



## Mirror-touch: Synaesthesia and the Social

Friday 7 February 2014, 18:30 – 20:40  
 Saturday 8 February 2014, 10:30 – 18:30  
 Level 1 Starr Auditorium, Tate Modern

People with mirror-touch synaesthesia feel a physical sense of touch on their own bodies when they witness touch to other people and often to objects. This symposium investigates how mirror-touch can model an empathic way of engaging with artworks. Speakers from neuroscience, art practice and theory, anthropology, and film studies discuss this fascinating condition, challenging the notion that merely looking is passive and celebrating the political agency of perception.

[www.mirror-touch.co.uk](http://www.mirror-touch.co.uk)

*Initiated by artist Daria Martin. The symposium is developed in partnership with the Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford and supported by the Leverhulme Trust.*

Friday 7 February 2014

### Introducing Mirror-Touch: Synaesthesia and Spectatorship

This evening explores the resonances and divergences between artistic and scientific approaches to synaesthesia. Expanding from synaesthesia's neuroscientific definition to its use as a generative metaphor in historical and contemporary artistic and curatorial practice, speakers discuss what it means to 'feel into' and 'feel with' works of art. Is synaesthetic experience limited to those with a measurable neurological trait, or can such sensorial perception be available to all of us in looking at artworks?

- 18:20 On arrival: Screening neuroscientist Jamie Ward's test videos for mirror-touch synaesthesia
- 18:30 Welcome: **Sandra Sykorova**
- 18:40 **Daria Martin** *Feeling In*  
 A brief discussion on the background research to this symposium, including its investment in empathy, and its historical roots in the concept of 'einfühlung' or 'in-feeling', a form of empathy with the arts.
- 18:50 **Jamie Ward** *Kaleidoscopic Sensations and Shared Experience: Synaesthesia, Science and the Arts*  
 Ward presents a broad overview of contemporary knowledge of synaesthesia (e.g. colour in response to music) primarily from a scientific perspective and introduces, in particular, the idea of mirror-touch (feeling touch when seeing touch on another person) as a relatively new form of synaesthesia. In addition, he will discuss how the concept of synaesthesia influences and resonates with the arts and social sciences.

- 19:15 Keynote Lecture: **Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev** *Sine/syn/aesthesia. Without the Enfolding of Aesthesis: A Symbiotic View of Art as Experience*  
This lecture argues that the default position of perception is always synaesthetic and that artistic (and curatorial) practice has often expressed and created conditions for embodied spectatorship able to bring the audience and viewers to such an awareness. Subordinately, it argues that scientific notions of the rarity of synaesthetic sensorial-perceptive phenomena, are always based on an underlying bias and a-priori belief that normative separation and classification of the senses into visual, tactile, olfactory, acoustic or gustatory even remotely represents common experience.
- 19:55 Panel discussion and Q&A chaired by **Laura U. Marks**
- 20:40 End

Saturday 8 February 2014

- 10:20 On arrival: Screening neuroscientist Jamie Ward's test videos for mirror-touch synaesthesia
- 10:30 Welcome: **Sandra Sykorova**
- 10:35 Introduction: **Elinor Cleghorn**

### **Section 1**

#### **Mirror-Touch Synaesthesia: Experience and the Arts**

This section deepens the introduction to mirror-touch and the symposium's interdisciplinary questions. Speakers discuss the neuroscientific discovery and understanding of mirror-touch, explore the lived perceptual and social experiences of the synaesthete, and consider the ways in which synaesthesia inspires artistic expression, conceptual investigation, and communication beyond its form as a neurological trait.

- 10:45 **Screening: *Sensorium Tests* (Daria Martin, 2012) 10 mins.**  
*Credits for Daria Martin's Sensorium Tests (16mm film, 20 minutes, 2012, courtesy the artist and Maureen Paley, London). Cast: Anamaria Marinca, Valeria Napoleone, Mark Barker, Flo Brooks, Susanne Burner, James Wannerton; Crew: Director of Photography- Suzie Lavelle, Editor- Guy Ducker, Sound Editor- Franziska Treutler, Composer- Zeena Parkins, Producer- Marcus Werner Hed of Pundersons Gardens, Thanks to the synaesthetes whose texts formed the film script, and to The Wellcome Trust and Arts Council, England.*
- 10:55 **Michael Banissy** *Experiencing Touch Through Observation: Mirror-touch (synaesthesia)*  
Banissy discusses work examining the perceptual characteristics and neural mechanisms that give rise to mirror-touch. The talk includes a discussion of neuroimaging and psychophysical studies examining how interpersonal representations differ between mirror-touch synaesthetes and non-synaesthetes, and what impact these differences can have on broader social abilities.
- 11:20 **Daria Martin** *Mirrors and Models*  
Martin explores various models for empathic seeing, including mirror-touch itself, and its manifestation in her recent film 'Sensorium Tests'. VS

