



YOUR TOUCH

screenplay

by

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PROJECT NOTES



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"Falling in love is like two children holding hands
in the dark."

Robert Louis Stevenson

first love in a dark and dangerous world

HYSTERICAL

BLINDNESS

One of my earliest memories is of my father reading me *Treasure Island*, and of Blind Pugh tap-tapping his way down the alley. Later I was enthralled by Orson Welles on the radio reading H.G. Wells's *Valley of the Blind*, and then I saw the movie of *Samson and Delilah*, and, in time, the plays, *Oedipus Rex* and *King Lear*. It is this **mythic power of blindness** that I set out to evoke in YOUR TOUCH.

In those that have once been sighted it is not uncommon to imagine on occasion that they suddenly see again. These hallucinations are similar to the persistence of a phantom limb after amputation. One might say that this state is the opposite of hysterical blindness, which should not be taken as a feigned blindness, but, rather, real blindness arising from psychological causes.

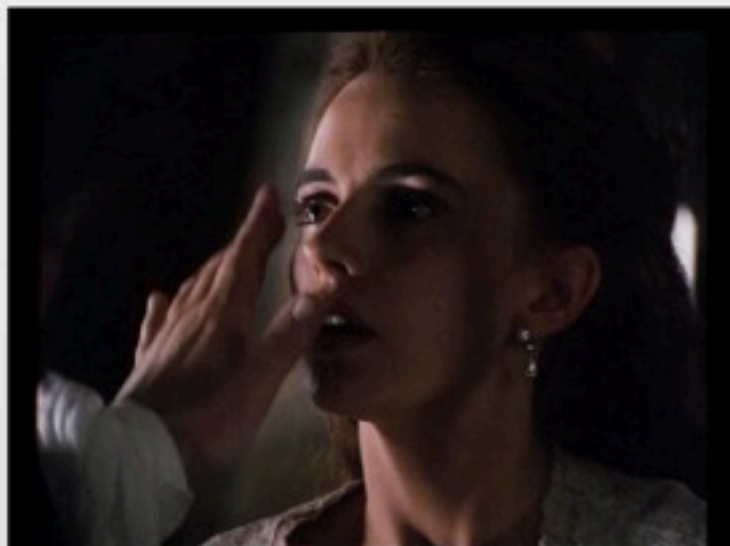
One of the earliest of documented cases was that of Marie-Therese von Paradis, a distinguished concert pianist of the 18th century, who went blind at the age of three. After enduring the most devastating physical treatments, for most of her adolescence, including over three hundred electrical shocks to the eyeballs, without any success, she

became a patient of Franz Anton Mesmer, who practiced a pioneering type of hypnotherapy. It is this story, in rather fanciful form, which is told in the film, *Mesmer*, starring Alan Rickman. During six months of daily treatment he succeeded in partially restoring her sight, but when her father withdrew her from his care she returned once more to complete blindness.

The condition is less common nowadays but does still occur. The *Doctor Sanity* website describes the case of a high school student, much the same age as Bel, who, after breaking up

with her boyfriend, decided to skip classes for the rest of the day, so as not to be seen crying. She arrived home in the afternoon only to discover her mother in bed with a man who was not her father. Upset, she turned and ran back out of the front door, tripped over a potted plant, and landed on the lawn. When she got up she suddenly discovered that she was blind.

Nowadays the condition is known in medical circles as *conversion disorder*. In pop culture the term **hysterical blindness** has taken on an ironic, iconic status being the title of a Hollywood comedy and an episode of the cult TV series, *Heroes*.



Seeing is another kind of musical experience, yet even more unusual and original than all the ones I already know. Very grand ... and bewildering ... and frightening!

Bel's inner journey



inner beauty

At seventeen, Bel is a real teen queen, whose main interest is in just having fun. With the looks to attract the local rich boys, and a devil-may-care attitude to take them for a ride, she thrills to each moment without missing a beat ... Until, inexplicably, the lights go out and she is thrown back into the darkness of her inner world.

Though her heart still beats, she feels nothing. When a young woman's body is dragged from the local river she imagines that body is her's, that she is already dead. Her previous life had been all about making the scene, about *seeing and being seen*; now, as old friends pass her by, she is filled with self-pity and then anger. Anger at the unfairness of it all; until, little-by-little, through hearing and touch, she starts to discover a world so close that until then she had over-looked it. Slowly she attunes to the life around her once more.

