

Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire

Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technologies

SOMATIC TRANSFORMATION IN THE PARTICIPANT THROUGH  
EMBODIED ENGAGEMENT WITH INSTALLATION ART

by

Richard Stone

Student Id: N00203142

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of examination for the BA (Hons) in Art. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institute.

Signed



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## ABSTRACT

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**Title: Somatic transformation in the participant through embodied engagement with installation art.**

This thesis explores installation art with an emphasis on the physical and emotional affects it has on the participating audience, particularly its capacity to transform our sense of self. The question this thesis seeks to answer is: why does installation art tend to elicit strong physical and emotional sensations and responses in its audience? The research explores this question by establishing the diverse elements at play within installation art that contribute to its somatic effects. An empirical study on the effects of an installation artwork are referenced, with the key result that a transformative experience was especially likely to occur if participants experienced introduction to a new environment which interrupted their routines. Research exploring the somatic experience is drawn together from the fields of art theory and history, philosophy, neuroscience and cognitive philosophy developments, psychology and somaesthetics. This research provides a contemporary understanding of how meaning-making, agency and the sense of self are firmly rooted in embodied experience and are continually influenced by the surrounding environment. This embodied interdependency between our sense of self and our environment explains why installation art, through providing an intensified and unified experience, can be particularly adept at transforming our sense of self. The installation art of Eliasson and Turrell are discussed and explored for their effectiveness at creating profound transformative experiences for their audiences. This transformation is shown to be linked to the intention of the artists to prioritise the centrality of the body in experiencing their art, and their facility in utilising stimulating immersive environments to present novel experiences which are somatically engaging for their audience.

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## Introduction

This thesis will explore installation art from the point of view of the physical and emotional affects it has on the participating audience, particularly its capacity to transform our sense of self.

The first chapter opens by giving a brief definition of installation art. This is followed by a discussion which compares the experience of viewing traditional art with that of viewing and experiencing installation art. It identifies some of the key differences between these experiences, and how the different opportunities presented to the viewer/participant through installation art tend to generate a more intense, embodied response. A specific example of an installation will be given to demonstrate the range of experiential possibilities typical of installation art that are available to the audience. To provide another perspective on audience impact, some outcomes from a recent empirical study on self-recorded responses to a specific art installation will be presented. The results of the study are shown to support art and philosophy theories of the role of the body in responding to art, and identify some of the elements which significantly impact the audience's experience.

Chapter two focuses on Olafur Eliasson's installation art and discusses how his intention to provide embodied experiences for his audience brings about personal and societal transformation. The chapter begins by describing an installation by Eliasson that I experienced in his retrospective exhibition in London in 2019. This serves as an example of the dramatic inner transformations that installation art can give rise to. The resonances between the embodied engagement of Eliasson's art and the emerging field of somaesthetics are explored in some detail. The research aims to establish a connection between engaging with physically and emotionally stimulating installation art and its capacity to transform our sense of self. The historical view of agency in the European philosophical tradition as being tied to rationality and free will is challenged by contemporary somaesthetic research, which suggests instead that agency arises from embodied experiences. Eliasson places the experiences of the body at the centre of his art to redress the dominance that thinking has over somatic experiencing in our culture, providing his audience with opportunities for growth and the transformation of the self.

The third chapter presents the idea that the interior world of the audience may function as the 'site' being investigated through an installation art work. This idea is explored in relation to Eliasson's art installation *The Weather Project* in the Tate Modern in 2003 and its affects. The



importance to Eliasson of the participants' encounters with each other through engaging with the installation is examined as an essential element in the realisation of the work. The impact on participants of Eliasson's focus on making the audience experience central to his work is also explored. James Turrell's work is introduced as having an intentional resonance similar to Eliasson's in that he works to create palpable physical effects in his audience. Turrell's 'Skyspaces' are discussed and how they make us aware of the act of perceiving as an embodied experience. Roden Crater, Turrell's monumental work in the Arizona desert which is a fusion of art, engineering, astronomy, architecture and neuroscience is explored through a participant's experience of some of its viewing spaces. Turrell, like Eliasson, is drawing our attention to how we create reality and how this is deeply linked to our somatic experiences. This chapter finishes by highlighting the parallels between Eliasson's and Turrell's work.

