# Solitude: Artist's Condition, Intention or Means of Expression?

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Programme of Study: BA Fine Art: Studio, Site and Context (BA)

Module: Independent Project (ADAA6000)

Word count: 6026 (excluding title page, abstract, table of contents, list of illustrations, and bibliography)

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BA (Hons): Fine Art: Studio, Site and Context, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Swansea (12th December 2024)

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# Abstract

This essay examines the multivalent and evolving concept of solitude in relation to art. It aims to present relevant findings to address whether solitude is an artist's condition, intention, or means of expression. Exploring a wide array of perspectives—including historical, psychological, and philosophical it highlights the evolution and significance of solitude in the life of an artist.

Drawing from psychological as well as philosophical studies, the essay examines artist's need for solitude whether as psychological predisposition or intentional act. A historical aspect will provide a better understanding of solitude's place within certain movements and how sociopolitical events shaped artist's engagement with solitude. A consideration of solitude in contemporary times will be examined in relation to rapid development of digital technologies. Throughout this writing case studies of various artist will provide information on artist's use of solitude as visual means of expression.

**Declaration: I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work**

# Introduction

Solitude is a concept that has been the subject of extensive research, branching out into many disciplines, such as philosophy, psychology, religion, and art, just to name a few. The widespread nature of solitude can be ascribed to its evolution, which is deeply shaped by the context of given conditions and circumstances, such as political or cultural changes. It also intertwines with the human psyche, spirituality, and creativity.

Although solitude concerns everyone at some point in their lives, the multifaceted nature of it, as well as a broad range of studies and art movements influenced by it (i.e. Romanticism or Transcendentalism) poses a question of its relevance and effect on the life of an artist. Thus, this essay will present with findings that will aim to answer the question whether solitude is artist's condition, intention or means of expression? This writing will provide with historical aspect of solitude as well as look at it from psychological and philosophical perspective. This essay will also look at some artists and their work in relation to solitude.

In the context of art solitude can be understood in multiple ways. Encompassing an artist's creative process, means of expression or intentional use of solitude to convey their ideas or introspective reaction to the world around them. It explores themes concerned with history, politics, or philosophy. Solitude in art plays a vital role

in visual representation exploring it as a theme and subject matter, it also manifests itself in the overall atmosphere and aesthetic side of an artwork.

Psychological aspects of solitude can tell us more about artist's motivation behind their need for isolation. Whether it is simply their natural tendency or a deliberate reaction to society. It is rooted in one's philosophy and desire for personal and spiritual development. Solitude is a broad concept in arts and artist's life. Artistic creation might not be only the creation of one's world, but also a creation of the sense of self, this idea is presented by John Cowper Powys in his book *Philosophy of Solitude* (1933).

The first chapter Solitude: Condition and Intention will focus on a broad nature of solitude. It will discuss psychological perspectives of solitude as an involuntary and intentional tool of an individual. It will also introduce the concept of solitude as a fundamental aspect of an artist's life and will examine whether it is by a natural predisposition or an intentional act to create in isolation. A book *Solitude* (1988), by Anthony Storr, will provide with psychological output while John Cowper Powys will give a philosophical insight into solitude and its implications on one's spirituality and ways of thinking. David Vincent's *A History of Solitude* will provide with significant historical facts that influenced the ever-evolving meaning of solitude. This historical aspect will aim to better understand solitude's place within certain movements such as Romanticism or Transcendentalism and will illustrate how sociopolitical events shaped artist's engagement with solitude.

Second chapter Solitude Today will examine the contemporary implications of solitude in the age of digital communication and how it is perceived in the modern world particularly for creative people. This chapter will also focus on contemporary

evolution of solitude and proposed re-conceptualisation of its meaning. This chapter will investigate how the immediate connection with others is a useful tool for communication, but also it will look into how the influence of digital engagement on the creativity can often lead to isolation, comparison, and disconnection. An analysis of two contemporary artists Tehching Hsieh and Tracey Emin will give an insight into their view on the idea of solitude from a visual perspective.

