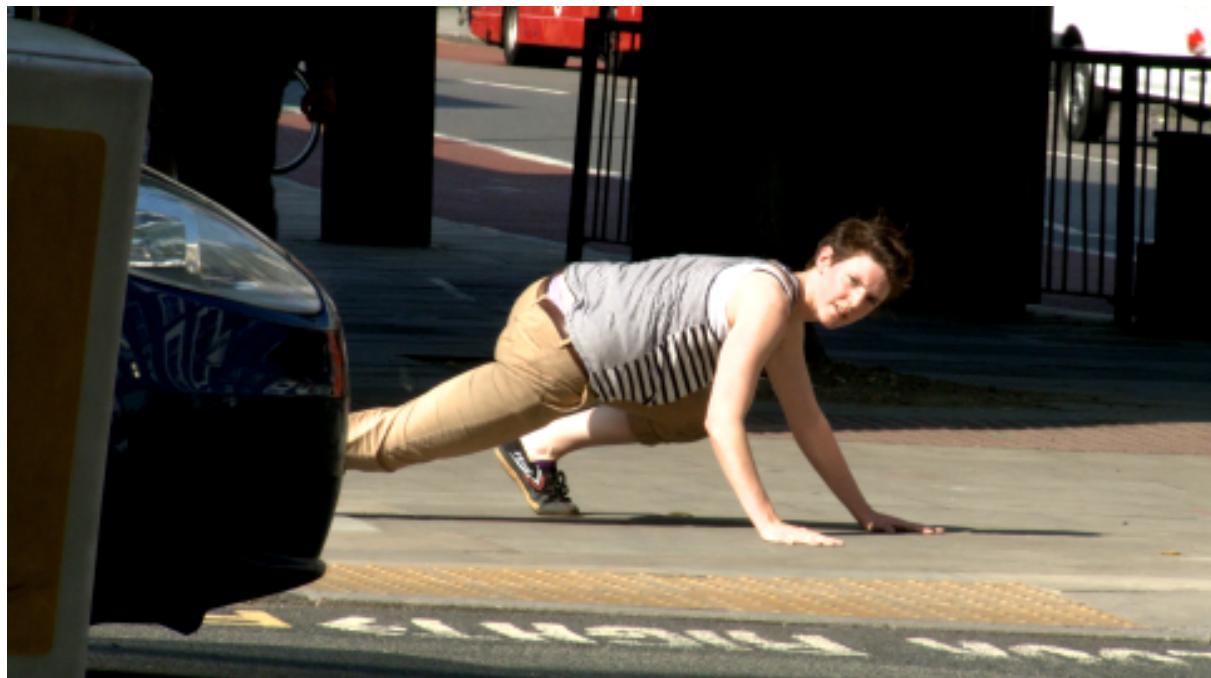


## Touch, containment and consolation in *This is For You*

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**Figure 1:** Genevieve Say performing in *This is For You*, 2013, England, ©Anna Macdonald. Film still.

### Abstract

This article brings together somatic, geographic and psychoanalytic discourse in order to explore the consoling effect of touch within a site-specific performance, made by the author called *This is For You*.<sup>1</sup> The particular quality of the touch in this work is identified, with reference to somatic practices such as Alexander technique and Contact Improvisation, as touching with empty hands. Drawing

on Amanda Bingley's assertion that touch experienced in one moment can connect us to foundational experiences of touch in another, this particular quality of touch is explored in terms of its resonance with the psychoanalytic concept of maternal containment. The article explores the role that the ability of touch to contain (what is touched) plays in its capacity to assuage feelings of loss prompted by the transience of the city in which the work took place. It concludes by pointing to the potential importance of the ability of touch to both hold and accentuate the indeterminacies of the body in its capacity to console.

