

Enhancing the human experience: A discussion on how immersive art will elevate contemporary dialogues.

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Abstract

This essay is about how immersive art makes us feel through its mediums. The research done surrounds art piece which open us up to emotion and conversation. Especially in regards to climate change and our interactions with and the environment and each other. Immersivity is part of everything and cannot be covered in a short space of research, but this only confirms the importance of its study. Our phenomenological reaction to the art is discussed along with how this comes about.

Immersive art is a contemporary form of art that is changing what an exhibition space has been and could be. Immersive art gives us the experience of being mentally, emotionally and physically encapsulated by it. The manipulation of the mediums by the artist elicits these deep responses. Mediums are what the artist uses to mould viewers experiences of their art, they can be tangible (perceptible by touch, physical) or intangible (perceptible by thought, incapable of being touched). This independent project is an exploration of our human interaction with our senses and perceptions in reaction to the mediums of scale, fire, mist, light and darkness. Within this discussion I will be looking at artists such as: Heather Benning, Pierre Huyghue, Vincent Van Gogh, David Hockney and Olafur Eliasson. I will also be discussing the theories of phenomenology, hyper-objectivity and posthumanism with key thinkers Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Eugene Minkowski, Claire Bishop and Timothy Morton. How these interactions with the art open up dialogues between people and can form an inclusive environment which surround topics of personal interest - climate change, scale, sensory perception, sensory design, grief/nostalgia and light/darkness.

Immersive art is a form of creative expression that actively involves and envelops the observer, which can be done either in person or through virtual means. The defining feature of immersive art installations lies in their ability to provide visitors with a meticulously designed, multisensory environment. (Avant Arte, 2024)

Our idea of immersive art is subjective to an extent, no one can be forced to be immersed. This is because, whatever the intent, the artist has no control over the viewers perception of the work. They only have control of the space and material

used, though the aim is to ultimately activate viewers senses. Immersive art can be an installation or an experience, sculpture, a painting, performance and any art that viewers open up to. This essay will be focusing on installation art but with the acknowledgement of other art forms being as effective.

An example of non-installation art with immersive properties, is the work of Mark Rothko, an abstract expressionist American painter from the 20th century. He is an artist seen to have various audience reactions. In the book *Pictures and tears: people who have cried in front of paintings*, James Elkins speaks of his experience in Rothko's chapel (fig. 1), which presents 14 of Rothko's paintings there were dark and textured (Elkins, 2005).



Fig 1. *Rothko's Chapel* (2021)

He reads the visitors book which is full of cases of people encountering Rothko's work and being brought to tears. Some other terms used to describe the feelings felt in front of Rothko's paintings were mysteriously confronting, at perfect ease, emptiness, loneliness (Elkins, 2005). Elkins had insights from Jane Dillenberger, who was an art conservationist that interviewed Rothko. She gave Elkins her first-hand experience of seeing Rothko's work, "...the painting is all around you, and you feel both threatened and comforted, both cushioned and asphyxiated" (Elkins, 2005). Jane's experience links directly to the definition of immersion by saying she feels like she is surrounded by the paintings just by looking at them. This book alone shows multiple examples of a human experience of immersion and art, not being subject to installation.



Figure 2, *Orange and Tan* (1954)

Fig 2. is another example of Rothko's work. Bright, bold colours with evident brush strokes. Many people may not experience his paintings in the same way as in Elkins books, some may not even give the work another look and put them down to just some coloured paint on canvas. Our interaction with immersive art is a unique experience. Immersivity is in the hands of both the viewer and the artist and the viewer's response is as important as the artists intent.