## Solitude considered

Before delving into the question proposed in this essay it is worth thinking about what solitude is and why its interwoven nature makes it appear in many disciplines. Oxford Dictionary describes solitude as “the state of being or living alone” (Oxford Dictionary, 2005), a condition common in everyday life for many of us. Yet this definition is quite ambiguous and may lead to a common misconception that solitude is the same as loneliness. Despite both being concerned with the absence of company there are key differences between the two. In *Intimacy and Solitude* Stephanie Dorwick distinguishes the two by saying that solitude is being “reasonably comfortable with your own self,’ and loneliness, as ‘uncomfortably alone without someone.” (Dorwick, 1991, p.141).

So, it appears that one of the main distinctions between the two is the intention and context of the situation one finds themselves in. Solitude is usually a choice to be alone to practice self-reflection, creativity, or personal growth, while loneliness is often involuntary isolation without space for meaningful contemplation leading to feelings of distress and sadness. Yet, by looking at various historical movements such as Romanticism which was largely influenced by a political situation and often enforced

on artists there seems to be a rather fine line between solitude and loneliness. Solitude can also be linked to “a negative side of loneliness” (Campbell and Ross, 2022).

So, despite solitude being a quite specific term its presence is often linked with other concepts concerned with philosophy or psychology. This consideration can help to understand the core concept of solitude as something inherently connected with the human perception of the world and the search for the meaning of self. This reflects the need for introspection and sense of individuality as well as awareness of one's place within society and their reaction to the changes. This is especially clear in the context of art, where the fast-changing political and social environment has influence artists in their work.

Throughout the history it has become clear that artist have been in some way tended to create artworks that have been in one way, or another linked to the idea of solitude. This idea opens a possibility for investigation into solitude as a condition and intention that artists may encounter through their environment, personality, or societal factors.

In art solitude may be a fuel for the creation. In philosophy it provides a space for contemplation and reflection. Meanwhile in psychology solitude can be either healthy or detrimental for mental health and overall wellbeing.

The interwoven nature of solitude makes it very much dependent on the context, as its meaning and purpose, changes and evolves depending on the given times. Each era encompassed an array of important political or societal changes that affected the way of thinking and perceiving world at the time.

The complexity of solitude and its connection to the history is particularly apparent in the context of art, such as the European Romanticism or American

Transcendentalism, they were major movements in which solitude was considered to a significant extent. These movements integrated and brought into focus all the elements in which solitude has already existed but has not been understood or explored fully. On one hand artists have created in response to solitude, on the other out of solitude or not much consideration was given to solitude at all as it was just a state one existed in.

# 1. Solitude: Condition and Intention

> The solitude has been described in two contrasting ways, as a form of punishment and as a state to be sought for the sake of personal or spiritual development.
>
> (Walejko,2021, p.13)

This statement brings to the attention the psychological and philosophical implications of solitude which will be a main subject of the first part of this chapter, with some historical context in the second part. Solitude can be both a motivation that informs and shapes an artist’s creative process. However, it is not a singular experience as it can be perceived as a condition caused by a psychological predisposition or a societal factor. It can also be a deliberate intention that is purely informed by an artist's introspective choice or a reaction to an outside world.

Solitude as a kind of condition especially from a psychological point of view may not be perceived as something one can aspire to be or have as it has been often associated with an inability to create interpersonal relationships. This idea is

commonly bestowed on creative people who often spend a great deal of time creating in solitude. Anthony Storr's book *Solitude* presents this very idea and takes on the exploration of the psychological link between artists and solitude.

One of Storr's first questions in the book was "Is the predilection of the creative person for solitude evidence of some inability to make close relationships?" (Storr, 1988, p. x). This assumption often painted a gloomy picture on the life of artists deeming them odd or even narcissistic. Although the need for aloneness could come from a person's natural predisposition, it could well be caused by mental health issues that further perpetuate antisocial behaviour.

However, whichever side we choose to look at there seems to be a mutual way in which solitude often manifests itself for an artist. "For it is intricately linked with one's need for self-discovery and self-realisation." (Storr, 1988, p. 21). This statement reveals one of the purposes of why one might create. There is a need for artists to express themselves to find out who they are and find the link between the inner self and its relation to the outside world:

> Self-discovery is above all the realisation that we are alone: it is the opening of an impalpable, transparent wall - that of our consciousness - between the world and ourselves.
>
> (Paz, 1961, p. 9)

This poses the question of whether solitude is merely a predisposition or perhaps an intentional act. To understand it better it is worth looking at the idea of how solitude presents itself in the development of the human mind, and how it then can then inspire the spiritual side of human existence.