## **Keywords**

psychoanalytic containment

Winnicott

touch

Alexander Technique

site-specific

contingency

## **1. Introduction**

In this writing I examine a quality of touch used within a site-specific performance called *This is For You* as a way of reflecting on the broad question of why touch, and certain types of touch in particular, work to console us. *This is For You*, which I made in 2013, involves an improvised exchange between

one dancer and one member of the public in a street in Archway, London. The section I focus on involves myself, as a dancer in the work, making contact with the architecture of the street using a type of touch that I refer to as touching with empty hands. The piece was performed over 60 times, which allowed me to witness recurring responses to these moments of touch in my body. Here, drawing on psychoanalytic, somatic and geographic discourse, I attempt to articulate and analyse these responses retrospectively, as part of a process of what Barbara Bolt might describe as ‘theorising out of practice’ (2006: 1). I do this in order to explore the relationship, in this particular moment, between touch and affect.

*This is For You* is a site-specific, one-to-one performance that involves one person, situated in the street, dancing for another person who watches them from a window, which might be in a nearby café, office block, gallery or shop, depending on the location. Passers by choose to watch or ignore their exchange. The event is pre-advertised and people sign up to see a 20-minute performance. The watchers arrive at their allotted time and a host takes them to their seat in the window. The dancer wears ordinary everyday clothes and is not distinguishable from other pedestrians until they start to dance. Each dance by each dancer is different, but all begin by touching parts of the street, effectively mapping the space for the watcher, before they start to dance. When each dancer feels they are coming to the end of their dance, they call the watcher and ask

them how they would like it to finish. The piece ends with the dancer improvising slowly down the street until lost from view. There is a space created where watchers can go after the event to have some refreshments and record their thoughts about the work.<sup>2</sup> Many watchers when writing about their experience afterwards, as the extract below indicates, noted that the work evoked feelings of immediacy and transience.

*The time flew and when my dancer faded away I had a profound sense of loss and I wept because I was moved. (Watcher 2013)*

The work was first performed in 2010 in the centre of Manchester and since then has been re-made in a variety of rural and urban settings. In 2013 it was commissioned by Islington Borough Council to be performed in Archway, London, as part of a two-year site-specific programme of art. In this instance the watcher was seated in a shop that had been converted into a gallery, looking out of the shop's large front windows onto the dancer outside. The work was developed and performed here by Genevieve Say, Rachel Rimmer, Orla Shine and myself, as lead artist. During a ten-day residency we worked publically in the street, rotating the roles of watcher, dancer, the watcher's host (who guides them through the work) and supporter (there in the street to help the dancer if they felt they needed it). Sometimes we would also be joined by a local member of the public who would sit outside the window and talk by phone with the

watcher. After each run, using a methodology that involved processes of witnessing and moving drawn from Authentic Movement, we would track our experiences for each other in order to develop and refine a performative score for the work. It is this performance in Archway that I reflect upon in this writing, as this is the richest and clearest manifestation of the work to date.

As a ‘rural outsider’, to use geographer Edward Relph’s term (1977), coming from a small mining village in Staffordshire as I did then, the sheer diversity and proliferation of people in Archway gave it, in my experience, an anarchic sense of contingency. It appeared, at times, as if anything could happen there, which made me feel vulnerable but also gave me a sense of permission to dance in this public space. I experienced continual moments of encounter and disappearance, as people passed by and designated watchers came and went. These encounters created a heightened feeling of transience for me, like that described by many watchers, which was at times delightful, unsettling and sad.

Working within, what geographer David Loy refers to as, the ‘accelerated sense of ephemerality’ of the city allowed me to explore the ability of dance to evoke or assuage feelings of transience in *This is For You*. This exploration formed part of my wider research concerning the role of dance in negotiating a sense of mortality and, in essence, took the form of working to intensify the contingent and mutable nature of the performance, while simultaneously exploring ways of

containing resulting feelings of uncertainty, for watcher and dancer.<sup>3</sup> For example, I looked at devices designed to invite contingency, such as asking the dancer to improvise in response to spatial and dynamic shifts in the street, and changes in the watchers' facial expression. The dancer also called the watcher in the window by phone to ask them what they might want to change in that moment. At the same time we explored holding structures designed to create a sense of stability and predictability such as employing a host that stayed with the viewer throughout the performance, creating a set order of events that the host told the watcher about before the performance started, having a clearly set out space for viewers to sit and creating a designated time for them to reflect on their experience. This research created situations, for example, where the dancer and the watcher might know the order of events but not what would happen in any particular instance of each event.

