

**The fomentation of sensory perception as a rummage in
the interpretational process.**

In *partial fulfilment* of the requierements of Module B3003:

Independent Project

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Acknowledgement,

“But thus much I can certainly declare concerning all these writers, or prospective writers, who claim to know the subjects which I seriously study, whether as hearers of mine or of other teachers, or from their own discoveries; it is impossible, in my judgement at least, that these men should understand anything about this subject. There does not exist, nor will there ever exist, any treatise of mine dealing therewith. For it does not at all admit of verbal expression like other studies, but, as a result of continued application to the subject itself and communion therewith, it is brought to birth in the soul on a sudden, as light that is kindled by a leaping spark, and thereafter it nourishes itself. Notwithstanding, of thus much I am certain, that the best statement of these doctrines in writing or in speech would be my own statement; and further, that if they should be badly stated in writing, it is I who would be the person most deeply pained. And if I had thought that these subjects ought to be fully stated in writing or in speech to the public,¹ what nobler action could I have performed in my life than that of writing what is of great benefit to mankind and bringing forth to the light for all men the nature of reality? But were I to undertake this task it would not, as I think, prove a good thing for men, save for some few who are able to discover the truth themselves with but little instruction; for as to the rest, some it would most unseasonably fill with a mistaken contempt, and others with an overweening and empty aspiration, as though they had learnt some sublime mysteries.”

Plato. Letter VII. 341b – 341e

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I. INTRODUCTION

This essay offers an insight into, firstly the theoretical support this research has been based on, from Plato to Noam Chomsky. Each of the theorists looked at have had an impact by their way of discussing either the question of perception or the one of interpretation. These two concepts are inherent to one another and it seemed inevitable to connect them in the research process in order to unravel it later in the practical process. Some theorists were discerned more pertinent to engage in depth, others had a lesser impact on the direction this project took but still informed in some ways the process. It seemed pertinent to expose them however much repercussion they may have had. Later the study of art practitioners enabled to find guidance in transposing to practice these theoretical ideas. That is why the second part focuses more on establishing the process undertook and its related references. I aimed to outline here an overview of the major influences this project has been built upon. Some result from one another, other relate by their relevancy in the field of inquiry. This research has led me to an understanding of perceptual process and its accompanying inquiry of interpretation. The visions embraced allowed a personal response to emerge through the practical component with a determined aim: awaken awareness.

a. The research core

The way we engage with the world, conscientiously or not, is filtered by our senses. “Each person is at each moment capable of remembering all that has ever happened to him and of perceiving everything that is happening elsewhere [...]” (Huxley, 1954, p. 16). However, only a very small portion of this data is perceived by the self. The mind has for function to protect us from this overwhelming and confusing amount of irrelevant knowledge. Doctor C. D. Broad from the University of Cambridge is quoted by Huxley (1954) as such: “The suggestion is that the function of the brain and nervous system and sense organs is in the main eliminative and not productive.” (p. 16). He explains later that only a very small and special selection which is likely to be useful is left. Therefore Huxley defines human potentially: “Mind at Large”. As the selection is made, we are left with both data to translate and the feeling that more is to be encountered. However this infinitely small parcel of data, is now too often considered as the only data existing; integrated in our societies as a truth not to be belied. The exploration of perception's boundaries, through play and alteration is a need to be awaken in all. However this research suggests that reality is multiple in that it is dependent on the way you engage with it. In the pursuit of truth one must recognise that “There is no truth. There is only perception.” (*Gustave Flaubert*, n.d.). The origin of this theory relies on relativism which considers that points of view have no absolute truth or validity, having only relative, and subjective value according to differences in perception and consideration. Once origins and layers have been looked at, the mystery of our surroundings may feel a little less restricted and a little more rich. However, answers are not what is to be looked for, as most of what is to be found is not visible nor playable.