The word *self* was described for the first time in 1674 by the Oxford Dictionary as “a permanent subject of successive and varying states of consciousness” (Storr, 1988, p.79). This idea an important in the sense of the human experience and has been long considered in the philosophical and psychiatric circles. It has been particularly examined by Freud in his psychoanalyst theory where he distinguished it into three components: the id, the ego, and the super-ego. These components play a part in the development of the self through continuous interactions. Although in the initial stages of human life, the capacity to be alone is supervised by the constant presence of carers this still helps with healthy reinforcement in self.

The need for the capacity to be alone concerned another more contemporary psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott who claimed in one of his studies on the psychological side of isolation that “more has been written on the fear of being alone or the wish to be alone than on the ability to be alone” (Winnicott,1958, p.1). This reinforces the idea that solitude is not merely a predisposition but also an important aspect of life and it should be embraced as a part of human development and experienced healthily.

When thinking about solitude and its psychological form it is also worth mentioning a particular German writer and physician Johann Georg Zimmerman who has done a considerable amount of research on the topic of solitude linking its psychological and philosophical notions. *Solitude Considered with Respect to its Dangerous Influence Upon the Mind and Heart* was written in 1791 and it was one of the first writings to challenge simple notions that solitude is either good or bad. Zimmerman “addressed the task of balancing “all the comforts and blessings of Society” with “all advantages of Seclusion “(Vincent, 2020, p.9). He was aware of the

two-way nature of solitude, emphasising that neither extreme seclusion and escapism nor intense immersion in society is favourable, thus a balance should be reached.

In the philosophical sense, the solitude has many meanings but is commonly associated with something more spiritual and immaterial. Zimmerman recognised the philosophical importance of solitude for its impact on self-discovery and reflection. In the much later writings on solitude this strand of thought followed especially in 1933 book *Philosophy of Solitude by* an English novelist and philosopher John Cowper Powys. In this book he talks about self in the sense of solitude. He emphasised the importance of finding comfort in being alone. Particularly, in the chapter *Self Isolated* he says, “The isolation of the self gives us the habit of contemplating at every moment the wide swing of the planetary world.” (Powys, 1933, p. 49). For him, the act of creation and finding the sense of self is linked and it is usually rooted in solitude. He sees it as a practice, a habit, and a will to concentrate on the self and mind. (Powys, 1933, p. 46).

The spiritual aspect of solitude can be also attributed to religious practices. Those practices can be reminiscent of the idea that Powys presented on the deep contemplation that isolation can provide. In the religious way, this can be achieved by either prayer or meditation, and these are usually done in silence and often isolation even when in places of worship such as churches or monasteries. The word *monk* stems from the Latin *monachus* meaning solitary or alone. Although the monks are usually associated with rejection of company spending long hours if not days in devotion to God, many historical communities sought a balance to these tendencies. A rule of St Bernard has been found where "monks spent long periods at prayer in their cells but joined together in seven liturgical devotions” (Vincent, 2021, p.116).

This brings attention to the fact that solitude should indeed be balanced otherwise in extreme cases it can be detrimental to psychological or even physical health.

The implications of psychological and philosophical questions about the self are twofold: one, the desire for self-discovery and two, the knowledge that we are inherently alone can fuel further one's awareness and search for solitude. For solitude is a subjective state; sitting away from someone in the same place may be enough for psychological solitude, yet physically it may make it difficult to escape from others presence (Simpson, 2021, p.116).

Yet, the examination of solitude as a human condition cannot be only restricted to its beneficent effects, as solitude can also be imposed and enforced. Solitary confinement is one of the examples of this matter. They are usually considered as a harsh penalty and come with an uncertainty of the measures and effect it might take upon the prisoner. Storr claims that "On the other hand, less rigorous conditions of imprisonment have sometimes proved fruitful" (Storr, 1988, p. 88). This means that prisoners might take comfort in spending time away from everyday affairs and distractions encouraging them to contemplate or realise their creative potential. This is similar to what a monk would have experienced in a deliberate solitary state.