As we worked, the dancers and I focused on the overall effect of each device, reflecting on whether we felt held by it and thinking about the balance of contingency and structure it produced, informed by our intuitive and somatic responses. This process was informed by notions of holding drawn from Donald's foundational psychoanalytic work on maternal containment processes (Winnicott 1960). The first reason for this was that there were strong similarities between the choreographic holding devices we employed and those used within therapeutic practices that draw on the psychoanalytic idea that 'the outer

predictability of a setting, a set time and place can lead to an inner sense of being held in a safe place' (Winnicott 1971: 83). One of the ideas underpinning this being that, through resonating with early forms of parental holding, containment devices reduce the anxiety of contingency, the anxiety that the world may not exist to meet your needs. The second reason was that Winnicott's (1990) description of the early infant's state of primary un-integration, where there is no discernable pattern to experience, resonated strongly with my experience of the contingent city.

The research at that time focused primarily on the choreographic structures in the work.<sup>4</sup> In this retrospective reflection, however, I focus on the moments of touch *in This is For You*. This is partly because touch received less attention at the time of making the work and partly because the moments of touch in *This is For You* function, in essence, as a microcosm of the research project as a whole, as I will go on to argue.

Some of the clearest memories I have of dancing in the work concern the way touching the street seemed to assuage for me, what the author of 'Spatiality' Robert Tally describes as the 'spatial perplexity' of the city (2013: 1). Clearly, there are many complex psychophysical processes that inform what geographer Mark Paterson refers to as 'that profound yet indirect relationship between acts of physical touch and being emotionally "touched"' (Dodge et al. 2012: 13).

What I propose, however, is that these acts of touch can, like the choreographic structures we focused on at the time, also usefully be considered as containment processes. I write about them now, drawing on Amanda Bingley's (2012) and Linda Hartley's (2005) connections between touch and psychoanalytic containment, in order to explore the role that the ability of touch to contain (what is touched) played in its capacity to console me in *This is For You*.

I begin by attempting to articulate the particular quality of touch in *This is For You* that worked to console my anxiety of displacement. I reflect upon my experience of touch retrospectively here in relationship to somatic-based examinations of touch by writers such as Gabriele Brandstetter et al. (2013), Sondra Fraleigh (2004) and Deane Juhan (1987). I also draw on writing from the field of haptic geography (Dodge et al. 2012; Hetherington 2003) because, unlike the majority of the touch referred to within somatic discourse, the touch in *This is For You* involved contact with the materiality of the street rather than another person, providing an opportunity to consider the effect of touch outside the realm of interpersonal communication.

I focus on three key points of connection between my experience of touch in *This is For You* and Winnicott's psychoanalytic concept of maternal containment (1960) that I find particularly useful in trying to understand its consoling affect. The first concerns the way the touch in *This is For You* brought

attention to my skin as boundary, which I explore in light of Winnicott's ideas about the role of the mother as a physical, symbolic and emotional boundary for the infant. The second concerns Winnicott's description of the maternal space of containment, a safe space created for the infant where the mother's desires remain contained, and the spaces within my body and between my body and the city, generated by the particular quality of the touch in *This is For You*. The third concerns the listening quality of both touch and the mother as holder.

Bringing somatic, geographic and psychoanalytic discourse together allows me to explore touch in *This is For You* as an act that resonates with both spatial and psychological containment processes. The results of this discussion lead to some final observations pointing to the importance played by the capacity of touch in *This is For You* to both hold and accentuate the indeterminacies of the body, in its capacity to console.