Ramachandran's mirror box, used as therapy for phantom limb pain, will provide another, lateral, metaphor for liberation through images. Through these examples, and others, she will complicate the notion of empathy as a panacea, introducing elements of doubt, projection and imagination.

11:45 **Fiona Torrance and James Wannerton** *A Conversation Between Friends: On Life as a Mirror-Touch Synaesthete*  
An opportunity to eavesdrop on a candid discussion between Fiona Torrance who has mirror-touch and her fellow synaesthete James Wannerton. How does mirror-touch affect Fiona's perceptions of artworks, objects and the social world? Discover some of the highs and lows of living with mirror-touch 24/7.

12:10 Panel discussion and Q&A chaired by **Elinor Cleghorn**

12:45 Lunch break

13:50 Welcome back and introduction to afternoon session: **Elinor Cleghorn**

## **Section 2**

### **Mirror-Touch Perception: Empathy with and Beyond the Figurative**

This section explores mirror-touch as a model for embodied and absorptive visual engagements with images, objects, abstract forms, and with 'others'. How does the gaze of the mirror-touch synaesthete 'feel into' the appearance of another? What happens when mirror-touch blurs the boundaries between the perceiving human subject and the non-figurative? And how might mirror-touch perception bring us into contact with the social and material life of inanimate things?

14:00 **Screening: *Spheres* (Norman McLaren and René Jodoin, 1969) 7mins 21secs**

14:10 **Joel Salinas** *Blurring the Homunculus in Empathy and Art*  
Your brain has a complete map of your body known as 'the homunculus'. In mirror-touch, this body map is hyperactive and can lead to a breakdown of the perceived boundary between 'self' and 'other'. How does this translate onto objects? What about the boundary between the self and artwork? Salinas explores these questions from his dual perspective as a neurologist and also a mirror-touch synaesthete.

14:35 **Patricia Pisters** *Seeing is Feeling? On Visualisation, Pathos and Distance in Aesthetic Synaesthesia*  
In *The Mind of a Mnemonist* Alexander Luria describes the case of synaesthetic patient S. who was unable to forget, inspiring filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein's theories about synaesthesia in art. Luria, Eisenstein and cultural psychologist Lev Vygotsky collaborated in an intellectual and artistic project at the intersection between neuroscience, cinema, art theory and social sciences. Pisters discusses what Eisenstein called 'the magic' and 'the pathos' of art, as well as empathy and the role of visualisation, by relating to accounts of mirror-touch.

15:00 **Laura U. Marks** *I Feel Like an Abstract Line*  
Non-synaesthetes can cultivate embodied and empathic responses to inorganic forms, such as the 'abstract line,' a non-figurative line with its own feeling qualities. Feeling like an abstract line allows us to experience

what we have in common with nonorganic life. With examples from Islamic art, abstract painting, animation, and analogue video synthesis.

- 15:25 Panel discussion and Q&A chaired by **Christopher Pinney**
- 16:00 Tea break (Refreshments served in the Starr Auditorium Foyer)
- 16:30 Welcome back and introduction to final session: **Elinor Cleghorn**

### **Section 3**

#### **Mirror-touch Participation: Layered Interactions**

This section explores mirror-touch as a model for re-visioning notions of participatory spectatorship. Through examples drawn from ethnographic participant observation, and psychedelic manifestations of synaesthetic experience, speakers address the ways that mirror-touch affirms a layered, sensuous encounter with the (non-Western or even non-human) 'other'. How might mirror-touch propose a socially catalysing engagement, even an empathy, with the past and future life of images?