While examining those psychological and philosophical aspects of solitude it is worth thinking about its effects on the life of an artist. One artist whose life and work could be attributed to the idea of solitude as a condition, as well as an intention, is Vincent van Gogh. "Though he liked his solitude, Vincent was no recluse. He loved people, was open and gregarious, and made close and lasting friendships." (Salatino,

2020). During his lifetime, Van Gogh spent a great deal of time creating in solitude often painting views from his windows or empty interiors that further amplified the atmosphere of aloneness and profoundness – this was his intention.

Yet perhaps one of his most interesting, but tragic series of works *Irises* (fig. 1) was created when he admitted himself to the psychiatric hospital in 1889 due to his deteriorating mental health issues. He spent his time there isolated from the outside world and only confined to the premises of the hospital. Despite his isolation but with hope for recovery Van Gogh was prolific in his art. *Irises* can be seen as an artist's reflection and reaction to his enforced solitude. "These are flowers that are still rooted in the earth and that are intensely alive (…). It is a picture of moving life attached to the earth." (Allan, 2022). It could be that Van Gogh sought peace in the nature despite his turmoil and felt hopeful to soon return to his ordinary life.

*Figure 1 Irises.*

Another example of solitude being imposed on humans can be through cultural and political changes. Throughout history, up until modern times major upheavals and societal advancements led to isolation or at least seclusion. This was particularly prevalent the from 18th through 19th up until the 20th century when the industrial

revolution took place. While industrialisation was generally considered to improve quality of life, it has also forced people to work long hours with little time for hobbies let alone time away from others. This led to a lack of individuality among people. Individualism was a paramount idea in European Romanticism as well as American transcendentalism movements that have been particularly concerned with solitude.

Romanticism formed as an opposition to the Enlightenment. The latter movement emphasised reason, science, and progress of society, but left “insufficient space for intellectual exploration and self-discovery” (Vincent, 2020, p.18). Thus, Romanticism called for the upheaval of self-reflection, individualism, and emotions. In the context of arts, this rejection of empiricism seemed to be particularly inspirational for creative people of that time. Artists of many disciplines such as painting, poetry, or music have found their inspiration and were able to express their innermost voice. Romantic artworks were greatly inspired by the themes of nature. “The Romantic Movement proposed a means of focusing the imagination, through an intense, frequently solitary engagement with nature.” (Vincent, 2021, p. 17).

German artist Caspar David Friedrich was one of the lead artists of the movement. *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (Fig. 2) is one of the notable examples of the Romantic period. His work amongst his fellow artists emphasised the concept of Sublime which Edmund Burke theorised as something built on terror and “that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (Burke, 1844, p.51). In paintings like this one by Friedrich the solitary figure is set against the vast and open landscape, emphasising the atmosphere of solitude but also uncertainty despite its tranquil aesthetic.

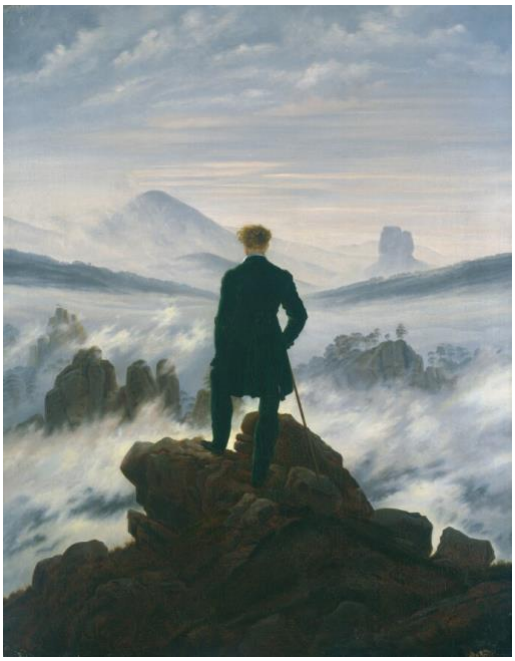

*Figure 2 Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*

However, behind the abundance and aesthetic innovation that artists were experiencing, a rather dark political context was apparent in their work. Materialisation corrupted modern society and left little space for emotional resonance, distancing individuals from their spiritual fulfilment. “Artists in general were becoming isolated by social changes, by the growing anonymity of their audience” (Vaughan, 1978, p.25). The advancements made by the fast-progressing society and turbulent cultural changes left artists secluded.