## **2. Touching with hands that do not want anything: Contingency, anxiety and the city**

The heightened sense of ephemerality I felt when dancing in the street was not, of course, because the city was in a state of chaos but rather that its codes and patterns of behaviour, more available to those who lived locally, were less visible to me as a visitor, intensifying a feeling of being at the mercy of events.

Looking back I wonder now whether the acts of touch that I focus on here were an attempt to make some spatial order for myself, and potentially the watcher, as an antidote to the feeling of displacement that dancing in the city evoked. These moments of touch happened in a part of the work called ‘the mapping section’ and it came at the start after the viewer has been seated for several minutes looking out at the street through the gallery window.



**Figure 2:** Genevieve Say, *This is For You*, 2013, England, ©Anna Macdonald. Film still.

In this section the dancers traced parts of the street as a way of mapping the city and their place within it. It was intended as a sort of tactile introduction to the space for the watcher. This section of the work was improvised and involved the dancers leaning on, standing in contact with or using parts of their body to

physically delineate the architecture of the street. Once contact was made with the street, the dancers remained still for some moments, rather than moving to seek further information, as touch can be keen to do, in order to listen to what was touched.

It is important to note that these acts of touch were seen by the watcher remotely, often from across the street and always from behind a pane of glass. The potential for remote touch to affect us is fascinating, and when I watched this section, the touch produced quiet moments amidst the busy street, the repeated moments of stillness contrasting the constant movement of the people and traffic (Hertenstein 2006). However, it is the emotional effect of direct touch that I am interested in here (a discussion of both is unfortunately beyond the scope of this writing) and my analysis focuses on my recall of my individual haptic experiences in the work for, as I have mentioned, this was not a focus of our group discussions at the time.

By touch, I refer here not just to cutaneous touch but ‘a range of internally felt body states’ (Paterson 2009: 769) produced by simultaneous internal and externally orientated processes of perception. In the mapping section we encouraged the receptors in our skins to register the surfaces, temperatures and shapes of the street as we engaged with our sense of balance, muscular tension, sense of pressure, movement and spatial position. It was a hot July day and the

pavement and surfaces of the street were warm and dusty. When I was dancing I was conscious of my physical appreciation of the warmth of the street, the sense of its different material qualities and the kinaesthetic pleasure of pushing against it. While wanting to resist simplistically positioning ‘the connection between emotion and touch [...] as a sequence of cause and effect’ (Brandstetter 2013: 10), I was aware, when performing this ‘mapping’, that I would often feel a shift from anxiety to calm in my body as if consoled by my contact with the street. This touch seemed to make me feel safer.

‘Hugging the walls’ is a phenomenon I have encountered during many site-based improvisations (and childhood discos) and is something I have often had an urge to do myself as a response to feelings of vulnerability when dancing outside. However, many of these instances of touch in the mapping section were in open spaces, perhaps only involving contact through fingers or part of the arm, and thus their comfort cannot be explained wholly by contact as a form of concealment or an antidote to exposure. The touch in the mapping section also involved responding to the different materials of the street with quite different types of pressure, duration or parts of the body. A common quality of this touch, however, which I explore here as a significant factor in its emotional effect, I describe as touching with empty hands, or as dance improviser Kirsty Simpson once put it, ‘hands that don’t want anything’.<sup>5</sup> Terms such as these are often used in Contact Improvisation and Alexander Technique, both part of my dance

practice, where participants are encouraged to touch each other without imposing their own desires on what is touched. These practices also have very different relationships to contact and weight, but in both, touch is used to listen to what is touched, both in the one's own body and the one that is touched, without trying to alter what is found. This type of touch is predominantly used as Gabriele Brandstetter notes 'for purposes of sensitization' (2013: 11) often simultaneously to environment, other and self. It is this quality that, I suggest, makes it resonate particularly with that of maternal touch, as I now go on to discuss.