One of the philosophical theories throughout this dissertation is Phenomenology. The term Phenomenology was founded by German Philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). It is the study of our first-hand subjective experience through living human consciousness (Smith, 2013). Phenomenology sees the mind and the world as overlapping and that our understanding of our existence comes from the relationship between our reality and our consciousness. "...phenomenology of knowledge as the theory of the essence of pure phenomena of knowing" (Husserl, 2013, pg. 36). It was Husserl's idea that combated the original philosophical Cartesian understanding of existence. Phenomenology and Cartesianism are both part of ontology, meaning the study of how we as humans understand our existence. Which was something that Martin Heidegger, another German philosopher and one of Husserl's students, interpreted. Cartesianism is the philosophy that the physical outer world (like the body) and our inner minds are separate entities, and our minds are influenced by this outer force (God is a third entity but is not relevant to this discussion). It was Heidegger who integrated the concept of 'dasein' which is a German word that translates to being there/existence (Nicholas, 2018). This is holistic perspective that humans are one whole, and not two entities, mind and body (Britannica, 2024). The Holistic approach is a psychological term which means to look at the whole of a

person when studying them. Both Holism and *dasein* look at people as whole entities not to be dealt with in separate sections. I will discuss Holism further into this dissertation in relation to our senses.

To describe phenomenology in relation to something we know; time- It is something in the world that affects us, but it is intangible. We cannot see it or hear it, but we experience it. The Cartesian understanding of time would be defining it numerically, seconds, minutes, and hours. A phenomenological definition of time would be that we understand time when we perceive what it will accompany. For example, a meeting may make time 'drag', or like the classic expression 'time flies when you're having fun'. What we understand as a set time can seemingly go faster or slower due to how we feel about the experience.

Our approach to art is to treat it as a kind of phenomenology...art can function as a way of directing us to important phenomena and helping us understand them in their own terms (Parry et al, 2010, pg. 1)

Although this quote speaks of art as a whole, immersive art has a direct link to phenomenology, as both are about the human experience.

We define 'immersion' and 'immerse' as either to be submerged in liquid or to be involved in deep mental involvement (Waite, 2012) French Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty took over from Heidegger's ideas of phenomenology (1908-1961) in his book, *Eye and Mind* (1964) he discusses how he interprets his perception and being present in the world; "I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me,

not in front of me” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Ponty’s description explains to us that he believes we are immersed by our world as we are physically surrounded by it. When considering the art, there is a similar understanding that to be immersed, we have to enter it/ be submerged by it almost. To be surrounded or submerged, triggers our senses, which will ultimately lead to immersion. Our minds also can create a sense of immersion in reaction to art that we cannot enter, as discussed with Rothko’s paintings, a good example of this is Heather Benning’s *The Dollhouse*.



Fig 3. *The Dollhouse* (2006)

Heather Benning was born in Saskatchewan, Canada, where her family owns a farm. When she moved back after years of developing her career, she began to make land-based work that would display her rural background. She was attempting to be different from the urbanised contemporary art (Macdonald, 2012). *The Dollhouse* (2007) fig. 3, was a piece she made that was constructed on an abandoned farmhouse in Saskatchewan, that the artist restored to look like an

upscaled toy dolls house. Benning's removed the north wall of the farmhouse and put in plexiglass so the viewer could see into the house but not enter it (Benning, 2024). Dolls houses always have a barrier to the viewer, usually it is the scale of the house and Benning echoes this using the plexiglass to create a real physical barrier, it is still impossible to enter. We experience frustration that comes alongside any dolls house, wanting to enter it and live a smaller, easier life. The visual of a dolls house creates a nostalgic sense of home, Benning's use of warm light and pleasant pastel colours are inviting to the eye. The viewer could be encapsulated by it but all they can do is look forward. The piece touches on so many emotive triggers, our phenomenological responses are to feel something visceral, it must evoke emotion in the viewer. Emotional immersion is as real as physical immersion.

An article written about the *The Dollhouse* in Colossal magazine where Heather Benning shared with writer Kate Mothes that:

By sealing the house and keeping the audience at a remove, viewers were forced to take note of what generates a sense of home. I think 'The Dollhouse' aims to speak to our profound desire for re-connection with place (Mothes, 2022)

The Dollhouse being site specific is important to the work as the viewer is already experiencing something different from a normal gallery setting. The location of the piece is immersive as we are surrounded by the country, with the natural smells, sounds, temperatures and views of the farm fields to explore the art. Benning wants

the audience to interact with their want to reconnect with place, which can be found in two ways, to reconnect with home and to reconnect with land.