Romanticism provides an interesting example of how solitude can stem from one’s need for individuality as well as how it is imposed by others. It shows the possibilities for rebellion and objection against forceful seclusion in order to express the importance of individuality. This rebellion that manifests itself within the arts is something that Zimmerman talked about in his study on solitude that was mentioned earlier in this chapter. He argues that there needs to be a balance and a critical reason

to withdraw from society into the seclusion. In his essay on Zimmerman's work Andreas Rydberg summarises Zimmerman's idea by saying: "To withdraw from political turmoil and worldly affairs did not itself solve the problem of the raging passions" (Rydberg, 2021). This statement proves that Zimmerman's discourse on the topic of healthy balanced solitude very much taps into the values and ideas that Romantics presented. On one hand romantics felt isolated by the political upheavals and retreated into the nature, on the other hand they utilised their skills to talk about particularly important matters concerning fast-changing society.

While Romanticism thrived in Europe, a philosophical and literary movement called transcendentalism was born in America. It was greatly influenced by romanticism. Although they both share similar ideas linked to individualism, nature and self-growth, transcendentalism has some differences. Romanticism used many artistic fields and was a motivational force for the artists to react against certain political advancements. Transcendentalism on the other hand aimed for transcendent intellectual growth:

> Romanticism exemplifies the importance of emotions and freedom over intellectual growth. Transcendentalism draws inspiration from the beyond or external to the human perspective even beyond reasoning and normal traditions.
>
> (Maureen, 2011)

Henry David Thoreau one of the leading transcendentalists wrote *Walden* while he spent two years living in solitude in a wooden hut. He wrote down his experiences in the form of a memoir of his reflections on living alone away from society. He said, "I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude" (Thoreau, 2017, p.121). Thoreau's experience of living away in nature is a fitting example of the values

that both romantic and transcendentalists shared – a fondness for nature as a space for reflection or creation. “Solitude may be seen as a chance to confront who you (really) are and perhaps as the foundational state of being human” (Weir, 2021, p. 73).

Overall, the findings in this chapter examined that solitude is a multivalent concept. Solitude is often a choice to be alone it allows for retreat, reflection, and self-discovery. Yet, looking at various psychological studies it appears that solitude is inherently rooted in human existence. It is especially prominent in the life of artists who need time alone to create. Although solitude can be a deliberate choice it is also conditioned by the environmental and political events as seen by the exploration of romanticism and transcendentalism. Visually, solitude is often associated with nature. This seems to be a recurring element that can be seen not only in romantic art but also in later works such as Van Gogh’s paintings.

Although this chapter mentioned only a handful of artists who were in one way, or another preoccupied with the concept of solitude in the psychological as well as philosophical sense in the history of art there have been a lot more of them. In the romantic realm of poetry, Williams Wordsworth would have been a relevant poet to analyse. Post-romantic art has also been associated with new traditions and perceptions of solitude due to fast-changing political and cultural events. “Post-romantic solitude mourned the loss of nature and the alienation of life in industrial cities.” (Stern, 2021, p.98)

## 2. Solitude Today

Knowing some of the historical context of solitude as well as the psychological and spiritual reasons for it is worth thinking about solitude from a contemporary perspective. It also poses a question of the place of solitude and individuality in the digital era and how can solitude be found these days, particularly by creative people.

This chapter will explore how hyper-connectivity, and technology can be both useful but also detrimental to creativity and whether boundaries between solitude and loneliness are blurring because of it. A case study by artists like Tehching Hsieh and Tracey Emin will be analysed in this chapter as well.