As she tentatively ventures out, she meets a boy unlike any she had met before, a boy blind from birth. He teaches her that *inner beauty outshines anything you can see*. He does not drive a sports car, wear the latest fashions, or go to smart parties, but in his arms she comes to value above all the mutual intimacy of touching and being touched, of knowing another person in all their breathing, heart-beating, presence. From that moment the dungeon in which she had been cast melts away, and a new future opens before her.

If Bel's relationship with her mother at first seems brusque and uncaring, it is because of the unspoken, cloying, closeness that exists between them. Bel was in the process of claiming a life of her own, when her affliction threw her back into dependence on her mother. For Jez, bringing up her daughter single-handedly may have been a struggle, but, during those years, she was able to use Bel as compensation for her own lack of real relationships.

Jez has kept a promise to herself never to reveal to Bel who her father is. Having her was something she willfully did

for herself, without grasping that, as she grew up, the child's need to discover her own identity would become an imperative. For Jez, one could cruelly say, that Bel was a trophy wrested from the past, a secret proof of rock-chick triumph. So, Bel has grown up in an atmosphere of fuck-you superiority, but a superiority with insecurity gnawing away at it's roots.

Sooner or later, children almost always learn their parent's "secrets". Bel long ago suspected that her father was no ordinary wage-slave, but a rock legend, alluringly known as "The Beast". Despite all her mother's attempts to warn her off, she is irretrievably drawn to him like a moth to the flame. Her opportunity to encounter him in the flesh comes at a rock festival where he is making a come-back. Though she is just one of the freaking crowd, seeing him in a million popping pixels, gyrating on the giant screen above her, is more than she can bear.

Like Icarus blinded by the sun, Bel is cast down into darkness. It is only through the machinations of a rock journalist, out for her own ends, that she is brought to the actual meeting she so longs for, and so dreads. But her tale also turns out to be a **beauty and the beast** story: when Bel finally meets her rock star father the gentle romantic beneath the fearsome image is brought to the fore. His life of mayhem has led him nowhere he wants to be. Feeling for her in her plight he is fired to do something worthwhile for once in his life. He pledges to do anything, everything he and all his money can to save her sight.

And so Bel is caught in the dilemma of her life; the excruciating dilemma of honouring her pledge to the blind boy she loves to spend the rest of her life with him; or of risking the uncertain journey back to the world of outer vision and a future unknown. Instinctively she knows that she cannot have it both ways.

Blind Love



There is no irony in blind love. To smile at someone is like sending off a dead letter. Because there is nothing to mediate between the intangible sound of voices and the immediate contact of bodies, body-contact becomes all the more startling, an embrace becomes a shock because the body comes out of nowhere into sudden reality

The unsighted live close to each other, often touching, because the binding of sound and touch, upon which their grasp of the world rests, is rooted in the presence of other people. Relationships become intense because, in a very real sense, the lover is at the centre of the other's world.

If adolescence is generally a difficult time, for those kids who are blind it is doubly so. There are all the same frustrations, but the solutions are that much harder to negotiate. Teenage rebellion is thwarted by dependence on others, finding an adult identity overshadowed by the limitations of a tag of *disability*.

It should be no surprise that those who are young and blind have all the same problems as other adolescents, but made that much more intense by the sheer difficulty of finding a way into the grown-up world, of leaving home and finding a way to live a self-sufficient life independent of parents. Above all there is the difficulty of meeting new partners, when there is no eyeing one another up from across the room, when even to arrange to meet for a coffee is a project fraught with hazards.





the dreams of a blind girl



In my dreams I see
everything, perfectly.
Everything is crystal clear,
in vivid colour.

*I am the red in the rose, the flowers
on the blankets on your bedroom floor.
And I am the gray in the ghost that hides
with your clothes behind your closet door.*

*I am the green in the grass that bends back
from underneath your feet.
And I am the blue in your back alley view
where the horizon and the rooftops meet.*

*If you cut me I suppose I would bleed the
colours of the evening stars.*

Bel should give the impression that she is trapped in the borderlands between real and unreal, that the world of dreams is never far away. Because the visual channel is no longer taken up with interpreting the world around her, the imaginary is always close at hand.

ROCK music



He reverses the gun, raises it to his face.

VIC

Well, rock 'n' fucking roll!

