41)</sup> might emerge; the effect was an embodied exchange between artist, viewer and place.

Broadhead's sensitivity to the qualities of the boundaries between bodies and space, rooted in her hands-on work with jewellery and textiles, gives her a rare capacity to activate sensory awareness in the viewer. However, when the word performance is used in relation to material, the frame is usually technical. For designer, maker and engineer, performance can mean investigating a material's structural properties in relation to the uses to which it will be put: its ability to flex or remain static, its reaction to temperature, moisture and movement, its behaviour in friction with other materials and surfaces. The additional subjective response elicited by different materials is often ignored.

In the context of the scenography of an exhibition, the performance of materials can be considered not only in relation to their structural capacities, but also in their capacities to activate sensory engagement with environments, as in the case of Zumthor's wooden pavilion or Broadhead's

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40 Robert Wilson, *The Theatre of Robert Wilson*, 1996, quoted in McKinney and Butterworth p. 73.

41 Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 1977, quoted in McKinney and Butterworth, p. 164.

textile works in historic buildings. In both these examples the social fabric becomes a 'sensorium activated by touch, proximity, texture'.<sup>(42)</sup>

The material with the most paradoxical relationship to the sensorium is glass, yet it is prevalent in most contemporary museum exhibitions. The creation of exhibition spaces would be impossible without it: showcases, lights, AV terminals. Glass is cold to the touch, vulnerable to shock, fragile, sharp-edged; its surface reflects and refracts the light that passes into it. Glass distorts perception and creates visions that are incorporeal: the dancing colours of the stained glass window, the camera lens, the mirror.

Although glass vessels are held in the hand, and hands stroke mobile phones, glass as a material usually fully subordinates our haptic to our ocular sense. The vision that glass, as a material, underlines is a disembodied one distancing the viewer from the lived space of individual experience, reinforcing 'a dream like sense of reality and alienation'.<sup>(43)</sup> In his concept of retinal architecture, Pallasmaa suggests that glass, as a material, generates this alienating distance between body and environment to detrimental effect.

However the role of glass, as a material, in the performance of relationships between people and environment can be re-calibrated by placing the work of the glassmaker centre stage. For instance, the invention of telescopes is attributed to spectacle makers in sixteenth-century Italy: an example of how makers can use specialist knowledge of material in one sphere to generate ideas and things in another. A contemporary example can be found in the work of UK glassmaker Matt Durran: 'always curious, always looking', as his website profile states<sup>(44)</sup>. He has used his hands-on material knowledge in diverse ways: to create glass moulds for tissue engineering

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42 Pearson and Shanks, p. 54.

43 Juhani Pallasmaa, *Eyes of the Skin*, p. 26.

44 <http://www.mattdurran.com/profile.html> (accessed August 2015).

