

Research in Practice:
Intuition, Tactility and Digitalisation.

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Introduction.

I will research and analyse three key words and, using knowledge and ideas from the research, I will determine a question which I can use as a base for my independent inquiry next year. The first keyword is 'intuition'. I will investigate the theories on intuition by looking at the works of Tim Ingold, Henry Moore, and Cath Brown. The second keyword is 'tactility' which will address the importance of tactility in perception and making, including theories by Tim Ingold, Julani Pallasmaa, Michael Polanyi and the artistic processes of Patricia Domingues. The last keyword is 'digitalisation' which is a topic that considers how art has and continues to change in the modern world with theories from Pallasmaa, Richard Sennet, John Ruskin, Walter Benjamin, and artwork by Olafur Eliasson.

Intuition.

According to Peter Struck the idea of intuition can be traced back to ancient Greece, where Plato amongst other ancient philosophers wrote about intuition or as Plato named it 'divinatory insight' which although the source of which is disputed, is generally agreed to be "an ancillary form of cognition that takes place outside our self-conscious, purposive thinking" (Struck, 2016, p.138). Today we understand intuition as a way of thought processing which "could be likened to a non-conscious scanning of internal (in memory) and external (in environment) resources" (Ashkanasy and Sinclair, 2005, p. 357). Therefore, Intuition is a way of thinking about our internal environment of thoughts, experiences and beliefs with our external environment and this form of thinking seems to occur without recognition or use of traditional thinking processes.

Intuition is a learning tool, gently observing the world to gather the information we need. It is "by watching, listening and feeling – by paying attention to what the world has to tell us – that we learn" (Ingold, 2013, p.13). Ingold describes an 'art of inquiry' which is used by craftsmen and makers "to allow knowledge to grow from the crucible of our practical and observational engagements with the beings and things around us" (Ingold, 2013, p.19). An example of an artist using intuition could be when an artist is about to paint and by intuition chooses a deep green. Could this be because of the evergreen trees observed on the way to their art studio? Influenced by the velvety sofa on the front cover of an interior design magazine? The colour of their favourite childhood toy? It is factors like these which all contribute to the phenomena we call intuition.

The idea of unconscious feelings towards external objects sourced from internalised feelings is something that glass artist Catherine Brown explores in her work. Brown uses the material of glass to evoke fear by using an unconscious fear. Brown (2016) explains that "the fragile and vulnerable qualities of glass are challenged by the tension in the forms highlighted by the stitched or bound mending thread to emphasis tension...explores ideas of tension and vulnerability, compromise and balance". Using tension and balancing the glass works precariously, Brown can put observers of her art on edge with the feelings of danger evoked by the potential of the glass shattering.



Fig One

Intuition is not only important for gathering knowledge but also an important part of the creative process. Sculptor Henry Moore explains that an artist should not write nor speak of their work too much because the use of too much logic and theory will result in an overly complicated and conceptualised piece of work. Moore describes a balance between the conscious, theorising mind and the unconscious and spontaneous mind, that is necessary in the act of making (Moore, 1966, p.338). Moore is suggesting that intuition is important, essential even, to the maker's process and that there is a part that the non-conscious intuitive mind will play during the making process.

Tactility.

The second keyword is "tactility" and in this section I will be explaining how tactility or touch is an essential part of how we think and perceive the world, especially for artist and other creative practitioners.

For the maker or artist, tactility can be used as a tool to understand more about the material that they are working with and its relation to the self. During an experiment undertaken by Tim Ingold with his students, he discovered that tactile engagement with a material will increase the understanding and change the relationship that you feel with the material. Ingold held two classes for this experiment over two weeks, on the first the students were asked to gather materials and then inspect them carefully and in the second they gathered materials again but this time the students used tactility to experience the materials focusing on "grain and texture" (Ingold, 2013, p.31), and the "feeling of contact between malleable substance and sensitive skin" (Ingold, 2013, p.31). Comparing the two classes, Ingold explained that the "experience of tactility could not be more different from the clinical detachment with which

we had examined the objects of the previous week” (Ingold, 2013, p.18). The importance of tactility is not only about understanding a material in its physical form but also looking beyond that. To understand a material is to think about “space, structure, matter, gravity and light” (Pallasmaa, 2009, p.10) which means thinking about its sensitivity, its grasp, its consideration, and its relationship to the self. This is because “We are connected with the world through our senses... as our senses and entire bodily being directly structure, produce and store silent existential knowledge” (Pallasmaa, 2009, p.4,). Pallasmaa explains that creatives, especially artists, “needs to focus simultaneously on the world and on oneself, the external space and one’s inner mental space” (Pallasmaa, 2009, p.10).