Jams the barrel into his mouth, pulls the trigger.

A sonic assault on the chains of earth-bound limitations: Rock began as the music of youth, of rebellion. Though plenty crashed out, others didn't die before they grew old. Lured by the big money, and former glory, they keep coming back. Randall, known as The Beast, is among them. On stage he can still strut his stuff, but the rock god's mantle no longer quite fits. The Beast is tired, but still looking for rest.

Jez as groupie, Vic as wannabe roadie, in their youth were both blinded by the lightening that can spring from the steel strings of a guitar. Jez, Bel's mum, threw everything to the wind and followed her lust; Vic, Ray's dad, dreamed the dream but never quite broke through to the other side. Now in their middle-age they are both, in their different ways, trapped in their faded dreams, unable to move on. The way they both dress, Vic with his leather waistcoat and earring, Jez with her skin-tight jeans and tumble of dyed blonde hair, are both throwbacks to a past they never quite left behind.

Greer, the lesbian journalist, has the same fascination with rock music that gay men have with drag queens. For her it embodies an attitude, an iconography, of never submitting to the drudgery of "woman's lot".



the suspense of YOUR TOUCH

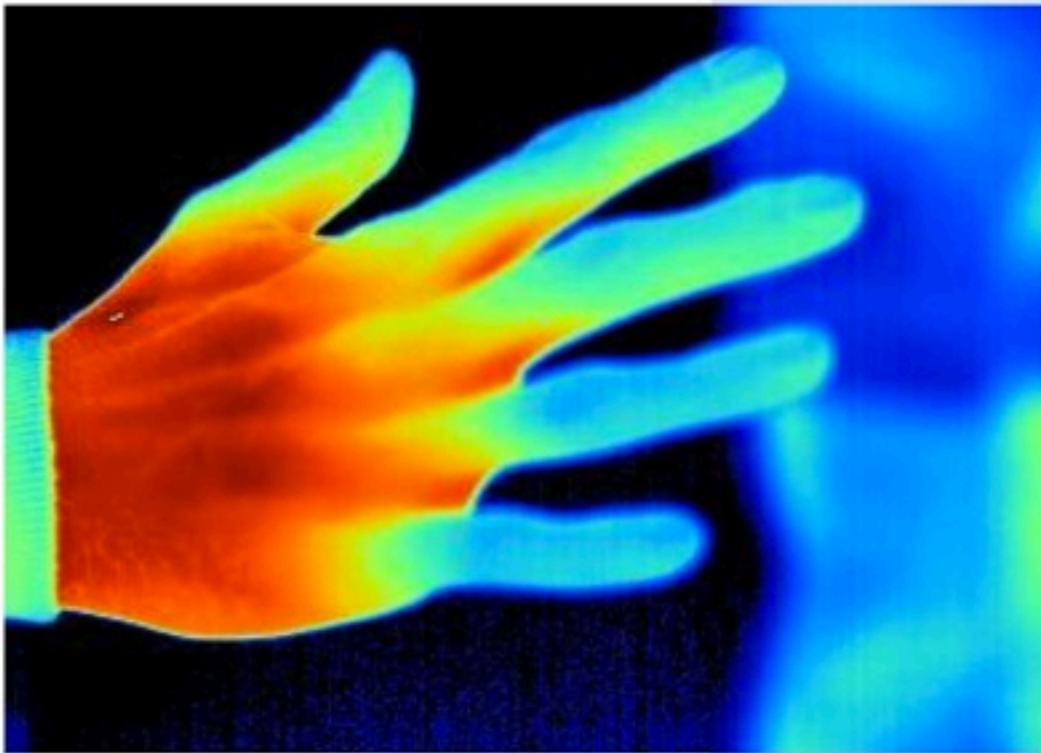
The suspense of YOUR TOUCH is like that excruciating state we might remember from childhood visits to the pantomime, where we can hardly keep from yelling out to warn the vulnerable one, "He's behind you!"

In *On Sight and Insight* the blind writer, John M. Hull, describes how one day he lost the house. Wishing to sit on a seat in the garden where he had sat the previous day, he sets out to go the few yards across the lawn without his cane. To his surprise he finds that the seat is not there. He starts to explore a few yards, this way and that, does not find the seat, but suddenly discovers that he has become disorientated and lost his direction back to the house. Though he knows that it cannot be more than a few yards away exact knowledge of his whereabouts is suddenly confined to the reach of his fingertips.