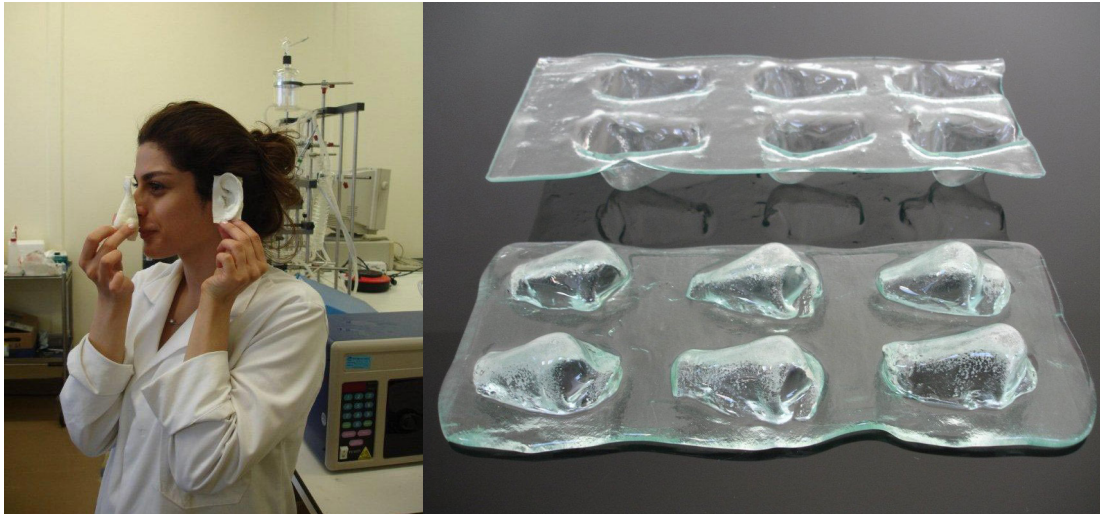


fig. 97. Matt Durrant *Glass Moulds for Tissue Engineered Noses*

scientists at University College London as well as large installations for contemporary artists. (fig. 97) A more direct engagement with material and makers can develop curatorial ideas about the imaginative potential of glass in display environments.

Artist and designer Wendy Ramshaw explored the magical role that glass can play in human affairs in her 2007 exhibition entitled *A Journey through Glass*. (fig. 98) Following a residency at the Oxford Science Museum, the artist worked with glassmakers in the USA and Britain to create vessels in response to the forms of laboratory glass: retorts, flasks, test-tubes, instrument dials, all of them forms which encapsulate the shape-shifting performances of scientific experiment and creative alchemy.

In the exhibition, the familiar but re-staged scientific vessel forms were arranged in groups, apparently frozen in time from some unnamed laboratory at the mid point of some unknown experiment. The objects appeared to have survived, and then attempted to recreate, an original, but unrecorded performance. The installation achieved aesthetic power



*fig. 98. Wendy Ramshaw, 'The Inventor' 2007, Blown glass, metal 46 cm*

by its symbolic celebration of the invention of man in intimate contact with materials in constantly changing contexts through time.

Tadeusz Kantor described performance space as a 'room of memory'.<sup>(45)</sup> Within this framework, the museum exhibition can be compared to a palace of memory, full of objects, paper archives and the less tangible, but equally vital, scholarly curatorial knowledge; all of these are constantly re-presented and restaged to conserve, as the ICOM definition reminds us, tangible and intangible heritage. Architectural historian Adrian Forty reflects on the ways in which, during the twentieth century, the Western world developed an obsession with memory, evidenced by 'a colossal investment in museums, archives, heritage programmes... symptoms of a culture that appears terrified of forgetting.'<sup>(46)</sup> This obsessive collecting of objects for public display reflects a belief that physical object contains within them a vast collective archive of individual memories, documents of shared cultures that can still perform within and shape present lives.

Jewellery, perhaps above all other forms of human expression, is implicated in this performance, or re-enactment of memory. Innumerable

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45 McKinney and Butterworth, p. 186.

46 Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), p. 215.



*fig. 99. Karl Fritsch  
Ring 2004  
18ct gold, emeralds,  
diamonds, rubies 2 cm*



wills and letters exist in which items of jewellery are listed as important bearers of meaning from one generation to the next. A whole conceptual field of contemporary jewellery practice focuses on this memory-performing role of the jewel, seen for example, in the work of German jeweler Karl Fritsch. (fig. 99) Fritsch collects lost, damaged or abandoned rings and fragments of jewels and gives them new life by casting new elements, soldering new links and constructing new forms to create intimate wearable pieces. The practice of melting down valuable metals in jewellery; or reworking them for contemporary fashion, has a long history, but Fritsch's reworking allows traces of the original object to remain. His work allows the past and present to be held visibly in tension. His ability to do this is informed by his knowledge of the practice and histories of a field of jewellery and goldsmithing.

One of the questions that Fritsch's work brings to the fore is whether, over time, an object will continue to carry memory in a way that builders of monuments and exhibition-makers in museums hope will be the case. His fragments are often abandoned or forgotten when he discovers them. Forty suggests that memory has 'an unstable and elusive relationship to objects': <sup>(47)</sup> he draws inspiration from Proust's extended meditation on the haphazard and fleeting nature of memory and forgetting in *À la recherche du temps perdu*.

One of the qualities that exhibitions and theatre performances have in common is their temporary and fleeting nature. Both can be described as 'rooms of memory' in Kantor's sense. However, the ways in which memory is constructed rests not only on the fixed physical object but also on the subtle, shifting relationships between people, and between people and objects, in a range of contexts. As Davies' *Table of Contents* demonstrated, to remember a performance, one has to re-enact a series of movements to draw out traces or fragments that were embodied in each actor.