The digital era, or the Information Age began in the mid-twentieth century revolutionising technology and shifting rapidly from the traditional industry that the Industrial Revolution brought. This massive technological development continued in the twenty-first century offering an instant connection with others around the world. The presence of social media facilitates easy access to inspirational content, and opportunities for exposure while creating communities of artists. However, with that comes the other side of social media that often leads to conformity to certain trends and the pursuit of approval and validation is often detrimental to mental health and blurs boundaries between healthy solitude and loneliness.

This leads to the observation that connectivity while convenient and inclusive has also made us unable to disconnect from the digital world easily. "Digital technology represents the culmination of the search not only for sociability but as importantly, also search for its absence" (Vincent, 2020, p.231).

It makes spending time on our own (intentionally) more difficult and calls for a great deal of self-awareness and control to genuinely enjoy spending time on our own in order to self-reflect and self-discovery. So, it seems like once again the act of creation might be an ultimate and stable force that embraces the idea of self and solitude despite its changing and evolving meaning.

Although the hyper-connectivity might pose a threat to the traditional concept of solitude it is important to remember that solitude is an ever-evolving concept that is shaped by the context of its time. S.W Cambell and M.Q Ross in their article *Re-Conceptualizing Solitude in the Digital Era: From "Being Alone" to "Noncommunication"* call to re-conceptualise the meaning of solitude:

> With today's digital media, especially the anytime-anywhere connectivity of mobile media traditional notions of "being alone" no longer suffice for conceptualising solitude.
>
> (Cambell and Ross, 2022)

This could imply that the meaning of solitude has evolved, and it should be considered and understood differently from how it was perceived in the past. The digital era is largely based on communication and perhaps thinking about solitude as non-communication (which is a concept proposed in the article by Cambell and Ross), could help to navigate and shape the idea of solitude and make it relevant for the purposes of current events.

Solitude these days can be seen as the means to retreat from that technological environment both physically and mentally. This can be done in order to pursue the solitude that is rooted in our existence as analysed in chapter one.

How all this can be linked to art if its prime idea is to communicate? While this might create a paradox, and art indeed is to communicate something it is also worth remembering that the communication could be viewed as a final product of the artistic creation. In this case, the consideration of the process of making art is equally if not more important than the idea that the art is a finished outcome ready to communicate its meaning or idea. The creative process often demands spending time in solitude and retreating from ordinary life to experiment, introspect and focus on what is that an artist wants to explore.

It appears that artists working in solitude might be a universal experience no matter the historical placement. This paradox reflects the complexity of the world and its relation to the artists.

In contemporary history, solitude has been used by artists similarly as in the past relating to the idea of self-discovery as well as exploring it in the context of sociopolitical issues. The contemporary artists' approach to solitude has also been closely related to the idea of intimacy and privacy often emphasising the importance of space, especially the domestic kind. This emphasis on the importance of domestic space has been particularly evident during the Covid-19 pandemic.

One of the artists whose work transcends many of the themes mentioned above is Tehching Hsieh (b.1950) a Taiwanese artist to whom the idea of solitude and isolation is not foreign. Coming to America as an immigrant in the 1970s where he worked undocumented for years has shaped his perception of isolation both physical and psychological, it has also influenced his future work in performance art. In an interview for *It's That Nice* he said that: "I feel that isolation is very good for artistic thinking," (Stone, 2018). This statement proves that solitude can be a catalyst and a

valuable tool for creativity allowing artists to fully concentrate on their thoughts and process. In the same interview, Hsieh also talked about his opinion on social media by saying that “we are more alone than ever, a people artificially connected to others (Stone, 2018). In his view, the digital world is driving people apart rather than connecting each other in a meaningful way. Hsieh is best known for the series of five performances done between 1978 and 1986 that explored the idea of time, depravation, and self-imposed isolation as well as the importance of the artistic process. Each of these performances involved the focus on a particular limitation related to a certain mode of being and pushing both psychological and physical boundaries.

In one of his performances called *Time Clock Piece* (Fig 3.) he spent one year from 1980-1 in his studio where he punched into a time clock every hour, on the hour, capturing it on 16mm film. At the beginning of the piece, he shaved his head so the effect of passing time would be more noticeable. He spent this year in complete isolation restricting himself from any means of communication, even talking to himself. This intentional act of isolation focused on that one particular moment of each hour, but it seems like the remaining time was fugitive. Although the audience cannot fully grasp what the artist experienced during the performance the process and documentation can offer a glimpse of into Thsieh’s radical engagement with isolation.