The house sat on the land until 2013, when with the help of a filmmaker Chad Galloway, they filmed the controlled burning of the house (fig 4). The film shows different parts of the interior of the house set alight like a bed or curtain slowly burning.



Fig 4. *The Dollhouse* (2013)

We are then brought into a new emotion of grief as there has been a loss of a nostalgic object, representing a home and childhood. The house is continued to be filmed from the outside where it is shown to collapse into a pile of debris. Benning's piece is still poignant to this day, as a world we are consistently traversing through displacement from homes due to politics, wars, and climate change.

Benning manipulations of the mediums, large scale and fire, plays with we experience from the piece, scale brings us up and the fire tears us down. The fascination around this dolls house can be brought into question, this enlarged 'Dollhouse' is just a regular house now. The intrigue is included by the boundary it has set. As mentioned previously the light in the house is warm and inviting "light is a material too ... it makes everything it touches change" (Lupton et al., 2018). If the light was blue or green, we may not feel as drawn to the house's interior, which is another manipulation of a medium to draw in the viewer.

Reiterating Maurice Merleau-Ponty's idea of the world being immersive as it is physically surrounding him and not directly in front is being questioned by Benning's piece. We are presented with a piece that can only be in front of us not around us, yet this *Dollhouse* leads to us feeling both physically and mentally immersed. The literal meaning of the word proves that to be immersed does not only mean to be physically surrounded rather it is also to have a visceral reaction (a deep inward feeling).

Merleau-Ponty claims that our perception is not just involved with our vision but is a whole-body experience, in Claire Bishop's *Installation art: A Critical History* (Bishop, 2005). This is much like Heidegger's 'desein'. It is also interesting to note that a lot of the research and theories around senses consider vision as not our primary sense or at least that it should not be held above the others. Sight presents us with what is in front of us, whereas our other senses acknowledge our entire surroundings. We are unable to talk about immersion and immersive art without acknowledging the senses, touch, sight, smell, hearing and taste. These senses play different roles in

how we interact and understand our experience. A book surrounding this topic is called *The Senses: Design Beyond Vision* Lupton, E. and Lipps, A. (2018) which integrates with idea of sensory design.

“At its core, sensory design is about tapping into emotions and feelings to create an immersive experience. This can be achieved through various methods such as lighting, textures, colors, scents, and even temperature” (Faria, 2023).

Sensory design will engage with multiple senses and aims to create some kind of connection between people and their surroundings. Architects use sensory design for this very reason (Belysse, 2024) so it is understandable that artists can do the same. This is a holistic approach as it is aiming to interact with the whole of a person and it is imperative for immersivity to have a deep mental involvement in a space. This idea is linked to Heidegger’s look on phenomenology understanding of humans. The book was published alongside an exhibition, with the same title, at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum. The exhibition *The senses: Design Beyond Vision*, is presented as a sensory experience for people with varied sensory abilities. Ellen Lupton and Andrea Lipps are the writers and creators for the book/exhibition. This art show was about having the art happen to the audience, they were involved in its activation and fulfilling purpose. In the book it is stated “sensory design activates touch, sound, smell, taste and the wisdom of the body” (Lipps and Lupton, 2018). The exhibition title itself “beyond vision” making a point that vision for this exhibition isn’t a main sense. The exhibition is more focused on interaction with other senses, the whole body. Sensory design supports everyone’s chance to receive

information, explore the world, and elevate our experiences, it makes it inclusive for all audiences due to different senses being employed. People with visual impairment will engage with art much differently than someone without, sensory design with immersive art open up an area of the art world for those who would find a normal art exhibition hard to engage with. By creating a creative space that allows people to be enveloped, physically and mentally, is how immersive art is changing our perceptions. This is especially important when considering our understanding of phenomenology.