- 16:35 **Screening: *Some End of Things: The Conception of Youth* (Judith Hopf, 2011) 3 mins**
- 16:45 **Lars Bang Larsen** *Vibing*  
This talk attempts to explore a more abstract synaesthetic phenomenon, namely the relationship between sound and time in the counter-cultural notion of 'the vibe'. More than simply a slang term for underground togetherness, Larsen argues that there is a post-human vitalism at stake in the imperceptibility of 'good vibrations'.
- 17:10 **Massimiliano Mollona** *Expanded Encounters: Ethnographic Fieldwork Between Art and Synaesthesia*  
Ethnographic fieldwork is described as a form of cinematic mirroring and synaesthetic blurring between touch and vision, self and other, which resemble the artistic practices of the surrealists and of Brazilian artist Helio Oiticica. Mollona discusses how such blurring of images and reality affected his recent ethnographic fieldwork in the Brazilian steel-town of Volta Redonda, the biggest steel complex of Latin America. Showing different images from the archives of the local steel company Mollona discusses how they impacted his fieldwork, addressing the issue of synaesthesia and temporal displacement, especially the blurring between memory and history.
- 17:35 Panel discussion and Q&A chaired by **Brian Dillon**
- 18:15 Closing remarks: **Daria Martin**
- 19:30 Film Screening: ***Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*** (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 113mins)

This film screening is free to all *Mirror-touch: Synaesthesia and the Social* event ticket holders.

## Speakers:

**Dr. Michael Banissy** is a Social Neuroscientist working at Goldsmiths (University of London) supported by an Economic and Social Research Council Future Research Leaders Award. He has published widely on mirror-touch synaesthesia and mechanisms of social perception, and is considered a leading authority in these areas.

**Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev** is a curator and researcher into artistic practices and the politics of aesthetics. She was Artistic Director of *dOCUMENTA* (13) (2012). Her books include *William Kentridge* (1998), *Arte Povera* (1999), and the *dOCUMENTA (13) 100 Notes – 100 Thoughts series* (2011–12). She is currently Visiting Professor in Art Theory and Practice at Northwestern University (2013-2015) and Leverhulme Professor at the University of Leeds (2014).

**Elinor Cleghorn** is Network Facilitator for 'Mirror-Touch: Empathy, Spectatorship, and Synaesthesia', a research project based at the Ruskin School of Fine Art, University of Oxford. Cleghorn received her BA and MA in the History of Art at Goldsmiths College, and her PhD from the London Consortium, Birkbeck College. She is a regular visiting lecturer at the University of Brighton and Central St. Martins, and in 2011 programmed a season of events and screenings at the British Film Institute commemorating the 50-year anniversary of the death of avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren.

**Brian Dillon** is the UK editor of *Cabinet* magazine. His writing appears regularly in publications such as *frieze*, *Artforum*, and *The London Review of Books*, and he is the author of several books including *Tormented Hope: Nine Hypochondriac Lives* (Penguin, 2009). Dillon is the curator of *Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing*, which opened at Turner Contemporary, Margate, in 2013 and is currently touring the UK, and *Ruin Lust*, opening at Tate Britain in March 2014.

**Lars Bang Larsen** is an art historian at the University of Copenhagen where he also wrote his PhD, *A History of Irritated Material*, on the subject of psychedelia and the neo-avantgardes. He has curated exhibitions such as *Reflections from Damaged Life* (Raven Row, 2013).

**Laura U. Marks** is a scholar, theorist, and curator of independent and experimental media arts. Her most recent book is *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art* (MIT Press, 2010). She teaches in the School for the Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada.

**Daria Martin** is an artist who has researched mirror-touch synaesthesia for several years and made it the centre of her 2012 film *Sensorium Tests*. Martin's 16mm films aim to create a continuity or parity between disparate artistic media (such as painting and performance), between people and objects, and between internal and social worlds. Martin is currently Graduate Studio Research Leader at the Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford. Her films have been exhibited in solo shows across the world including at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Kunsthalle Zürich and Tate Britain.

**Massimiliano Mollona** is a visual anthropologist, writer, and filmmaker. He is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at Goldsmiths College, London, and has carried out extensive fieldwork on the steel industry in Europe, and in Brazil where he is involved in several film projects. He is the author of *Made in Sheffield: An*

*Ethnography of Industrial Work and Practice* (Berghahn, 2009). His publications bring together economics, political anthropology, and art and film theory.