However, tactility is not only about touch, it also involves all of our senses and we do not always need to physically touch an object to evoke a response. When we view art at a museum it is often behind a glass cage or at a distance behind a barrier and yet we are still able to absorb and understand the piece of art we are looking at. This is because the perceiver or observer will use tactility unconsciously as a way of experiencing the art as “our eyes stroke distant surfaces, contours and edges, and the unconscious tactile sensation determines the agreeableness or unpleasantness of the experience.” (Pallasmaa, 2005, p.42). To add to this, Polanyi agrees that “the way we see an object is determined by our awareness of certain efforts inside our body...in terms of position, size, shape and motion of an object” (Polanyi, 1966, p.13). This furthermore suggests that we understand external objects using tacit knowledge from internal body responses.

An example of an artist who uses tactility in their work is Portuguese jewellery artist Patricia Domingues. Galerie Ra (2017) describe Domingues’ work as created “through processes of fragmentation erosion [which] mimics an imaginary relationship between the movements,

patterns, and rhythms found in nature”. This artist uses a chisel and hammer to chip at a material, split it into many fragments and then will put the fragments back together to form a new and unique piece. Using the tactile senses of feel and sound, Domingues can control how the material will fracture and break.



Fig Two

Digitalisation.

Humanity is becoming more and more technically advanced, and these advancements are becoming an increasingly important asset to the world of art. However, since the Industrial Revolution man and especially artists have felt threatened by technology (Sennet, 2009, p.39-40). Advocators against the use of mechanical advancements in the practice of art include John Ruskin, Richard Sennet and Julani Pallasmaa.

Pallasmaa states that the world has become a “stage sets for the eye” (Pallasmaa, 2005, p.31). This suggests that the world has become flat and unreal, only meant for looking and not interacting. This could not be more relevant to the circumstances we find ourselves in today, seeing the world as flat two-dimensional photographs to post all over social media. A separation between reality and the digital world was found by a young architect whilst using CAD (computer-assisted design). They discovered that “when you draw a site... it becomes ingrained in your mind. You come to know the site in a way that is not possible with the computer” (Sennet, 2009, p.40). This implies that the simulation that CAD produces can never substitute for the real thing.

furthermore, using CAD instead of visiting and drawing from the site itself can cause issues with understanding the space that the designers are working with. There are issues with scale as “what appears on screen is impossibly coherent, framed in a unified way that physical sight never is” (Sennet, 2009, p.42). This suggests that the screen only allows the designer to see their work from a particular viewpoint, perfectly framed in the digital world but not applicable to the real world similar to Pallasmaa’s concept of the world as a two-dimensional stage set. Sennet also gives the example of a row of cafes and restaurants with outside seating which had been planned using CAD. However, the outside seating could never be used due to the CAD not taking into consideration the heat concentrated in that area (Sennet, 2009, p.43). This example shows the disconnect of digitalisation from reality, the regenerated version cannot account for the tactile factors such as heat which are experienced when drawing and planning on the physical site. I believe the same can be said about drawing from still life. Drawing from real life gives the artist a sense of understanding that cannot be translated through a screen like the shadows, colours, and depth. In life drawing classes it is so important to experience that silent intense atmosphere, the heavy humid air to keep the model warm, the squeaking of charcoal across the page, the dynamic movement of shape and shadows. These are all things that cannot be replicated using a computer-generated image.

Ruskin describes a ‘life’ that can be found present in art created by “the vivid expression of the intellectual life which has been concerned in their production” (Ruskin, 2011, p.142). This implies that the person who creates the art gives it a sense of ‘life’ during the production of making which would mean that a machine-made object would lack this sense of ‘life’. This is similar to Benjamin’s idea of the ‘aura’, Benjamin describes a unique existence which is held by an object that “originates from the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence” (Benjamin, 1935, p. 3). This would suggest that an object made from hand would hold a ‘life’ or ‘aura’ because it has been touched and contemplated with human hands opposed to the cold mechanical making of a mass-produced object.