Our first-person conscious experience is so important to our understanding of our environments. People interacting is what keeps the art world going, so immersive art and sensory design is boosting the engagement. Lupton and Lipps say our senses are unique to each person. (Lipps and Lupton, 2018), therefore, any individual sensory sensitivities are unique as well. If we consider the effects of disabilities and divergencies on the phenomenological experience there will be a greater variety of change. Some of the disabilities that might affect this experience are synaesthesia and autism. The neurological condition synaesthesia is where triggering one sensory pathway will lead to the triggering of a second sense (psychology today, 2024), for example hearing music triggers you to seeing colours in your mind. Which will change the engagement to the art. The neurological disorder autism can lead to over stimulation from lights and loud sounds, or intense smells Synaesthesia and autism are only two examples that may affect this experience. Immersive can be a negative experience for many people with divergencies, as much as it opens doors for other disabilities, they may feel pushed out from the art community. This can open up a dialogue about making more inclusive art.

Through analysing the video about the exhibition itself we are shown, people scratching and sniffing a wall, listening to noise, feeling walls of material and prickly objects. We can see where the audience is supposed to be fitting in and how it will be engaging. However, the video does not make the exhibition look the most alluring experience, it seems gimmicky. Especially with the music choice, an upbeat piano tune layered over as you would find in a children's show. We are presented with artificial lights, and three actors interacting or 'experiencing' what has been displayed for them. Not having been to it however, I cannot judge too heavily. Visually it is not appealing but the exhibition is about looking "beyond vision".

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's statement that our perceptions were a whole-body experience not dependent on vision, we should be open to this type of exploring a space. In an ArchDaily article headed *Touch it, Smell it, Feel it: Architecture for the senses*, the writer Alice Bucknell shares a quote from Lupton:

"People go to museums because they want an authentic experience with real things, but their only experience is visual; how is that authentic?" (Bucknell, 2018)

The idea of the book, *Design Beyond Vision* and exhibit is to bring the understanding that sensory design will connect us in better ways with the physical world. This can start discussions on our environments and how they impact those with disabilities and divergencies.

Another artist who simulates immersive art through sensory design is Pierre Huyghue. Pierre Huyghue is a French artist who now works in Santiago, Chile. It is said that "He creates porous and contingent environments, complex systems in which living and non-living, real and symbolic agents evolve" (Umwelt, 2023). Often

Huyghe incorporates technology into his work intertwined with biology, time, space to create speculative fictions – the basis of them are made up ideas or guesses (Pierre, 2024). Encountering the work of Pierre Huyghe called *Liminal* during the Venice Biennale in the Punta Della Donga was an incredible example of an immersive art experience. Huyghe's mediums included: light, darkness, scale and mist. The exhibition was in darkness the art was the only thing that was lit up, there was no overhead lighting. The only other lighting was small lights which helped people see on the staircases and along the walkways. At the start of the exhibition was a recommendation that the viewer might need to adjust their eyes to the darkness of the rooms. The viewers phenomenological perceptions are already being altered just by the set-up of the surroundings.

Huyghe's work is a post-humanistic view of life. Posthumanism is a theory about the intersection of human, non-human and technological worlds, especially in this era of ecological awareness which confronts human's roles in the fate of the earth (Nayar, 2023). *Liminal* is a physical depiction of a world posthuman. A video called *Human Mask* situated in no-man's land around the city of Fukushima in Japan. Set just after the nuclear catastrophe in 2011, where a major earthquake and tsunami disabled the power supply to the power plant in the city which was cooling the nuclear reactors, (World Nuclear Association, 2024). The video shows a restaurant with a monkey wearing a mask that was of a young girl's face.



Fig 5. *Human Mask* (2024)

The curator of *Liminal*, Anne Stenne, states that the monkey is moving between instinctive behaviour and taught behaviour.