b. The notion of psychic continuity

Noam Chomsky evokes in the documentary “Is the man who is tall happy?”, Newton and Jung's idea of cognitive endowment. He considers that “The brain absorbs a constructed reality and consequently gets convinced to witness a fair representation of the subject” (Is the Man Who Tall is Happy, 2013, 1 min 45 s to 1 min 54 s). However we cannot argue that we have fixed capacities and we cannot help but seeing the world in terms of its physical interactions. (Is the Man Who Tall is Happy, 2013) In the illusion the moon plays every night, we cannot stop noticing it getting smaller as the night advances. But its size does not change. He speaks in terms of empirical data, we have a conception of things and how these things work. It is a constant fight between the conception of how orderly things work in our minds and the messy nature these things actually have. Later he states:”The way we identify anything in the world no matter how elementary, is the mental conception that we impose on interpreting very fragmented experiences.” (Is the Man Who Tall is Happy, 2013, 42 min 20 s to 42 min 33 s) If we were to look at every situation as in the myth of Theseus' ship; if Theseus' boat shipping was to lose a piece of material of which it is made, one at the time, and being replaced by a new piece would it still be Theseus' boat? Further, if someone was to gather them and build a whole new ship all from Theseus' material, it yet won't be Theseus' boat. There is an epistemological issue here, something about the nature of our cognitive system which revels the psychic continuity that we are given. We are able to recognize a dog even if it is not the one by which we learn what a dog looked like. The learning of this capacity triggered a need to deepen the research and directed me into fields of interest such as Empirical idealism and semantics. I was able to connect my own original revelation to philosophical ideas.

c. Plato's allegory and Kant criticism

Plato's analogy of the cave in *The Republic* book VII, is a great reference to understand the above concept. He explains that men are retrieved into a cave in which they are facing a wall. On the wall they see shadows passing, these represent the Ideas, the actual things. He considers that the objects seen, the shadows, is a representation of the Idea, but that it cannot ever be reached. In his idealist conception Plato argues that Ideas are the real things, objects can die and disappear but the Idea stays through time and space. Furthermore he inputs the idea that the sensitive world, the one we live in, is an illusion. The moral of this myth teaches us to look further than the shadows on our wall, that men have to acknowledge this fact in order to free themselves from this illusion that we may call reality (Plato, 300 B. C./1941). In other words, the systematic reasoning function the mind bares must not be reduced to habit by economy of means. The contemplation of the divine¹ nature of things should always be a stimuli for mental wake-up in order not to be conditioned by ethical values that rely on a selective categorisation of distorted mental representations. Kant goes further in his reflection in that he challenges Plato's idealism by defining the sensible world and the suprasensible. He argues that instead of accepting the Ideas as part of the suprasensible world and therefore unreachable; he suggests that if we are capable of denoting these Ideas and understanding their characteristics, it is that they live in the object seen. Indeed, as we are making live the Idea by the object, both are therefore integrated into one another and inherent (Allison, 2004). He demonstrates the mirror effect the sensible world has on the suprasensible by integrating its divine, perfect nature into the object. This directed the

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According to Collins Dictionary: heavenly; celestial.

process towards the interaction and the sensory exploration to be triggered by actual objects as explained later in this essay.

d. The inevitable medium: Language

From the above an understanding of a way to apprehend the world has been shown. Language² in its broad sense is a medium that seemed inevitable to be considered, and therefore this paper outlines some of the reading that was taken into account. Although not looked in great detail it remains relevant and triggered interests in integrating these concepts and playing with conversations in the rehearsal process with the performers. In the mescalin experiment that Aldous Huxley undertook, speaks of languages as such: "To formulate and express the content of this reduced awareness, man has invented and endlessly elaborated those symbols-systems and implicit philosophies which we call languages." (Huxley, 1954, pp. 16-17). Indeed, languages are another layer to be encountered in the meaning making process which result from the perceptual activity. Once interpretation was made of the perceived images, languages enable the communication of these concepts. However, the actual experience of these things stays untranslatable and sharing it is restricted by the knowledge and values the people communicating must share. Huxley expresses later: "We must learn to handle words effectively; but at the same time we must preserve and, if necessary, intensify that half

opaque medium of concepts, which distorts every given fact into the all too familiar

² According to Collins Dictionary, language is any other systematic or non systematic means of communicating.

likeness of some generic label or explanatory abstraction." (Huxley, 1954, p. 59). Symbol-systems are tools to handle with care and we should not be trapped by their finished likeness. Words and images are here to allow us to transcribe very undefinable ideas. It is essential to learn how subjective these representational concepts are and remember that "[...] human culture is made up of signs, each of which stands for something other than itself, and the people inhabiting culture busy themselves making sense of those signs." Bal and Bryson as cited by Gillian (2007, p. 75).