# Chapter 1 – Elements of Installation Art

## 1.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces installation art and compares the key experiential differences between traditional art and installation art, highlighting the typically intense, embodied response to the latter. An installation will be described to provide an example of the diverse experiential possibilities that installation art offers to its audience. Findings from a recent empirical study that recorded audience responses to an installation are presented, aligning with art and philosophy theories which emphasise the centrality of the body's role in art appreciation and identifying key elements that significantly influence the audience experience.

## 1.2. What is Installation Art?

“The term installation art is used to describe large-scale, mixed-media constructions, often designed for a specific place or for a temporary period of time” (Tate, no date). An installation may be in a gallery or public space, or could also be situated outdoors. The audience enter into the installation and can explore it by walking through it. The range of media used in installation art is the most diverse of any artform, as any material may be used to create one or more constituent elements of the artwork.

The main factor that distinguishes an installation from traditional art is that, rather than being a collection of individual artworks, an installation provides a complete unified experience for the viewer. (Tate, no date). Installations usually engage participants on multiple levels and stimulate multiple senses, which tends to deliver an intense and memorable experience. “As artist Ilya Kabakov said: The main actor in the total installation, the main centre toward which everything is addressed, for which everything is intended, is the viewer.” (Tate, no date). This emphasis on the viewer is key to installation art's efficacy in impacting the viewer's experience in a variety of different ways that can persist long after they exit from the installation.

## 1.3. Why Does Installation Art Create Strong Audience Responses?

How does the sort of engagement required of viewers/participants of installation art differ from that of traditional art? In general, most traditional art presentations – painting, sculpture,

drawing, photography, video – rely mainly on the viewer’s visual engagement as the primary sense through which it is experienced. The artwork is presented to the viewer as a stand-alone object for their consideration. The viewer is imagined “as a pair of disembodied eyes, that survey the work from a distance” (Bishop, 2005, p6). The viewer usually stands back from the artwork to include all of it in their field of vision and hence can then get an overall sense of the work. The viewer may then move closer to examine some details in the art object that catch their attention. There is also almost invariably the accompanying ‘do not touch’ sign to be observed by all viewers throughout the duration of their interaction with the art. As the use of touch is actively denied, even in the case of most sculptures, the viewer is left to imagine the felt qualities of the materials present. The viewer may spend a short amount of time with the work – seconds or minutes usually – then move on to observe other works in an exhibition. Overall, there is little sensory engagement with the art, and the viewer’s cognitive and emotional response to the piece arises almost entirely from what is perceived through their eyes.

In contrast to this, installation art is usually presented to the public at a large scale - often occupying a room in a gallery or even the entire gallery. Installation art, as Bishop states: “loosely refers to the type of art into which the viewer physically enters, and which is often described as ‘theatrical’, ‘immersive’ or ‘experiential’.” (Bishop, 2005, p6). To experience the installation the public are required to enter physically into the space that the installation occupies, so there is a strong physical sense of an immersive experience, entering into the artwork. In most cases it would not be possible to visually take in the full installation from a single vantage point because of its scale and layout, so the viewer is enticed into physical movement throughout the entire assembly to explore and experience all its different elements. Bishop notes the significance of this sensory experience:

Instead of *representing* texture, space, light and so on, installation art *presents* these elements directly for us to experience. This introduces an emphasis on sensory immediacy, on physical participation (the viewer must walk into and around the work), and on a heightened awareness of other visitors who become part of the piece. (Bishop, 2005, p11).

The immersion into the artwork and movement through it to experience it fully require much more active bodily engagement and participation from the audience than for traditional art.

Moving through an installation also gives the opportunity to experience it from different locations and to see what it feels like in varying ways and through multiple senses to occupy a range of distinct physical spaces in the installation. Installation art therefore presents a number of opportunities to have a large set of experiences of different types, engaging with different elements at different locations within the same installation. Because installations by their large-scale nature tend to encourage bodily engagement, they frequently contain elements that invite touch from the participant. This could be climbing through structures, navigating unusual spaces, touching surfaces, perhaps interacting with some equipment that creates a certain effect. This open invitation to touch tends to have a liberating effect on participants, and is dramatically at odds with the constraining ‘no touching’ policies of traditional art. Bishop echoes this liberating effect where she states:

Many artists and critics have argued that this need to move around and through the work in order to experience it activates the viewer, in contrast to art that simply requires optical contemplation (which is considered to be passive and detached). This activation is, moreover, regarded as emancipatory (Bishop, 2005, p11).