...in the aftermath of a sinister, human mask presents a residual image of human presence carried by an unconscious actor and sole mediator, questioning the 'human' mask we all are wearing. (Anne Stenne, 2024)

The video is a visual of a post-human world, where an animal which we have taught and 'controled' is left to defend itself. Watching the video, a sense of sadness is motioned as we have an innate response to look after this human girl/animal figure. It is alone in a world where humans made it reliable on them. Humans use the environment and natural world for their own gain with no thought about

repercussions. It is important that this video is related to a real-life event, which has been caused by our impact on the world. Earthquakes and tsunamis are disasters only getting worse with the deteriorating climate. What Huyghue does well in his exhibition is make the viewer feel as though they are in the post-human world. Through sensory design we have a connection with our surroundings, using the gravel under foot (fig 6), mist in the air and darkness of the surroundings. He manipulates our phenomenological reaction with each of these.



Fig 6. *Gravel on the floor of the liminal exhibition (2024)*

Another poignant piece in *Liminal* was *Offspring* (2024), two low hanging black boxes with beams of light projected out of it and mist moving through the beams of lights (fig 7)



Fig 7. *Offspring* (2024)

The whole thing is AI controlled, the lights and the music changed based on external factors which means that there was a constant unique piece for each person. The senses we are triggered by sight, sound, smell. Another use of sensory design. Emotionally, we were made to feel unnerved, nothing quite made sense in each room. This is important when making fictional post-human spaces as we can reflect on it being a possible future, that ultimately, we do not want. Again a piece that opens up to conversations that we should be having, to prevent this post human world forming. The full sensory experience is why Huyghue's *liminal* was a perfect example of an immersive art experience. Huyghue's exhibition has no barrier

between the art and the viewer, unlike Heather Benning's Dollhouse. Which as stated previously has a clear, physical, barrier. Despite this Benning also uses sensory design, sight and sound connecting people to the natural surroundings. Both works are immersive, Benning's makes us note the barrier between us and the art questions us up front but Pierre Huyghue's integrates us, so we are only focusing on the space we are experiencing. "With liminal, he invites us to follow other realities, to become strangers to ourselves, from a perspective other than human- inhuman" (Anne Stenne, 2024). Huye attempts to take the viewer out of their known reality and see it in a new form. The false future he has made is not inviting, just intriguing.

Pierre Huyghue works with darkness as a medium which is discussed by Clair Bishop in the book, *Installation art a critical history*. Where there is light, we can also play with the lack thereof. Darkness can remove or enhance boundaries to physical space. If we are placed in a dark room we will move as far as we can 'see', not being able to see what is in front of us, boundaries of walls and objects become non-existent. Say we filled the room with objects we can feel these objects so we will have increased boundaries as we do not want to collide with the unknown entities. We may be prevented from any further movement after this point. This is unlike with vision when we can encounter these objects with ease. A usual gallery constitutes of white walls and bright lights. We are exposed to our surroundings, but them also to us. As we can observe the art from a distance, we no longer feel the need for closer proximity. Bishop's ideas come from the psychiatrist Eugen Minkowski who wrote a book, *Lived Time* (1933) in which Minkowski states:

“I no longer have the black night, complete obscurity, before me; instead, it covers all of me completely, it penetrates my whole being, it touches me in a much more intimate way than the clarity of visual space.” (Minkowski ,2019 p.372)

The link of darkness and intimacy within a gallery space is interesting to discuss. Minkowski is saying he feels safe in darkness, the unseeing. Darkness gives us space where there is no judgment, a weighted blanket, this is our phenomenological response to darkness. In Pierre Huyghue’s *Liminal* exhibition many viewers were touching a sculpture of an alien figure *Idiom* (fig 8) because the darkness gave them the ‘protection’. We may find ourselves more immersed in art that is welcome to physical interaction. Our first-hand perceptions are not always visual they could be tactile (perceptible by touch).