II. THE PROCESS

In order to engage with this open awareness the above theorists recall, the research process focused on playing with triggering the senses, altering the frequencies in which we are used to navigate through. Huxley (1957) states: "[...] the perpetual innocence of childhood, when the sensum was not immediately and automatically subordinated to the concept." (p. 18). The necessity of distorting reality to assimilate the information with a broader eye was the core of the research. The process implied practices of deconstruction of the reflexes in interpretation. In order to challenge the way in which we perceive the surroundings, the focus was put on altering the way we use our senses to reach other places than usual. We noticed that we take for granted the information that is stored in our experiences. We rarely choose to hear or see what is happening around us. That is why in looking at ways of replacing, misusing or taking out one sense, the experience encountered gives the chance to be interpreted in a more decisive and empowering way.

a. Objects as subjects

The first stage of the research was to awaken the senses in a non-studio environment in order to bring the performers Rebecca Journo, Svenja Bühl and Sara Røisland Torsvik in a more daily setting. Improvisations in a park lead to an open state of awareness, engaging through a somatic approach, the seeing, listening and touching senses where enhanced by exploration. However this stage brought to my eye the necessity of detaching the observation from the observed and giving the observer the chance to focus on an external subject. Later, objects were randomly placed in the space and time was given to see which was attracting the gaze, why and how could its function be distorted, its connotation manipulated. Inspired by Marcel Duchamp's approach on ready-mades, we found a correlation in the finality of the task. Objects are meaning bearers, they imply a context, a gender, an area... and in all of that you are the one creating the connection between their physicality and your expectation of what they might be. Your interpretation is what makes it become. Olsen (2002, p. 62) proposes to speak the expectations we have on an object. This process sucks out all the projections we may weight it by. Seated in front of the object, we listed a sequence of: "I expect that you ...". This happens to be extremely freeing and allowed unexpected projections to arise. She later states: "[...] As we become aware of perceptual habits, we can make a practice of inviting new information, opening new opportunities for interpretation." (Olsen, 2002, p. 58). This task resulted in being part of the sound score. In order to go further, I looked at experiments proposed by Tufnell and Crickmay (2004, pp. 159-160). The task was on the exploration of objects through touch in the dark. They listed words such as, place together,

pin, weave, balance etc. to activated another relation to the material. We used the object function and distorted it. We decided to be surprised and interpret the materials function through touch. This process gave a whole new dimension to the assemblages proposed and their meaning became altered by something else than an automatic reasoning. The development of this task was to speak about the chosen object, and evoke every connotation it may have. Once this was done, the performers moved in response to the conversation they had, bringing out their essence of the object to the eye. Finally the goal of the assemblage was to show the quality enhanced by the dance.

b. Drawing as immediate interpretation

Strong from these explorations, we went further in devising our own task introducing drawing. I had been interested in the past by automatic writing practices and introduced by Ana Mira to drawing as a medium to enhance the essence of things. The task was that one dancer had to map the architecture of space on an overhead projector. Allowing the perception of the thing she was looking at be subject to instant interpretation. Through drawing, the possibility for the essence of the object to be exposed is enhanced. You are sketching, mapping, graphing, synthesizing, representing. The lines, shapes, weight, sound, movement, all the sensory information the space gives you are matter to draw. The two other performers were interpreting the imprint appearing live on the wall through movement. The result was a distilled filter of different layers of interpretation of a same space. Pallasmaa (2011) states: "Even every architecture setting has, auditive, haptic, olfactory, and even hidden gustatory qualities, and those properties give the visual

percept its sense of fullness and life." (pp. 051-052). Furthermore, Bachelard rooted into phenomenology his inquiry of language consciousness. He explains that the poetic character which reverie requires is triggered by the polyphony of the senses perceived. He relates them to the harmony they nurture with one another. "All the senses awaken and fall into harmony in poetic reverie. Poetic reverie listens to this polyphony of the senses, and the poetic consciousness must record it" (Bachelard, 1971, p. 6).

c. Collaboration with Ben Brown

Ben Brown, a musician from Canada, has been collaborating on this project. He is at the origin of the sound scape in the space. Firstly he came to improvise on the drawing task. I wanted to integrate him in the task as a performer and not just to make music to which the dancers could improvise. He became a third layer of interpretation of one unique object of inquiry, the architecture of the space. So finally the task became a lay out of filters, each influencing one another, having a common origin, yet a singular existence. We observed that things bare the meaning we give them and that reality is shaped by whom perceives it. In regards to the sound proposed in the space, I gave him total freedom in the way he would invest it. We imagined a surrounding sound scape, it had to be valued as much the other informations. We played with the location of the sound, its intensities, its provenance, its colours. We aimed to create a stimuli for the auditive sensory channel and exalt a global awareness.