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47 Forty, p. 215.

This relationship between movement and memory was highlighted in a recent series of video interviews conducted by Sylvia Lahav. A small selection of Tate visitors and curators were invited by Lahav to describe a work of art they had recently seen, and their reaction to it. In all cases, the subjects closed their eyes and moved their arms in the air to recall and describe the image of the remembered work. <sup>(48)</sup> The process of performing movements also ignited memories in those watching. An example of the importance of movement to human memory in everyday life can be demonstrated by re-enactments at police crime scenes. An actor retraces the last recorded movements of the missing person to prompt memory recall in others. To return to Forty, 'what is important is not just memory but the tension between memory and forgetting'. <sup>(49)</sup> Movement in performances and exhibitions replays the temporal intervals as well as the still images of our experiences. This creates a different layering of memory before the object, something that Clare Twomey explored with poetic force in her ROTOR performance in which unfired clay vessels were dissolved through repeated immersion in water. (fig. 02)

Film and digital media offer many ways of introducing movement and performance into the exhibition, as the section on film suggested. In theatres, archaeological investigations and exhibitions, the introduction of digital media, sound and film, is used in conjunction with living bodies and material space to enlarge the experience of performance. In the field of scenography, contemporary directors such as the Canadian Robert Lepage fuse video, live stage action and overscaled projected images to create immersive performances that, in his words, 'use all the narrative languages that are around' <sup>(50)</sup> to involve audiences. The point that

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48 Sylvia Lahav 'Interpretation in the Art Museum: authority and access 1987 – 2007' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Institute of Education, London, 2011).

49 Forty, p. 218.

50 Robert Lepage, Radio Interview, 2006, quoted in McKinney and Butterworth, p. 136.

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*fig. 100. Fabrica Projects, 'Venetian Mirror' 2009, Designed by: Gonçalo Campos and Sam Baron, Interactive design by: Andy Cameron and João Wilbert*



Lepage's work emphasises is that technology is not supplanting physical objects, or gestures in theatre, but it is offering new frames for them in forms of language that are now widely understood.

The increasing use of more interactive technologies, such as computer games or computer navigation tools, in exhibitions allows a participant to read and absorb and also to control which elements get highlighted and remembered. *The Venetian Mirror* installation by Fabrica, (fig. 100) exhibited in the exhibition *Decode: Digital Design Sensations* in 2009/2010 at the V & A, explored this sense of the exhibition performance as a collaborative interaction. *Venetian Mirror* blended contemporary digital technology with traditional Venetian glass. When visitors walked up to the installation, their image did not immediately appear in the mirror. Only if they kept very still did their reflection slowly appear, like a photograph being developed. It was an interactive piece which engaged the sense of proprioceptivity – the sense of oneself and one's body, in the here-and-now. The appearance of the image was controlled by the time spent in front of the installation by the viewer. The object was performed by the viewer.

There is, however, a tension in the use of computer as narrative tool in exhibitions or performances. On the one hand, digital tools enable the creation of rich 'metaphors of transience, instability, multiple framing and interactivity', <sup>(51)</sup> which Joslin McKinney suggests echo the rapid associative capacities of the human brain. On the other hand, over reliance on digital tools risks the underuse of the unique embodied capacities of individual human cognition through which difference, in Bakhtin's sense, <sup>(52)</sup> is both recognized and used as creative stimulus. Digital tools, as Pallasmaa argues in connection with glass buildings,

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51 McKinney and Butterworth, p. 147.

52 See Zappen's discussion on Bakhtin's concept of difference in *Twentieth-Century Rhetorics and Rhetoricians* pp. 8-10, op.cit.

risk restricting the human sensorium to the eyes alone and can overlay difference with a form of Burgin's 'prosthetic unconscious', immune to the material potential of human thought. <sup>(53)</sup>

As Joslin McKinney observes in her texts on scenography, the performance of self through avatars, websites, blogs and social media has become an increasing part of most individual daily lives. However, it remains unclear whether the virtual reality of this kind of performance can offer the level of social and imaginative participation in the material world offered by the live experience of an exhibition and to which a concept of craft remains inextricably linked. *Homo Faber* may now have a new identity as an avatar in the creative commons of the virtual world, but the thinking material hand is still needed to switch on the machine before the performance can begin.