Fig 8. *Idiom* (2024)

In a Financial Times Online article written by their arts editor, Jan Dalley headed '*I don't need a lightshow to immerse myself in art*' (2023). Dalley discusses her views on current day immersive art. In this article she gives examples of immersive art experiences and elements as to why they do work and why others do not. For example, *Van Gogh The immersive experience* which takes the works of Vincent Van Gogh and virtually projects them as moving images on surrounding walls in a room (figure 9). Within this experience people sit and watch the projections from reclined chairs. Dalley describes her experience, "Sunflowers and irises float past, disassociated from the paintings in which they were created ... Immersive indeed" (Dalley, 2023). Her words indicate with negative connotations, for the iris' to be disassociated they have now become separate from the original painting and so are no longer representative of Van Goghs work. As artists we can understand why, this is seemingly taking the incredible talent of a long dead artist and turning it into a gimmick in the endeavour to solely make money. The exhibition is touring the globe which is a clear form of commercialisation.

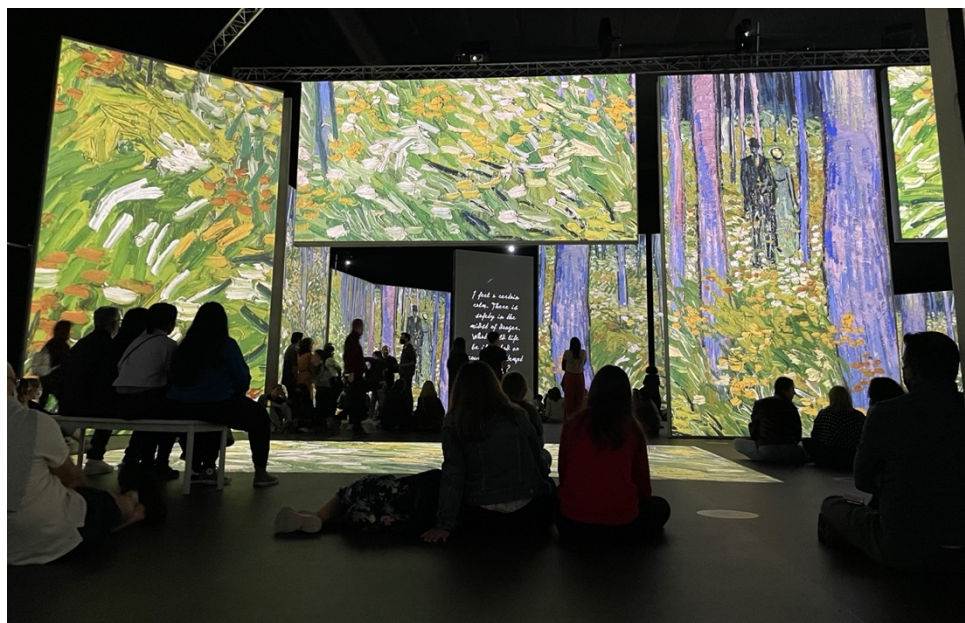


Fig 9. *Van Gogh the immersive experience* (2021)

The exhibition is not crafted by Van Gogh as his work being in this type of exhibition would not even been conceivable to him. Having the artists input in the work is something important for an immersive experience, there lacks a human-to-human connection. It feels exploitative and is not a true experience of Van Gogh's work. Dalley does acknowledge the want to experience a painting even more "...to feel every whiff and jot of it, to smell it and taste it and hear it. Isn't that what happens anyway, when you really look at something" (Dalley, 2023). Though this may be true for Dalley, her words are subjective to her views, to look at a painting we may experience mental immersion, but not everyone can experience all the senses just by looking at it. The article raises good points that make the reader think about their values and what they hope to encounter in an immersive experience. On the other hand, to look at the immersive experience in a positive light it is opening the work of Van Gogh up to new audiences, to show his work through modern formats.

Dalley compares *Van Gogh's, The Immersive experience* to that of David Hockney's, who recently put out his own immersive experience, *Bigger and Closer (Not Smaller and Further away)* (figure 10). Similar In a way to the Van Gogh exhibition, his work is spread over the walls and floor surrounding the viewer. Hockney has created this moment for viewers, he has experimented with material, photography and digital paintings. Unlike Van Goghs It is not a "repurposed Immersion" as Dalley suggests.



Fig 10. *Bigger and Closer (Not Smaller and Further away)* (2024)

In an interview with KLOF magazine Hockney said:

The world is very, very beautiful if you look at it, but most people don't look very much. They scan the ground in front of them so they can walk, they don't really look at things incredibly well, with an intensity, I do.