This particular performance along with his other work emphasises the idea of solitude as both something intentional and also used as a means of expression. This however shows the determination and psychological state that Hsieh was conditioned with that allowed him to endure such long times in isolation. His performances proved to be prolific and cathartic revealing raw experiences of vulnerability and self-resilience.

Thsieh's work is "a series of profound existential statements, sometimes whispered, sometimes barely audible, always multivalent" (Donnell, 2014). For one in a physical way his work explores the rigorous aspects of solitary confinements and the passage of time, for two he highlights the psychological implications of isolation on the mind as well as the creative process. His work touches on the idea of private space and is also highly autobiographical relating to his individual experiences that inspired him to create his work.

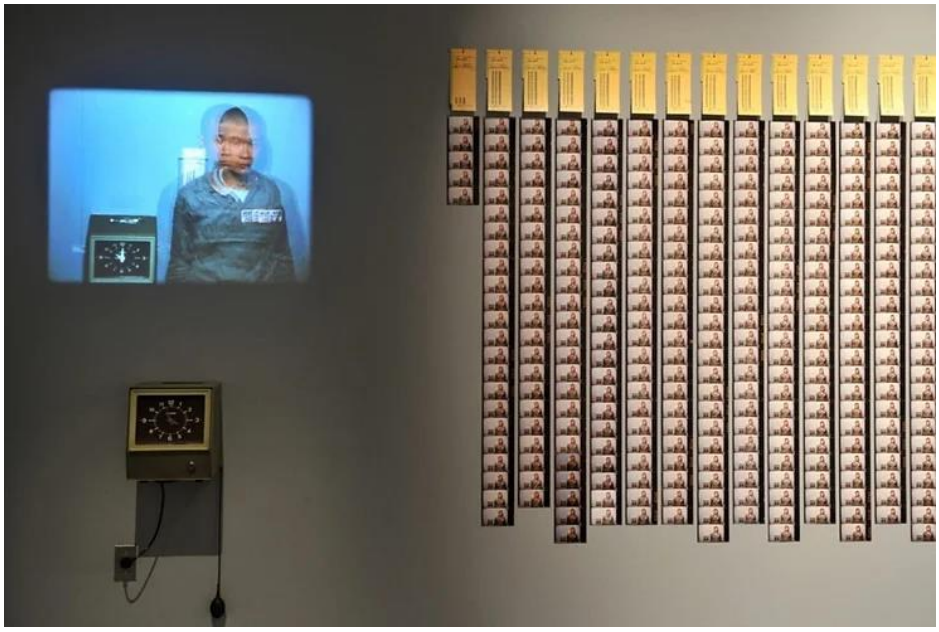

*Figure 3 Time Clock Piece (One Year Performance 1980-1981)*

Another contemporary artist whose work embodies the idea of solitude both in their artistic practice and also as a means of self-exploration is the British artist Tracey Emin (b. 1963). Her work is multifaceted ranging a wide array of topics that convey events and experiences from her personal life. This autobiographical aspect of her

practice highlights another way in which solitude can be perceived. The artist who is concerned with their own experiences displays the core idea that solitude is a way of self-discovery as well as a part of human existence (this has been analysed in Chapter 1). Autobiographical work often requires introspection and self-reflection but also a deep engagement with one's inner world and confrontation with their vulnerability.

Another aspect of solitude that seems to link many contemporary artists is the concept of space. In Hsieh's work, the space is usually his studio that was turned into an almost solitary confinement creating a private but secluded space for his extended performances. In the case of Emin, she explored the idea of space in an equally private manner, but with emphasis on the domestic and intimate spaces, for instance, home, or objects associated with the home such as her work *My Bed* (1998). The concept of the importance of space has been used by the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard in his book *Poetics of Space* (originally published in 1957). However, the physical space and design in that book have been utilised by Bachelard as a sort of means to understand human existence and how the surroundings influence human's relationship with spaces, memories and their effect on solitude and creativity. He argues that the spaces particularly the intimate ones like houses shape our consciousness and promote imagination and daydreaming, elements that many artists experience while working in their creative process.