A similar situation is played out in *YOUR TOUCH* when Ray head-butts the faith-healer, Malcolm, and, in fear for his life, runs from his father's house. He stumbles and slips in the woods at the bottom of the garden, and, while his resting place hides him from Malcolm, it also presents him with the task of finding his way back to the house the next day. Whilst, he laboriously struggles to follow false trails leading this way and that, all the while, as a sighted person would instantly see, the house looms up against the sky right behind him.

However at ease a blind person may appear, their competence is always fragile. While they may, from moment to moment, appear to be at one with their surroundings, a small change in the circumstances, that the sighted would take in their stride, either accidental or made with malicious intent, can suddenly completely upset the balance.

Haptic Style



haptic hap-tic (hăp'tik) *adj.* Of or relating to the sense of touch; tactile

The world of the blind is one where distance is a fleeting and unstable thing. It is a quality more of the imagination than of perception. People appear and disappear in an ebbing and flowing of presence and absence, rather than in the measured approach and recession of the sighted world. The sudden appearance of characters and events in close-up is a technique which has often been co-opted by the horror film for shock effect. This is sometimes done quite unrealistically with characters jumping out from behind camera. But in an unseen world it comes as a natural expression of the characters' way of being in the world. Here fragmentation can be used to slide from the optical space of clearly determined objects, to discontinuous surfaces of subjective space. Haptic style pulls the viewer close, and this in itself is erotic.



A TACTILE form of cutting.

For obvious reasons, one of the key techniques of film editing, that of cutting between eyelines — known as "suture" — does not apply in filming the blind. While blind people may naturally turn in the direction of sound, they do not exchange the looks which would form cutting points; nor do they have a clear eye-to-eye axis. The conventional alternation of points-of-view could only result in a jarring falseness. It is necessary to find a more "tactile" form of cutting, binding shots together through movement, sound, and mood.

EYE-MOVEMENTS reveal the movement of the mind.

The eyes of the blind reflect their orientation in the inner world rather than in the outer. Many people are now familiar with the "wandering" eye-movements of the blind, but very few will understand their significance. It is a relatively recent discovery that, freed from the task of scanning the outer world, the eyes follow the movements of the mind. This gives the actor the opportunity of creating an unparalleled intimacy with the character on screen.



ENTERTAINMENT

"... once when I was listening to
a bell I walked into a lamppost."



RESONANCE

In the life of the blind sound activates space. So in the film there are certain times when an event is carried by sound rather than by the picture. At these times what might normally be treated as merely "background" becomes of crucial importance. The sound of rain on a window pane, wind in the trees, church bells, a helicopter, or the labyrinthine sounds of the London Underground should have as great a presence as dialogue or music.

A focus on natural sounds is quite rare in cinema today where too often everything is drowned in music or sounds reduced to percussive effects. Against this one might think of the sound of wind in the trees in Antonioni's *Blow-up*, or the rattling metal fence in *The Eclipse*. The films of Alain Robbe-Grillet use sounds, such as dogs barking, a car crash, water lapping in a harbour, as the carrier of memories. In collaboration with the sound designer, Michel Fano, soundscapes were built up through the course of the film, which tended to be echoed at climatic moments. So, too, in **YOUR TOUCH**, sound would be used, not just for orientation, but as the carrier of feelings.

One sound in particular plays a key role in the film, it is the ringtone of Bel's cell phone. The little tune it plays is *The Dance of The Sugarplum Fairy* from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*. It is music she danced to in ballet class as a little girl. But it is also the tune that played on a music box that was owned by Ray's mother. On each recurrence it carries a growing complex of feelings with it, in a similar way, perhaps, to the musical pocket watch in Sergei Leone's *For A Few Dollars More*, or the harmonica, played by the character of that name, in *Once Upon A Time in the West*.

"At five in the morning I wake up to the sound of rain. I go into my study and press my forehead against the window pane. I stand there motionless, hardly breathing, concentrating everything on the sound of the raindrops. First I notice differences of place. Now I pay attention to the higher sounds as the rain spatters on the wall above the window and on the roof of the house itself. Below me, the rain falls on a fence, the shrubbery, and on the ground. Differences in pitch emerge. Next there are differences of speed as the storm ebbs and flows. Some patterns of drops overtake others, a bit like the music of Steve Reich. On the window pane it is very loud. The panes of glass vibrate on my forehead. Then the sounds diminish layer on layer, receding into the faint distance as the rain falls on nearby trees. I wonder how far away I can hear it falling. Can I make it out on the houses over the road?"
(John M. Hull / *ON SIGHT AND INSIGHT*)

Is this the first
plot to hinge on
a RINGTONE?