(Hockney, 2020)

Hockney's perspective casts a resemblance to those of Ferris Buellers, in 'Ferris Buellers Day Off', infamous quote "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while you could miss it" (McCormick et al, 2024). Though Ferris Buellers quote is mostly about skipping school, it holds the same value as Hockney's, to really look at what's around you, a common idiom that we often hear.

Hockney's quote shows that he sees vision as a very important sense, which is evident in his immersive exhibition. *Bigger and Closer (Not Smaller and Further away)* is an experience of Hockney's paintings repurposed and mainly focuses on sight.

Olafur Eliasson is an artist who grew up in Iceland and Denmark. He is a multi-disciplinary artist whose most famous works are large scale installations. His work is often centred around ecology. One of his best-known pieces is the *Weather Project* (2003). This was installed in the Tate's turbine hall, a giant yellow circular screen at the end of the hall, mirrors on the ceiling and artificial mist. (fig 11). Within this piece Eliasson plays with the mediums scale, light and mist. The piece was one of the first pieces to be put up in the Turbine Hall and is so well known because it had such an impact on the viewers. Much like Heather Benning we are presented with something in art form that usually has a barrier. The sun is an 'object' we can never directly look at. Though we all know its beauty, Eliasson has given us a space to experience the sun in a new but intimate context. "...they joined hands; they lay down to form shapes and words reflected in the mirror above." (Godfrey, 2019).



Fig 11. *The Weather Project* (2003)

This quote is describing the way the audience interacted with the piece, it is an example of how creating a space like this gives people the freedom to express themselves, using free will. Immersive art allows us to have free will, the opportunity to be ourselves, which many people are unable to do in everyday life. We are given permission to feel creative expression and interact with something new. The weather project was a space for viewers to let loose and experience the sun that they would not normally because they do not have the time or would never thought about it. For the viewer it is refreshing to find those phenomenological moments, especially in nature.

The *Olafur Eliasson In Real Life*, which contains an essay from the editor Mark Godfrey- who was a curator for the Tate from 2007 to 2021 – discussing Ellison’s career. According to the book Eliasson has four key theoretical principles he follows, which are found to be connected to ideas of phenomenology and our senses. His first point is “To me it is a question of visualising our senses... seeing yourself sensing” (Eliasson, 1999) which means that he wanted his work to make the viewer aware of their perception and of themselves as they are experiencing it. The second point, by the viewer coming to his work and finding some associations with it gives the piece a meaning, which is similar to Lupton and Lips. The third theory is that the work makes the viewer aware of others also experiencing the piece, and there becomes a togetherness through this experience. The final theory is that feelings are facts. Ellison takes this idea from Yvonne Rainer’s autobiography *Feelings are Facts: A life* (2006). Eliasson was aware his art would elicit emotions from the viewer and that feelings were as real as anything tangible. Godfrey surmised that Ellison thought “feelings could lead to actions- and indeed this was the very reason to make art” (Godfrey, 2019, pg. 20). Having this understanding of Eliasson is important as we go into our next discussion. He was clearly influenced by the theories or phenomenon. His ideas of the experience of his art line up with Husserl’s beliefs of how we understand the world around us by perception and experience.

The book accompanied a Tate exhibition of Eliasson’s work in 2019 to 2020. After Godfrey’s essay the book provides 18 conversations that Eliasson has had with specialists, sharing their interests that he also values. The people being interviewed work in areas such as architecture, philosophy, dance, choreography, music, biology and more. With these conversations we get an insight into Eliasson’s thought process and ideals. One of the conversations that gives us the best connection to

this essay is one with philosopher Barry.C.Smith called *Anti-numbness*. Smith explores the senses alongside neuroscientists and psychologists, he mainly explores taste and smell but incorporates the other senses into his thought process.