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53 Burgin, p.192, op.cit.



# AFTERWORD

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*Intimate Ecologies* has been an exploration of the languages of exhibition-making in museums and related cultural spaces in the UK in recent years. The study has suggested different ways of understanding the way that the exhibition as a medium might contribute to a contemporary concept of craft. The proposition has been that such a concept points to an important form of critical thinking, rooted in material practice. This thinking can be found across many forms of human expression and remains an active constituent of art-making in contemporary human culture. Exhibitions, with their capacity to make use of interwoven layers of visual, verbal and spatial language, are, it has been argued, a vital arena for understanding such thinking.

The introductory paragraph launched a critical assault on anthropologist Alfred Gell's theoretical framing of art and its values. Astutely observed as Gell's comments are, they undervalue the knowledge of materials and making that artists and designers in all disciplines employ to great effect. Despite its elusive relationship to verbal framing, such knowledge can be scholarship of the highest order. It is this knowledge that underpins art-making and informs a concept of craft and it has informed the dominant thesis of *Intimate Ecologies*. The particular challenges of framing this form of scholarship in museums, has been considered throughout.

In order to keep the focus on material practice, the decision was taken to focus on some of the different forms of language that are part of the vocabulary of the exhibition-maker. Each of the four sections has selected a form of language and studied examples of work by artists and designers, in different media, that show imaginative mastery of that language in particular material forms. So, for example, the section on text in exhibitions drew on the work of poets, lettercutters and calligraphers as

*fig. 101. Installation shot: '1:1 Architects Build Small Spaces' 2010  
Victoria and Albert Museum (for full discussion of this exhibition see p 216 - 217)*

a way of thinking about how words and their material qualities can create dynamic flow in exhibitions. The playful and sensuously associative potential of words was drawn into sharp focus. Attention was also drawn to the complex and elusive nature of meaning in verbal language and its roots in material worlds.

The study of examples of painting from still life traditions, alongside the works of potters and sculptors, drew attention to the importance of the home and its domestic objects as a place for art-making that informs, and is informed by a concept of craft. The challenge of realising the domestic context in museum spaces was highlighted with particular reference to the work of Kettle's Yard. (fig. 107) This section of the thesis also directed attention to the role of pattern making and spatial arrangement as part of visual language and hence to its role as a vital compositional tool for an exhibition maker. The exhibition was thus considered to be, in itself, a form of still life. (fig. 102)

The introduction of a section on performance and a section on film opened up useful lines of enquiry into the role of movement in exhibitions examining its role in stimulating empathy and embodied consciousness and in activating different kinds of perceptual knowledge. The language of film in particular was selected as it has become an increasingly dominant form of language in everyday life and is thus familiar to both artist and viewer. The question of the role of film, as document or autonomous object, as material presence or virtual reality, dovetailed neatly with the question of the role of the exhibition. The interplay between material environments and imaginative realms is common to both. Different film clips were juxtaposed with the written elements to suggest this interplay.

The increasing presence of moving images in online worlds was discussed as a way of considering the viewing experience of film in exhibitions. The risks associated with this flood of online images were considered.



*fig. 102. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott  
Installation shot from show  
at Galerie Besson, 2010*

Victor Burgin's suggestion that such hyper-presence might be creating a form of prosthetic unconscious in humans – an unconscious directed by Google and Apple rather than by our own intimate environments – was both provocative and precise.

Performance brought the intimate body and its physical environments back into the frame. The work of choreographers and theatre designers (fig. 103) was juxtaposed with the exhibition experiments of artists with a strong interest in the participatory potential offered by traditions of performance. (fig. 106) Contrasts were drawn between the understanding of performance and movement within a field of professional dance and understanding of them as presented by visual artists in gallery spaces.

Time as a structuring force for experience has threaded through the thesis. It took particular form in the performance section. The idea of performance as a temporary intervention was seen as a link with the time-limited medium of exhibitions; it highlighted the ways that both areas explore the material object/body relationships to create memory in an essentially fleeting environment.

Surprising contextual links between, for example, archaeology, craft and performance also emerged suggesting that concepts of craft are inextricably linked with other professional spheres.