**Christopher Pinney** is Professor of Anthropology and Visual Culture at University College London. He has published several ethnographies of image use in central India which explore the relationship of mutual embodiment between devotee and deity. His most recent book is *Artisan Camera* (Tara Books, Chennai, 2013).

**Patricia Pisters** is Professor of film studies at the department of Media Studies of the University of Amsterdam. She is one of the founding editors of *Necrus: European Journal of Media Studies*, programme director of the research group Neuraesthetics and Neurocultures and co-director (with Josef Fruchtl) of the research group Film and Philosophy at ASCA (Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis). Publications include *The Matrix of Visual Culture: Working with Deleuze in Film Theory* (Stanford University Press, 2003) and *Mind the Screen* (ed. with Jaap Kooijman and Wanda Strauven, Amsterdam University Press, 2008). Her latest book is *The Neuro-Image: A Deleuzian Film-Philosophy of Digital Screen Culture* (Stanford University Press, 2012).

**Dr. Joel Salinas** is a physician and senior resident in neurology at Harvard Medical School with a focus in cognitive neurology. In addition to his active work in prevention of neurologic disease and cognitive remediation, he has helped provide special insights into the study of synesthesia through his own experiences with this unique neurologic trait.

**Sandra Sykorova** is Curator of Public Programmes at Tate Modern.

**Fiona Torrance** is a multiple synaesthete, predominantly with mirror-touch synaesthesia. She works part time for Liverpool Advocacy doing data and finance and as a Technology Trainer for people with learning difficulties. She also has her own Home Pet Groomer business, grooming cats, rabbits and dogs in Liverpool. Fiona is currently completing the final stages of a PhD degree in Humanities and Social Science, researching how people with sensory and learning difficulties influence technology for work.

**James Wannerton** is the President of the UK Synaesthesia Association. He is actively involved in raising awareness of synaesthesia and in encouraging other synaesthetes to open up about their unique and fascinating experiences. A taste synaesthete himself, he was one of the first in the UK to have his experiences studied, documented and published. He has been continually and closely involved with synaesthesia research for the past 13 years. James has also collaborated on written and filmed items for the Wellcome Trust and the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

**Jamie Ward** is Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience at the University of Sussex. He is currently the most prolific researcher of synaesthesia in the world with over 40 empirical publications on this topic. His research in the area includes its neural basis and development, the effects it has on cognition, and its relationship to typical modes of perceiving.

If you would like to take part in more scientific research for mirror-touch synaesthesia, please visit this website where you can respond to Jamie Ward's test videos: <https://www.survey.bris.ac.uk/sussex/mts>



**EVALUATION**

**EVENT: Mirror-touch: Synaesthesia and the Social**

**DATE: Friday 7 February 2014 18:30 – 20:40**

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We look forward to your impressions and comments, which will help us improve our work.

1- Have you been to Tate Modern before?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No					
2 - Have you attended an event/course at Tate Modern before?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No					
3 - Are you a Tate Member?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No					
<b>4 - How did you find out about this event/course?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Tate guide <input type="checkbox"/> Tate e-bulletin <input type="checkbox"/> Social Media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) <input type="checkbox"/> Tate website <input type="checkbox"/> Word of mouth <input type="checkbox"/> Other – please tell us _____						
<b>5 - Information about this event, in the guide or on the website, was clear and adequate.</b>  <b>5a – If you disagreed, how do you feel this information could have been made clearer?</b>	<b>Agree</b> <b>Disagree</b> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 20px;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20%;"></td> </tr> </table>					

6 - I had an enjoyable learning experience.	<b>Agree</b> <b>Disagree</b> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 20px;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20%;"></td> </tr> </table>					
7 - I felt engaged with the event.	<b>Agree</b> <b>Disagree</b> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 20px;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20%;"></td> </tr> </table>					
8 - The event was good value.	<b>Agree</b> <b>Disagree</b> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 20px;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20%;"></td> </tr> </table>					
9 - How would you rate the overall quality of the event?	<b>Excellent</b> <b>Poor</b> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 20px;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20%;"></td> </tr> </table>					

10 – Based on your areas of interest, what events would you like to see at Tate Modern in the future?

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**11 - Any other comments?**

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[joseph.kendra@tate.org.uk](mailto:joseph.kendra@tate.org.uk)

*Thank you,*

*Public Programmes, Tate Modern*