However, Ruskin writes briefly on imitation with “it is no sign of deadness in a present art that borrows or imitates, but only if it borrows without paying interest” (Ruskin, 2011, p.145). This

suggests that an object can imitate something and still have a 'life' if there is thought and consideration behind the imitated object. An example of this could be the work of Olafur Eliasson which "recreate[s] natural phenomena like water, rainbows, mist, ephemeral experiences" (Eliasson, 2019, p.147). "Beauty" (1993) is an art installation which projects light onto a falling mist of water, imitating a waterfall and a rainbow (Eliasson, 2019, p.228). Risekult (2014) says that this piece "emphasize the importance of one's own senses as they engage with an artwork or outside stimulus". Therefore, Eliasson is not only imitating the concept of a waterfall but also adding 'life' to the imitation with the purpose of the work being to awaken and engage the viewers senses. Observers of the piece are overwhelmed by the beautiful rainbow mist cascading down from the ceiling that they feel a need to watch it, touch it, and sometimes even stand under it.



Fig Three

Conclusion.

From my research, I have discovered that there are strong connections between the three keywords intuition, tactility, and digitalisation. Intuition is a part of the decision-making process that is non-conscious. This is because the decision is achieved through internal and external scanning happening in the background of our minds (Struck, 2016, p.138). This scanning is how we are influenced by our past experiences (internal) and the way in which we perceive the world (external) (Ashkanasy and Sinclair, 2005, p. 357). In other words, intuition is influenced by tactility. Tactile experience involves using the senses of touch, smell, taste, hearing and seeing to determine our own perception of the thing being observed. As displayed in Ingold's experiments and the work of Domingues, the person is better able to understand the material when they have a tactile experience with it. However, the person is also able to have a tactile experience with an object from a distance by drawing on past experiences with similar materials (Pallasmaa, 2005, p.42). The last keyword is digitalisation which as the world becomes more technically advanced, threatens the experience of tactility. Pallasmaa's concept of the world becoming like a two-dimension stage set along with Sennet's writings on CAD in architecture proves how we cannot rely on technology fully in the making of art. Viewing things only through a screen is causing our perception to be limited and distant, lacking the physical tactility that needs to be experienced (Sennet, 2009, p.43). Then, there is the issue of man verses machine made objects. Benjamin argues that the man-made object will possess an 'aura' which is given to the object through the hands of the maker, something that it's machine-made imitation would lack (Benjamin, 1935, p.3). However, Ruskin suggests that imitation can have 'life' or an 'aura' if it is imitated with consideration (Ruskin, 2011, p.142). For example, the work of Eliasson who imitates natural phenomena with the purpose of creating art which engages with the senses.

For my dissertation, I want to investigate tactility and its importance. Looking at how museums are hiding artwork behind glass walls and barriers when art was made to be touch, felt and experienced. It seems like the world is becoming desensitised from traditional gallery artwork and instead favouring works like that of Eliasson who is creating an open space for everyone, even non-enthusiasts of art, to experience, interpret and discuss his art. The working question that I have chosen for my dissertation is 'To what extent does tactility and the involvement of the senses affect a person's experience with art in the modern world and are the physical barriers, between the art and the self, within galleries causing a mental barrier for the observer?'. I have also created some sub-questions ideas including 'How important is the presence of the maker within their work?', 'How important is vision in tactility?', 'Is the modern world becoming desensitized to works of art?' and 'Do consumers treat man-made products differently to machine made products?'.

Figures.

Fig. One: Brown, C. (n/a) *li 3* [kiln formed glass]. Available at: <http://www.catherinebrownglass.co.uk/Glass.html#lg=1&slide=2> (Accessed: 14 April 2021).
Fig. Two: Domingues, P. (2017) *Brooch* [reconstructed onyx]. Available at: <https://www.galerie-ra.nl/en/patricia-domingues> (Accessed: 23 March 2021).
Fig. Three: Eliasson, O. (1993) *Beauty* [light, water, pump, wood, nozzles, and hose]. Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

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