Indeed, as the research has developed, it has revealed that a concept of craft is being explored in many distinct intellectual traditions within the contemporary humanities including, among others: anthropology, architecture, art history, cultural theory, design research, philosophy, archaeology and performance. This vibrant state of affairs highlights the rich diversity of ways in which a concept of craft can be made articulate, and inform, myriad spheres of human knowledge, practice and theory, as well as taking form through particular material objects and exhibitions.



*fig. 103. 'Machina' from 'Metamorphosis: Titian' 2012,  
Choreographers: Kim Brandstrup and Wayne McGregor  
Designs: Conrad Shawcross Composer: Nico Muhly*

Nevertheless, the research has also shown that for a concept of craft to be understood in all its complexity, it benefits from the friction, or dialogue, between these largely verbal intellectual traditions and the hybrid language of practice, underpinned by the role of the artist and the maker. Three particular concepts that articulate this dialogue have risen to prominence: Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa's concept of the thinking hand; British anthropologist Tim Ingold's concept of wayfaring as a 'current of sensuous activity' and French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's linked concepts of material imagination and poetic spatiality.

The considerable body of writings from each of these scholars has been of significance in demonstrating that constitutional boundaries, so often favoured in museums and universities, are usefully transgressed in order to understand the visual arts in particular, and creative practice more widely. The practising artist can move, as the writer Italo Calvino points out, between the rapid associative thinking and immaterial lightness symbolically associated with the classical god Mercury and the careful material craftsmanship of the earthbound Vulcan. Each of the scholars cited above has married craftsmanship with imagination managing to write about non-verbal practice with insight. Each has moved thinking in their own discipline beyond turf-policing defensiveness into correspondence with a whole realm of perceptual worlds that bring the maker into the centre of the human stage.

Close reading of some of these texts has been combined with a close reading of many different kinds of writing, as highlighted in the introduction. Ingold's description of the meandering line has been fully lived in the choice of texts. As one author, or scholar, has quoted another, so that text has been brought into view and enjoyed.

*fig. 104. Sara Brennan 'Trees' 2014  
Work in Progress: Silk and wool tapestries 32 x 28 cm*



*on the edge of a wood  
a moment's hesitation  
how will you conduct yourself  
in the company of trees <sup>(1)</sup>*

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1 Thomas A. Clark, *Of Woods & Water Forty Eight Delays* (England: Moschatel Press, 2008)

The writing of American literary critic, Elaine Scarry, is one example. Quoted by Pallasmaa, her text *Dreaming by the Book* tackles the difficult task of exploring the way an imaginative experience of the world can be prompted by certain forms of writing: her concepts of immediate, delayed and mimetic perception became guides, in themselves, to the nature of perceptual experience in exhibitions. Margit Rowell's informative essay on still life painting, from the Hayward exhibition catalogue on that subject, made the direct connection between painting and poetry, by quoting Rilke's comments on Cézanne. Correspondences were set up between the visual and verbal with increasing intensity through this linking of texts. The correspondence between the making of a tapestry and the making of a poem became clearer. (fig. 104)

The problem of aesthetic theory has been precisely linked to the problem of the unsayable, in Wittgenstein's sense. One language does not necessarily translate into another: a successful painting or jewel will, by virtue of the specifics of its language system, be irreducible to verbal language alone. The painter Howard Hodgkin's poetic articulation of the problem, in relation to painting, emerged from an interview with David Sylvester. As the artist says, he paints until 'the subject comes back'. However, appreciation of what is unsayable, the aesthetic value of a work, can be developed through greater critical attention to understanding embodied material knowledge and skill. This concept of material theory, proposed at the outset, recurred in each section as an attempt to banish Gell's weak articulation of aesthetics as something applied to objects with 'appealing qualities'.

Wittgenstein hovers like an improper ghost at the edge of this thesis. Improper since philosophers haunt such abstract realms compared to makers, and it is to the maker that this work pays homage. It is through them, I suggest, that aesthetic practice and theory is first forged. Nevertheless Wittgenstein is there. Perhaps the fact that he trained as





*fig. 105. Ludwig Wittgenstein  
Doorhandles 1928  
Designed for Haus Wittgenstein, Vienna*

an engineer and also built buildings and designed and made furniture (fig.105) is the connecting point. His logical dissection of the limits of language are, one feels, rooted there. Art historian Tim Clark's linking of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* with Picasso's 1920s experiments in collage and drawing is compelling. Both, he said, are wrestling with the 'problem of how best to state – to show – what it is to be an object'.<sup>(2)</sup> This research has shown that this is what intelligent makers do, and it is what exhibition-makers must try to do. Makers don't describe, they enter into the forms that do not yet exist and reveal their existence. Immersion in the language of material is an inevitable part of the ability to develop such existential and aesthetic experience. This is also where a concept of craft takes form.