### **3. Touch and maternal containment**

The type of heightened sensing touch used in *This is For You* encourages what Paterson refers to as the 'tactile-spatial imaginary' (2009: 782) and I was aware of experiencing strong associative responses as I performed them. For example, touching the street with empty hands reminded me of the way my children touch me, their hands left on my knee while they are watching TV, connecting us without asking anything more than connection. There was also something about this quality of touch that reminded me of touching my own mother as she was dying. It resembled, what Alphonso Lingis describes as '[t]he touch of consolation [...] where nothing is offered and nothing is promised' (1994: 178–79).

There are types of touch that are associated with particular relationships such as the touch of a partner or a friend, for example. The two associations I cite above, however, are both connected to the maternal and it is this touch I am drawn to when trying to articulate the nature and affect of the touch in *This is For You*.

Sondra Fraleigh writes that touch is ‘associated with material and thus the maternal materia’ (2004: 127) and touch is the first sense to develop in the womb. It is, therefore, not perhaps a surprise that a type of touch that consoles might have particular resonance with the maternal, but what do we mean by maternal touch and in what way can it console us? Psychotherapist Adam Phillips writes that ‘[b]y literally gathering her baby in her arms [...] the mother allows him to feel something (Phillips in Metcalfe and Ferguson 2001: 251). Here we see maternal touch characterized, as it commonly is, as one of embodied holding, a haptic process that facilitates physical sensation and emotional feeling in the infant.

The act of holding is rich with connotations of touch for to hold something means being in touch, emotionally or physically, with what is held. While acknowledging the breadth of theory concerning the intertwined relationship between maternal touch and emotional affect,<sup>6</sup> my focus here is on the act of maternal holding as articulated within psychoanalytic theory. The term ‘holding’ in this context is used in both literal and metaphorical senses, drawing on

Winnicott's (1965) proposition that physical, symbolic and psychological aspects processes are inextricably linked within early maternal holding patterns. I now go on to identify three interconnected aspects of this maternal containment process that I find particularly relevant to the acts of touch in *This is For You*, which are, namely, boundaries, responsivity and space.

In early infant development Winnicott describes the way the mother generates what he calls a holding environment for the infant. Here the mother's physical and psychological actions allow all the needs of the infant to be met in a way that creates a safe space, in which the infant can remain whilst a continuous sense of self begins to form. These early holding processes offset contingency, the intrusion of a world not responding to their needs, by creating a brief period of time and space where all the desires of the infant are met due to the particular sensitivity and responsivity of the mother. This holding then lays the ground for the formation of a coherent ego (a permanent sense of self) that is strong enough to withstand experiencing variations in this environment. As Wendy Wyman-McGinty writes,

Early experiences of congruence between infant and mother reinforce a sense of an intact psychic skin, which can hold together through disruptions in attunement. Winnicott (1945) referred to this state of intactness as 'a continuity of being'. (2007: 157)

A further part of the maternal containment process required for the development of a coherent ego is that within this safe holding space, as Sabar Rustomjee writes, individuals can link, ‘raw unprocessed precursors of thoughts [...] in a meaningful way’ (2007: 524). This linkage is formed in part through the process of engaging with the boundary created by the container – the boundary in this sense, to return to Winnicott, being the mother who is strong enough to contain difficult projected parts of the infant’s experience. This act of containment, this act of not being overwhelmed by the infant’s needs, allows for the transformation and therefore release and reintegration, of the infant’s anxieties. Richard Parry explores the connection between containment and feeling when he writes that ‘if [...] fears are not accepted and given meaning by the mother then the fear becomes nameless and much more scary’ (2010: 10). In the process of holding, the mother provides a way for the infant to transcend contingency, allowing them to feel less overwhelmed by their sensations.