d. The place of the voice

Later, we developed the task explained above by replacing drawing by the use of the voice. Now the dancers were to sound the textural aspect of what they were looking at as well as letting it reverberate into the body. We discovered as the task was developing that there was several options. They could choose to sound the shape, the material, the name of the object was also its sound to some extent, or the writings it had on. It was interesting to see these sub tasks emerge and work out as an observer what quality of the architecture they were vocalizing. The inevitable question of language exposed earlier drifted the process towards absurd conversations as a playful experiment. The task was for the performers to answer to a sentence as if they misheard one of the words. This inputs a perpetual shift in the meaning of the conversation. It creates surprising and often comical ideas' associations and places the audience in an alerted state of listening; having to follow and imagine what thought process brought the performer to answer this way. This task ended to be integrated in the sound score. Slowly I was finding ways to engage the audience's reflection on its own interpretation process.

e. The visceral body

Later in the process the question of other types of perceptions arose. I learnt about the Autonomic Nervous System which is the primary indicator of the balance of the body and its environment. It connects visceral organs, glands and skin with the brain along side the vestibular system, responsible for balance, movement perception and orientation;

together integrated in the great scheme of perception. Functioning below rational thoughts, our visceral body, the Autonomic Nervous System, picks up on information that may not register our conscious minds (Olsen, 2002, p. 52). It recalls these archetypes, reflexes and instinctive behaviours. Olsen proposes an exercise of pouring the body (p. 53). In a comfortable sited position, allowing each volume, chest, centre, pelvic area, to land in your hand as if each organs was to actively let go of their consistence and float like water. This task enabled a state of awareness where the movements were freer and greater. The proprioception of the dancers seemed to expand and the quality of their dance governed by an on-going vibratory cycle.

f. Jung's collective unconscious

Carl Gustav Jung, Swiss psychiatrist, argues the notion of collective unconscious. Representations, individual or collective, are influenced and conditioned by human functioning related to imagination. Instincts and archetypes are what he calls the “collective unconscious”; to be opposed to the Freudian personal unconscious linked to personal content and inherent to the individual. Furthermore, he deepens the mystic participation that anthropologist Bruhl studied from Durkheim's principal of collective representation. In analytical psychology, mystic participation defines the mechanism where unconscious is projected on the object and the object injected in the subject. Jung goes further in saying that it emerges from the collective unconscious therefore it is immediate reality, evident and universal which creates an unconscious identity with the object every time it occurs. (Jung, 1980)

g. The use of moving image

I explored this understanding of Jung idea by looking at what ways of composing an image in order to recall upon this collective unconscious. In Visual Methodologies, Gillian describes the sites at which the meaning of an image is made. The site of production and the sites where it is seen, the audience that sees it and the modalities it is composed by (Gillian, 2007, p. 13). This analytical methodologies gave birth to a short film sequence with rushes captured in different places throughout the year. It is the representation of this process. Pallasmaa (2011, p. 054) explains how seeing is a way of touching without physical contact. “Besides, the eyes are specializations of ordinary skin tissues”. This supports the fact that vision has the same quality as touch and expanding this notion to the other senses, vision encompasses all the perceptual abilities. Without the other senses visual data would be a blank image with no textural qualities in a broad sense. Furthermore Pallasmaa, (2011, p. 054) states how: “The entity of experience is grasped as a coherent and meaningful whole constituted of perceptible and memorable images.” This film will be one of the elements laid out in the space for the audience to look at and give a personal insight into my research.

III. THE SPACE

The practical component is divided in two spaces in conference rooms 1 and 2. The installation is a space created for the audience to explore their relation to their perceptual abilities and habits; it is to be experienced one person at the time. The first space in which they will enter is sprinkled with strong images and stimuli summarising