*Intimate Ecologies* concludes with a diffuse but reverent sense of the diversity of the creative human thinking that is rooted in material practice. Any study of practice undermines grand unitary theories. It points instead to some common areas of lived experience that are intimately shared, but infinitely different. The language of materials is rich and varied. Verbal language is in itself a form of material. The human capacity to invent, challenge, change and understand the world through these materials is part of the joy of living. Museum exhibitions need to reflect this. Bakhtin points out that: 'this complex mixture of languages is not merely a mixture, however, but a dialogized heteroglossia, a viewing of each language from the perspective of another'.<sup>(3)</sup>

Such a rich perspective is at the heart of creative practice and intelligent exhibition-making. Will the subject of the object or the exhibition

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2 T.J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* (England; New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 42.

3 James P. Zappen, 'Bakhtin and Dialogic rhetoric', in *Twentieth-Century Rhetoric and Rhetoricians* ed. Michael G. Moran and Michelle Balif (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000) p. 17.

come back to the viewer? In the end this research concludes that each individual's own object/show will come back and it is neither the task of the exhibition-maker, object-maker, curator nor critic to restrict the experience of objects to singular views. The task is to be precise about a particular experience, as the artist Victor Burgin has pointed out, not to explain it. An exhibition is a material object, rich in languages that catalyses a constant congregation of strangers. It is an extraordinary lived space, full of atmosphere and possibility – rather like life itself.



*fig. 106. Installation/Recreation of  
Robert Morris' 'Bodyspacemotionthing' 2009  
Tate Gallery, London*



*fig. 107. Jim Ede's Bedroom  
Kettle's Yard 2012  
© Kettle's Yard*



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*Dorothy Hogg*, dir: Paul Watson and students of Edinburgh College of Art, from *Creation II*, (London: Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, 2009)

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*Olafur Eliasson - Notion-Motion*, dir: Jan Schmidt/Pars Media, 2005

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*What Artists Do All Day - Norman Ackroyd*, dir: Matthew Hill, 2012

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*Objects in a Landscape, Gordon Baldwin*, dir: Matthew Partington, 2012

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- 1 b. 8.45 – 9.18
- 1 c. 10.51 – 11.20

*Our British Friends*, dir: Tom Supensky, 2008

- 2 a. 0.33 – 1.22
- 2 b. 2.10 – 3.24

*Catherine Martin*, dir: Paul Watson and students of Goldsmiths College, 2009 from *Creation II*, (London: Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, 2009)

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- 3 b. 3.42 – 4.34

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- 4 a. 0.00 – 0.100
- 4 b. 2.00 – 2.15

*What Artists Do All Day - Norman Ackroyd*, dir: Matthew Hill, 2012

- 5 a. 0.17 – 1.30

*The Manual*, dir: Matt Hulse, 2010

- 6 a. 0.00 – 2.09
- 6 b. 14.58 – 15.32
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*Self Made*, dir: Gilliam Wearing, 2010

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*Olafur Eliasson - Notion-Motion*, dir: Jan Schmidt/Pars Media, 2005

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## EXHIBITIONS

*1:1 Architects Build Small Spaces*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 15 June – 30 August 2010

Curator: Abraham Thomas

*Adventures of the Black Square: Abstract Art and Society 1915 – 2015*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 15 January – 16 April 2015

Curators: Iwona Blazwick OBE and Magnus Af Petersens

*The Architecture of Hope: Maggie's Cancer Caring Centre*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 26 February – 8 May 2011

Curator: Matthew Storey

*Bauhaus – Art as Life*, Barbican Art Gallery, London, 3 May – 12 August 2012

Curators: Catherine Ince and Lydia Yee

*British Ceramics Biennial*, various venues, Stoke-on-Trent, 30 September – 13 November 2011

Curators: Barney Hare-Duke and Jeremy Theophilus

*Chewy Cosmos Thingly Time*, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, 14 May – 10 July 2011