In an article looking at the role of touch in art therapy, Amanda Bingley writes that touch is a ‘primal and essential sensory mechanism’ that allows us to re-access primary maternal acts of containment, at other times in our lives, and therefore, the ‘earliest elements of the foundation of self’ (2012: 72). Here Bingley argues that the touch experienced in one moment can connect us to foundational experiences of touch in another, and it is this premise that guides

my exploration of the consoling affect of touch in *This is For You*. In the next section I analyse my memory of the acts of touch in detail, exploring their resonance with maternal containment, focusing on boundaries, space and responsivity.

#### **4. Touch, boundaries and holding spaces**

When touching with empty hands, during the process of mapping, I focused on placing one surface upon another, bringing attention to the surface of my skin and the surfaces of the street. I was aware of my attention being drawn to my skin in these moments, as a boundary between subject and object. On a primal level, this awareness of my skin in relation to the city, perhaps allowed me to become more conscious of being a bounded being, for each touch marked where my body stopped and the city began. As such, this touch reminded of my own presence, physicality and mortality. There was profound comfort in this for, as geographer Kevin Hetherington writes, [c]entral to the experience of touch is the idea of confirmation. We touch something to confirm it: that it is there, that it feels like this, that we are here to experience it (2003: 1941). Perhaps this is why when we feel lost, or our thoughts unravel, we touch our foreheads and rub our hands, bringing attention back to the clarity of this fundamental inside/outside form, back to the skin as a primal signifier of our existence.<sup>7</sup>

Being conscious of the boundary of the skin made me feel held and it made me feel calmer. One reason for this could be that I sensed that I did not need to hold myself, ‘up or together’ (Walker 2014 unpaginated), as Alexander practitioner Lucille Walker puts it, because I was already safely contained in my own boundary. An awareness of my skin as boundary also generated an awareness of the space within my body. These two connected somatic experiences resonate for me now, looking back, with the boundaried maternal holding space allowing the infant ‘to be un-integrated yet safe’ (Metcalfe and Fergusson 2001: 252). In short, although at times I felt overwhelmed by the speed and complexity of the city, this touch seemed to remind me that I was not about to fall apart, that I had been held and that I was held in that moment. As Linda Hartley writes, ‘touch to the skin is [...] crucial to the development of self-coherence, the sense of being a unified and boundaried whole’ (Hartley 2005 unpaginated).

At times, perhaps as an unconscious response to the transient city, I shifted from this cutaneous touch to mapping the street in terms of its ability to take my weight or force. Here I pushed against, leaned into and pulled back from objects and surfaces testing my strength as my touch went through the skin to focus on the sensation of muscular effort and bone. I tried to continue to listen through this touch, enjoying the reassuring biofeedback from the complex sensory systems in the body. Testing the physical boundaries of the street in this way felt reassuring for the physical feedback seemed to affirm my solidity. It signalled to

me that I was present and so was a world that could be relied upon. Looking back I see an image of me pushing against the street as if it was a maternal boundary strong enough to withstand my force. I would often look at the watcher at these points as if to say ‘this is the floor and see how it holds me up’, wanting to show them how solid the world was that they were looking out on.

## 5. Touch, separation and listening



**Figure 3:** Rachel Rimmer, *This is For You*, 2013, England, ©Anna Macdonald. Film still.

To contain something, you must both have contact with it and remain separate from it for, as John Berger writes, ‘[to] touch something is to situate oneself in relation to it’ (Berger in Norman 2010: 13). Touch created a point of contact

between myself and the street and I can remember feeling comforted by this. It made me feel as if I was dancing with, rather than in, the city and I became more confident of my place within it, my touch feeling like a tactile version of ‘you are here’ written on a map. However, touching the street also created a sense of separation both within my body, and between my body and the street. For example, when I pushed against the street I sometimes focused on allowing this force to travel through the skin and muscle, straight to my bones so structure could meet structure. Here I can recall touch generating a sense of space, within my own body as I became aware of the distance between the lengths of my bones and the connections between them.