In the world of the blind a ringtone becomes a personal call-sign alerting others to your presence, a beacon to guide them to you.

GOLDFR



The Main Characters of YOUR TOUCH are not using vision for information: this opens the way to use the colour rendition of the image more expressively — warping under the sway of emotion.

(Baselight — desaturated/high contrast)



FEAR — strangeness / disorientation — Meeting the Lizard King, Butterfly House



PASSION — intimacy / togetherness — Lovemaking scenes, The Party



DRAINED — feint & insubstantial — The Faith-healing, Lost in the Streets



LONELINESS — lost in the night — Ray's ordeal in the woods



FULL-BLOOM — coming together, fully alive — The Wind in the Park, Meeting at the Café

SOURCES

Who's my father, asks Pearl Lowe's daughter Daisy

By PEARL LOWE

Last updated at 15:49 08 July 2007

Comments (-) Add to My Stories

In the second part of her brutally honest story, Pearl Lowe reveals her battle to prove a rock star fathered her daughter Daisy and how she agonised over telling her.



Pearl with her daughter Daisy: 'There had always been a slight parentage.'

Read more...

• My drugs hell, by Pearl Lowe

C4's

Blind Young Things



blind kids are just like others only more so ...
the problems get BIGGER!

picture this

G... Sunday Times article on a girl losing her sight



Rolling Stone
LIV
DISCOVERS REAL FATHER IS
Family Values
STEVE TYLER

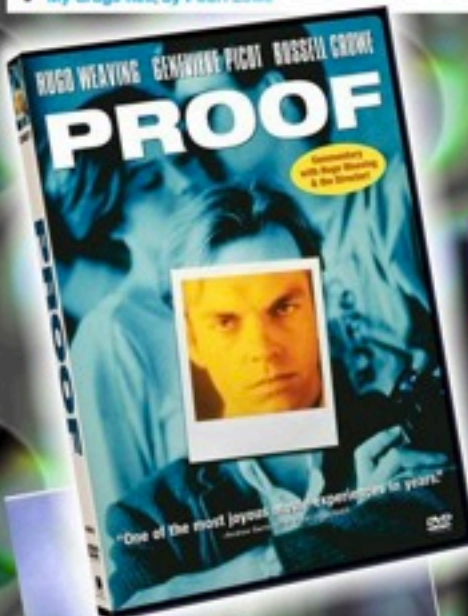
P.J. O'Rourke
In Mexico

Clinton
at Midterm

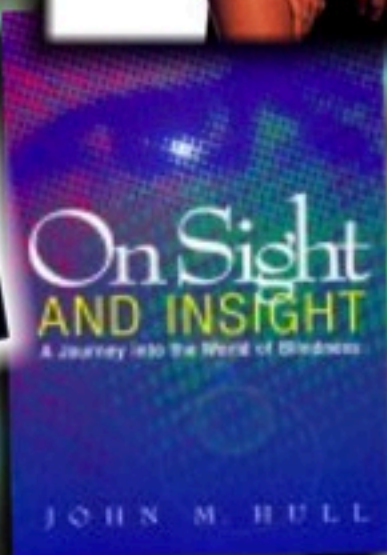
Sugar
Tom Petty
Wears
The Black
Crowns

Liv Tyler
'Chip
off the
Old
Block'

MASTERPIECE of
teen intensity



Only film to take seriously the inner & outer worlds of the blind.



Seems like the other day
My baby went away
He went away 'cross the sea
It's been two years or so
Since I saw my baby go
And then this letter came for me
It said that we were through
He found somebody new
Oh, let me think, let me think, what can I do?
Oh no, oh no, oh no no no no no

(Remember) walkin' in the sand
(Remember) walkin' hand in hand
(Remember) the night was so exciting
(Remember) smile was so inviting
(Remember) then he touched my cheek
(Remember) with his fingertips
Softly, softly we'd meet with our lips

Sight Unseen

Losing your
Sight