flanges of sensory triggers. The auditive, visual and haptic senses are the main senses engaged in the exploration but the olfactory and gustatory sense are insinuated in each experiment as argued earlier. This first room is only there to state and support a wider theoretical enquiry questioning the engagement we put in the way we give value and meaning to the data surrounding us. Reducing and synthesising its content aimed towards enhancing the value of the everyday context. It seemed arguable to present a performance recounting all the stage we went through. The enquiry is such that is it to be encountered alone and by the self. "By its very nature every embodied spirit is doomed to suffer and enjoy in solitude. Sensations, feelings, insights, fancies – all these are private and, except through symbols and at second hand, incommunicable." (Huxley, 1954, p. 8). The blathering of ones experience would be a paradoxical choice for the aim aspired. The conference room 2 is where the audience becomes the creator of the space. The room is empty, only one performer is standing behind an overhead projector with a blank sheet ready to draw what the audience member decides. The dialogue taking place between the audience member and the performer is not forced. It is only initiated through a playful invitation let to the performer to decide how she will convey the input of dialogue. The audience member will understand that it is him that decides what is drawn, what the space becomes. The way the space is structured is creating a reflection between the drawer, the audience and the decision maker. The drawing is mirroring the audience member's choices through the eye of the drawer. He therefore not sees his actual choices drawn on the wall but the subjectified representations of the drawers interpretation. This aims to bring the audience member to reflect on his own interpretational process. Mondzain in Yale University (2012) speaks of the weakness of meaning in relation to the multitude of

speaking subjects.” [...] Mirrors are operator of alterity. [...] It is about seeing in the mirror plane, the overturning space in between a subject's real body confronting the mirror and the intangible image of the desiring subject meeting the other in the mirror.” Here the performer acts as the mirror enabling not a reflection of the audience member itself but the interpretational process through which they are perceived.

a. A collaborative project and its format

This project was a total collaboration with my performers. The process was facilitated for them and their responses informed its progression. However, since the very beginning of this project, I had aimed to produce an active exploration for the audience as they are the makers of the meaning for themselves. The performers will take in turns the position of drawer as each of them went through the process in an individual way and their vision/input will be singular. I consider their role determinant, their engagement, and performative state will require recalling upon all the experiments we went through in order to distil the intrinsic nature of the other person.

I believe the format I choose is more appropriate to the kind of experience I want to propose. I see the space as an interactive gallery; in a gallery you come in with a different expectation than in a performance. There is a different engagement from the audience and it is dependent to them to investigate and make sense of the things proposed. The responsibility is shared and this notion is determinant in the way of looking at my project.

b. Shifts and process development

The initial intention I had for this project was to develop practices and tools for the awakening of perception and therefore understand better interpretation. It started as a walk about where there would be different stations to stop by. Later the process took the project into another direction where the performers' inputs was at the heart of the decisions. It was going to be a durational performance where the enquiries we were investigating would have been presented, revisited and open to interactions for the audience. But it is only now that I am starting to understand myself, understand how the research is taking me elsewhere. The decision of shifting the drawing task from the dancers moving as a representation, a performance, to the choice of placing the audience as the one creating the drawing, came from a discussion with my tutor Zoi Dimitriou. She rose to my mind the fact that the dancers and Ben the musician where all taking initiations from the drawing yet it seemed that they were also influencing each other. This triggered the understanding of the mirror effect this task had and how by placing the audience as the creator of the space, I would make my point clearer. I feel I am only grasping what the research is trying to tell me. I am aware that it is a trial for exposing a line of enquiry with its potential for failure. But throughout the year risks of throwing in and out bites of the process enabled to distil it. This research is at its very beginning and will continue to grow and expend, shift and go back on itself. I am also aware that many other routes are to be explored and that the ideas exposed here are synthesised by economy of means.

c. To conclude

This research has been the start of the enquiry of sensory perception as a landscape for freedom in the inevitable meaning making operation. It always rises new perspectives of research, new questioning and requires experimentation. It is a pool full of emergent and inherent systems and logics, engaging more than ones perception, it is a journey to the enlightenment.³ The more you allow space for questioning, the more you understand how wide the spectrum is and that you are the maker of the depths and shapes and weight and colour scheme of the world perceived. Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues for: "The essential integration of the senses and the instantaneous and holistic character of perception." (Pallasmaa, 2011, p. 051). She writes

My perception is [...] not a sum of visual, tactile and audible givens: I perceive in a total way with my whole being: I grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of being, which speak to all my senses at once. (Pallasmaa, 2011, p. 051)

Phenomenologie is the next route towards which this research will divert. It is now certain that unpicking reality lead me back to Huxley's formula on egolessness: " All is in all - All is actually each. (Huxley, 1954, p. 19)

³ According to Cambridge Dictionary enlightenment refers to the state of understanding something.

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