The acts of touch in *This is For You* also created spaces between my body and the street, between my hands and the streetlamp or my feet and the bench, for example. When I watched this happening in other dances, see Figure 3, I saw small areas of calm created amidst the flow of people passing. As psychotherapist Neville Symmington notes, ‘[s]omething embraced becomes entirely different in quality’ (2006: 35), and when I was dancing I was aware in these moments of my touch transforming what was enclosed. Like Winnicott’s maternal holding space, the space between my body and the street, and within my body itself, felt like it operated in these moments, not as absence but as a supportive, holding presence.

The spatial distance created by touch, described above, is echoed in the psychological distance created by trying to touch with empty hands. For this touch can be seen as a way of remaining separate from that which is touched, in that it aims to resist imposing desire in order to listen more fully. This touch resonates with the idea of ‘Not doing’ (not trying to physically correct or solve what is perceived) that is so central to Alexander Technique. It also connects with what Fraleigh describes as ‘touching the world lightly’ (2004: 202), a touch that she characterizes as being central to somatic practice. What I suggest here is that this quality of touch creates a space that is responsive to contingency just as maternal touch, within the act of holding, responds to and contains the fluctuating needs of the forming infant.

I can remember wanting the watcher to see the street through my experience of it, as reflected in my touch. Writing now, I find echoes between this desire and the mother as holder who, acting as witness to the infant, allows them to see themselves back as reflected in her gaze.<sup>8</sup> This tactile listening process also brought something of myself back to me, the ‘proximal construction of touch’ (Hetherington 2003: 1936) allowing hand and railing or foot and curb to be linked together, allowing for comparison and the creation of perspective. Touch brought my body and the street together and my skin against the concrete felt softer and more vulnerable and the concrete against my skin more porous and crumbling.

I was aware that although I attempted to listen to the street with empty hands, I did not always achieve this for my touch was often led by many interrelated drives of curiosity, anxiety and self-protection. As Deane Juhan points out, the skin is not an open barrier it is ‘exquisitely selective’ (1987: 23), and therefore perhaps this utopian quality of touch within much somatic practice, where people interact ‘free of power and violence, desire and emotion’ (Brandstetter 2013: 10) is difficult to achieve. How can one ever touch without desire – surely touch *is* desire? Looking back now, I wonder whether in trying to touch with hands that do not want everything in *This is For You*, the aim was not to negate desire but rather to maintain it through engaging with and listening to, rather than ‘mastering’, what was touched. Thus the touch in *This is For You* could, potentially, be described just as appropriately as ‘hands that want everything’ or ‘hands that are full’ but in the sense of mapping rather than fixing or experiencing rather than explaining: A maternal touch to hold the transience of the city.

## **6. The consolation of touch**



**Figure 4:** Genevieve Say in *This is For You*, 2013. Film still.

I have suggested in this writing that dancing in the street in *This is For You* accentuated a sense of transience in me, a sense of my own mortality. I then went on to argue that the moments of touch in the work worked to console this sense of contingency by reminding me of my own coherent presence in the world, bringing attention to my skin as boundary, the space within me and the connection between my body and the city. The discussion made connections between maternal acts of holding and the acts of touch in *This is For You* as a way of exploring the potential for touch to console by reconnecting us to foundational patterns of holding.

My reflection on the acts of touch in *This is For You* point to the potential significance to be found in the similarity of the words ‘consolation’ and ‘consolidation’. For it was the way that touch worked to bring elements together in this work, both in terms of the contact between myself and the materials of the street and the sense of myself as a contained whole, which were significant in creating feelings of comfort and reassurance. Arguably touch also enabled a form of temporal consolidation for, as I have suggested, touching the street worked to affirm my immediate presence alongside earlier, embodied patterns of holding. I end by pointing to the potential importance this temporal bringing together played in terms of the emotional affect of touch in *This is For You*.

Bingley writes that touch is a way of continually ‘re-visiting/(re) connecting with embodied elements of the primary relationship [in order] to maintain the continuity of self’ (2012: 78). She argues that these foundations of self need to be continuously re-visited, however, because, as she goes on to write,

[as] fast as we create and re-create a ‘trope’ of experience [...] that emphasise the continuity of a sense of self as a stable immutable and authentic identity, that moment will be gone. (Bingley 2012: 77)

The touch in *This is For You* only ever created a temporary sense of consolation, drawing attention to my immanent absence just as it confirmed my presence.