*Figure 4 Tracey Emin I Thrive on Solitude, 2020*

During the 2020 pandemic, Tracey Emin created a series of works titled *I Thrive on Solitude* which she then exhibited digitally at the White Cube Gallery. “Focusing on a range of intimate interior spaces, these small paintings are concise studies that, for Emin, represent a ‘transference of emotions and place’” (White Cube, n.d.). In this series of paintings (example in fig. 4), Emin offered a glimpse of her domestic realm by portraying a variety of objects such as a bed, chair, or a table with her mum's ashes. At this time Emin was also preparing to move the house after many decades, so this exhibition has been particularly filled with a sense of memories and anticipation. Bachelard in *Poetics of Space* writes:

> And all the spaces of our past moments of solitude, the spaces in which we have suffered from solitude, enjoyed, desired and compromised solitude, remain indelible.
>
> (Bachelard, 1994, p. 10)

This suggests that spaces in which we experience solitude hold an emotional significance that shapes the sense of self and becomes deeply rooted in our memory. Perhaps this is what Emin was trying to convey through those paintings.

These works have not only reflected on her experience of solitude but also presented a positive side of this digital technology. During the pandemic digital communication was vital for many to stay in touch with others but also encouraged artists to seek alternative exposure and showing opportunities. Emin's exhibition further challenges the cultural and technological shifts that are associated with the notion of digital isolation. Undoubtedly, *I Thrive on Solitude* presented new ways of engaging with solitude but also indicated the possibility of utilising digital platforms in a favourable way.

In conclusion, the digitalisation of the world has brought a lot of positive aspects such as instant communication that connects people around the world, with twenty-first century technology progressing and developing even more significantly. Although this progress allowed artists to gain more exposure and create digital communities it has also caused conformity to certain trends posing a threat to individuality. Amidst the technological revolution, the meaning of solitude has continued to evolve and be re-conceptualised. Solitude today presents itself not only in a form of physical isolation but could well be considered as a form of noncommunication with aspects like privacy and intimacy playing significant roles in the contemporary understanding of solitude. These themes are also prevalent for contemporary artists such as Tehching Hsieh and Tracey Emin who utilised the idea of solitude and isolation as means of expressing their inner ideas.

# 3. Conclusion

Solitude remains to be a vast and multivalent force, particularly in the aspect of human existence. It has been conceptualised and theorised in relation to many other disciplines such as psychology, history, politics, and philosophy. However, it appears that art has been a field in which all those disciplines somewhat connect and intertwine the most. The influence of solitude on the arts but most importantly the artist has been considered in a wide array of literary as well as visual ways.

Historically, solitude has been influential for artists, it played a significant role in the creation of romanticism as well as transcendentalism. These movements emphasised the idea of individuality despite sociopolitical upheavals that led to mass materialism. Solitude being a broad concept is constantly shaped by the context and ever-changing conditions of political or sociological events. We, as human beings also cannot be shielded from the external influence of the world. As artists, we are even more prone to be inspired by the world around us. The process of creation is linked with the need for self-discovery, and this often leads to the need for solitude.

Finally, this essay aims to answer the following question: whether solitude is an artist's condition, intention or means of expression? Upon investigation of solitude's implications on psychological, philosophical, and historical states it appears that the answer to that question is not singular and cannot be definitive. Solitude is at once a condition, a choice, and a voice in which artists can express their subjective outlook on their surroundings as well as their inner self.

Although solitude may resist being defined and interpreted in a singular way it opens a possibility for broader research and invites the opportunity of establishing a stable place and significance for solitude in the narrative of modern history. In the final

pages of *A History of Solitude,* David Vincent once again recognises the importance of solitude by saying “A chosen moment of retreat makes it possible to find new purpose and recharge spirit for resumed encounters” (Vincent, 2020, p. 237). This sentence captures the aim of this essay: to emphasise solitude’s significance and its effect on arts and artists. It is also to bring closer attention to its historical context and its implications on the psychological side of human existence. But most importantly it is to recognise solitude’s existence and evolving role amongst all the aspects of life and its renewal in the contemporary world.

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