“...to do certain things as an artist, Olafur, you have to know about the materials, and you have to know about the process”. (Smith, 2019, Pg 84) As artists materials are our source of language - Smith’s quote shows his understanding of this and we can infer that Eliasson values this also from his four key theories. Smith believes that we should start practicing immersive teaching to children within schools “so they can discover something about themselves” (Godfrey,2019, pg.87). Bringing immersion into art we are letting greater communities be able to respond to it. Tacit knowledge is an example that we already do this, it is knowledge that you develop from experience. Our phenomenological experience is actually teaching us. If this is something we already do then pushing the boundaries and making all learning immersive could be revolutionary. The more we can understand art by our varied senses, not just visual, the more we can say as artists but also learn as a viewer.

“And I think they’ll make better political choices if they’ll realise that they can connect with people.” (Godfrey, 2019) To become aware of our surroundings we become more in touch with how we affect it and how it affects us. I think this can be said of all our choices. If we critically examine our experience of the environment, we can see the vast negative effects of climate change. Colder walks, less snow days, hotter summers. Overall, we are having less joyful interactions with the environment. Just being aware that we exist is crucial to maintaining our existence. As said about Huyghue’s work, it highlights that we use the environment for our own gain. Olafur Eliason’s *Weather Project* is about the reminding us of the experience of the sun.

Going forward viewers can choose to experience the environment and its beauty. Immersion is a tool to learn to feel about the environment. This is a perfect example of immersive art intervening with an experience that brings awareness to something as imperative as climate change.

Climate change is part of a philosophical theory as a type of Hyperobject, which is a term coined by the philosopher and ecologist Timothy Morton. In his book *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* he defines hyperobjects as “things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans” (Morton, 2013 pg 1.). Other examples of hyperobjects are: black holes, the Florida Everglades, biosphere, solar system, the sum total of all nuclear material on earth (Morton, 2013).

In Morton’s book he aims to make us realise the world is ending and we must take action now to maintain it. It is a philosophy that something is so vast we cannot comprehend it. Climate change is something we are aware of, we know what it is, and we see the affects, but we cannot see climate change, it is not something that stares us in the face, yet we are impacted by it every day. “A hyperobject could be the very long-lasting product of direct human manufacture pg 1” (Morton, 2013) such as plastic bags, which will long outlive us. The word hyperobject gives a name to those elements of life that we cannot simply call objects; they provide an understanding of that which we struggle to grasp. Immersive art acknowledges hyperobjects and utilises them. We can get a clear sense scape of hyperobjects in relation to our minds and bodies.

Eliasson visually brings us hyperobjects so we are faced with the reality of them. As stated, before in the *Weather Project* we are faced with an intimate moment with the sun. I referred to the sun as an object when discussing this piece but it is a hyper-object. This phenomenological reaction is significant as it means we will have a connection to this place and the senses triggered by it. When we enter the world again the viewer will be reminded of this experience and this may change how they interact with it. They may find a better appreciation for the sun and mist because they can be transported back to the time seeing Eliasson's work. "...like metaphors, works of art make us revise how we see original context/setting" (Parry, 2011). Art that utilises hyperobjects allows people to consider possible futures. As in Huyghue's work, that is a cautionary tale of humanity's ignorance. Immersive art opens the discussions to phenomena's such as hyperobjects.

In conclusion, immersive experiences are something we will remember, take with us over our lifetimes. This is why it is so important we integrate immersion into our daily lives. We will learn and remember more because we will hold viscous emotional tags of these memories. Immersive art has become popular because it can be inclusive as the sensory design exhibition shows us. Our understanding of the physical work is important not only understanding ourselves, but everything. We cannot understand ourselves without being able to feel and cannot change our environments if we do not understand our dialogue with them. To change our situation, we must change ourselves first. Philosopher Simon Crowell discusses that art shows us why we care (Parry, 2011). Which is exactly what the work of Heather Benning, Pierre Huyghue and Olafur Eliasson does. Immersive art has a lot more to be explored around it, especially as it has taken a firm position in the realm of virtual reality and AI. With the

rate at which technology is changing and growing we are sure to see increases in immersive installation art and the starting of new conversations alike.

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