This is unavoidable for touch must remain ‘mired in the local’ (Dodge et al, 2012: 10), demanding that one is in spatial and temporal contact with, rather than transcending, what is touched. The city was only ephemerally marked with the lines of my body. The semi-permeable boundary of my skin creating tidal marks that re-emerged with each performance and then slipped away.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, touching the city consoled me because it recognized my mortality.

Alongside generating a sense of immediate presence, however, another part of the consoling affect of touch was, perhaps, that it offered me a sense of permanence, something I could hold on to. As Paterson writes, touch is able to combine a sense of immanence with ‘historically sedimented bodily dispositions and patterns of haptic experience’ (2009: 779) and I can recall being aware of touching railings made smooth by the countless other, now absent, hands, and pavements worn down by other people’s steps. The touch in *This is For You* also reminded me of other times where I had felt held. It resonated, perhaps, with deeper processes of psychoanalytic containment where the experiences of holding environments in early infanthood enabled me to tolerate things that were beyond my control.

In summary, I suggest that part of the reason that touch consoled me in *This is For You* is because it offered me the comfort of immediate presence alongside the evocation of permanently embodied patterns of holding. Looking back,

although I was not conscious of it at the time, touching with empty hands encapsulated something at the heart of the original research project for it offered me an embodied way of incorporating contingency, of negotiating mortality. It connected me to early experiences of maternal touch, which comforted me by indicating that I was both, entire in myself and, in that moment, not alone. If we are lucky we are contained enough to embody this feeling and take it with us through time, after the actual touch has gone, and I was glad that some people wrote to me some time after the event to say that something of *This is For You* had stayed with them.

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## **Contributor details**

Anna Macdonald ([annamacdonaldart.co.uk](http://annamacdonaldart.co.uk)) is a dance/moving image artist and scholar from the United Kingdom, who specializes in working directly with the public. Influenced by Mark Johnson's (2008) notion of bodily 'schema,' she is interested in using dance to expose the emotional and conceptual resonance of simple actions such as, moving from 'here to there', 'unfolding' or 'getting slower'. Anna's work has been shown at galleries and festivals such as Festival Ciné-Corps, Paris, Athens Video dance project, Agite y Sirva, Mexico, Home, Manchester, Art Currents, New York, Somerset House, London, Lightmoves, Ireland, DascamDans, Belgium, Miden Festival, Greece, VideodanzaBA, Argentina and was nominated for the International Video Dance awards in Barcelona. Her work was selected as a flagship project for AHRC-funded research into socially engaged art and she has published several articles about the body, time and film.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *A Million Minutes* was a two-year programme of commissioned public artworks in Archway and Finsbury Park in North London. The project was initiated by Islington Council, and produced by AIR, a Central Saint Martins research studio (link removed for anonymity).

<sup>2</sup> The majority of watchers took up this opportunity and wrote quite extensively about their experience.

<sup>3</sup> Ph.D. by publication entitled 'What I rely on: Dance, contingency and containment' due for completion 2017.

<sup>4</sup> See Macdonald (2014) for a discussion of these devices.

<sup>5</sup> Kirsty Simpson: 'Improvisation intensive', Wales, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> See Bracha Ettinger's Matrixial model of subjectivity (1996).

<sup>7</sup> As Juhani writes, '[e]very unit of living protoplasm- be it plant or animal, single cell or complex aggregate [...] cannot really be called "life" until it has established some means of self-containment' (1987: 21).

<sup>8</sup> Parry (2010) notes that this process is not always one of simple mirroring but often involves a processing of what is seen.

<sup>9</sup> See Green's (2009) unpublished paper entitled 'Lines, traces and tidemarks'.