Curator: Andy Holden

*Tony Cragg: Sculptures and Drawings*, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, July 30 – November 6 2011

Curator: Patrick Elliott

*Creation II: An Insight into the Mind of the Modern Artist-Jeweller*, The Goldsmiths Company, London, 29 May – 11 July 2009

Curator: Mary LaTrobe-Bateman

*Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing*, Turner Contemporary, Margate, 24 May – 15 September 2013

Curator: Brian Dillon in association with Cabinet magazine

*Decode: Digital Design Sensations*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 8 December 2009 – 11 April 2010

Curators: onedotzero

*Design for the Real World*, Royal College of Art, London, 27 September – 3 October 2012

Curators: Rama Gheerawo and HHRC Research Associates

*Edmund de Waal*, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge 26 May – 22 July 2007

Curator: Edmund de Waal

*Fleece to Fibre, The Making of the Large Tree Group Tapestry*, Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh, 1 April 2014 – 14 February 2015

Curator: Ben Divall

*Grayson Perry: The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*, British Museum, London, 6 October 2011 – 26 February 2012

Curator: Grayson Perry

*Inscription, from Jerwood Encounters*, Jerwood Space, London, 13 January – 21 February 2010

Curators: Amanda Game/Anita Taylor

*In the Making*, Design Museum, London 22 January – 4 May 2014

Curators: Barber Osgerby

*Jerwood Contemporary Makers*, Jerwood Visual Arts, Jerwood Space, London 2008 – 2010 Curators: Various

*The Joy of Living*, Somerset House, London, 15 – 21 March 2011

Curator: Max Fraser

*Light Show*, Hayward Gallery, London, 30 January – 6 May 2013

Curator: Dr. Cliff Lauson

*Lost in Lace: Transparent Boundaries*, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham, 29 October 2011 – 19 February 2012

Curator: Lesley Millar

*Matter 1 – 5*, Dovecot Foundation, Edinburgh, 30 April – 5 September 2010

Curator: Adam Paxon

*Mixed Marriages*, Blackwell House, Cumbria, 13 May – 10 July 2011

Curator: Philip Eglin

*Giorgio Morandi, Lines of Poetry*, Estorick Collection, London 16 January – 7 April 2013

Curators: Roberta Cremoncini and Christopher Adams

*Olafur Eliasson, The Weather Project*, Unilever Turbine Hall Commission, Tate Modern, London: 16 October 2003 – 21 March 2004

Curator: Susan May

*OMA/Progress*, Barbican Art Gallery, London, 6 October 2011 – 19 February 2012

Curator/Designer: Rotor, Belgium

*Out of the Ordinary: Spectacular Craft*, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 13 November 2007 – 17 February 2008

Curator: Laurie Britton-Newell

*Katie Paterson*, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, 26 April – 23 June 2013

*Memory Palace*, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 18 June – 20 October 2013

Curators: Laurie Britton-Newell and Ligaya Salazar

*Patrick Caulfield, Tate Britain*, London, 5 June – 1 September 2013

Curator: Clarrie Wallis

*Power of Making*, Victoria & Albert Museum, London 6 September 2011 – 2 January 2012

Curator: Daniel Charny

*Quietus: the vessel, death and the human body*, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (mima), Middlesbrough, 13 July – 11 November 2012

Curator: James Beighton

*Richard Serra Sculpture*, Gagosian Gallery, London, 4 October – 20 December 2008 Curator: Kate Nesin

*ROTOR*, Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh, 12 – 16 July 2011

Curator: Siobhan Davies Studio

*Sea Change: Tiondadh na Mara*, Royal Botanical Garden, Edinburgh, 8 November 2013 – 26 January 2014

Curator: Ruth Little

*Sitting and Looking*, Dovecot Foundation, Edinburgh, 10 July – 5 September 2010

Curators: Jim Partridge and Liz Walmsley

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Birmingham Museums Trust, Birmingham, 17 October 2009 – 4  
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Curators: Andy Horn and Helen Carnac

*The House of Words*, Dr. Johnson's House, London, 2 June – 29  
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Curator: Tessa Peters

*The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China*, Fitzwilliam  
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Curator: James Lin

*Utensils: current approaches to tableware*, National Craft Gallery,  
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