Installations often present a complete environment constructed by the artist with the intent of creating for the audience an experience that is perceived as so different from our everyday reality that it stands out as memorable. This ‘highlight’ type of experience is what Dewey referred to as ‘an experience’ (Dewey 1934, p35). John Dewey was a philosopher, psychologist and educationalist who wrote extensively from the late 1800s through to the mid-20th century about the embodied roots of our experience of being in the world. For Dewey an experience is one that has a consistency of unifying experiential quality throughout its duration such that it is perceived as a significant experience that can be named – “that meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship” (Dewey 1934, p37). This unifying quality elaborated by Dewey is what people generally experience in an installation: they have multiple different types of sensory and emotional experiences throughout their period in the installation, yet the entire set of these experiences is perceived as a single experience (Bishop, 2005, p11).

Ann Hamilton’s *The Event of a Thread* (Fig. 1) provides a good illustration of all of the elements of an installation discussed above. The work was installed in the very spacious Wade Thompson Drill Hall in New York in 2012 and it comprised of many diverse elements, some of which were: a large white cloth suspended across the centre of a vast hall, forty-two swings



Fig. 1. Ann Hamilton (2012). *The Event of a Thread*. Installation view.

hung throughout the space, all interconnected through pulleys to the cloth, causing it to move when people used them (Hamilton, 2012, p7). Bellows and telephone bells were attached by ropes and activated by the swings. Two people read from scrolls, their voices transmitted live at low volume to radios in paper carrier bags (Fig. 2). that audience members could carry with them and listen to in the space (Hamilton, 2012, p7). There were also some performative elements which occurred at different times of the day.



Fig. 2. Ann Hamilton (2012). *The Event of a Thread*. Radio.

This installation thus provided multiple ways for the audience to experience it. The viewer could walk through the vast space encountering different elements of the installation, swing on the wide swings alone or with another person, listen to the ambient noise or the live recordings on the radio, relax on benches set against the long walls of the space, lie on the floor below the hanging cloth and watch it move in response to others on the swings. If a viewer was present at the end of the day, they could witness live vocalisations from a singer combining with the cooing of homing pigeons as they were released. This was a diverse multisensory experience, engaging participants across multiple levels.

Installations can also contain or may facilitate interactive elements, both with the art itself and with other participants, which is another way in which participants are physically and emotionally engaged with the work. This can be seen where artists talk about the importance of the presence of the participant as an essential part of the artwork, in order to activate or complete the installation (Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski, 2023, p3). This increased focus on the active physical participation in the work in a multitude of ways tends to increase the body-awareness of participants, and this factor may be “key for eliciting potentially “profound”, self-reflective, and transformative reactions to installation art” (Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski, 2023, p2, p5).

#### **1.4. Empirical Studies of Art and Installations**

Over the past twenty years, there have been many empirical studies made of our engagement with art and how this affects us emotionally and cognitively, giving us insight into the neurophysiological processes that underlie our responses (Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski, 2023, p1). However, the majority of these studies have looked only at visual 2D paintings as the aesthetic stimulus, despite the growing presence and popularity of installation art in the contemporary art world since the 1970s (Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski, 2023, p20). It is only within the last few years that empirical studies have focused on installation art, and explored the challenge of studying the wide variety of ways in which the body of the viewer/participant engages with and responds to the artwork.

A specific study was undertaken by Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski in 2023 to address this deficit of empirical information available about the body’s role in engaging with and responding to installation art. The study, titled ‘The role of the body in the experience of installation art: a case study of visitors’ bodily, emotional, and transformative experiences in



Tomás Saraceno's "in orbit" (Fig. 3), captured visitors' subjective experience both quantitatively and qualitatively. The installation comprised of a 2,500m<sup>2</sup> net, somewhat like a spider-web made of strong stainless-steel cable spread horizontally at a height of 25m over a gallery atrium. Visitors could enter it and climb through it to explore its different interconnected layers or just sit or lie down supported in space by the net (Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski, 2023, p8). The installation presented a physicalised experience to the audience, and through its construction and location allowed people to navigate through a space in an out-of-the-ordinary location that was previously empty and inaccessible.



Fig. 3. Tomás Saraceno (2013). *in orbit*. Düsseldorf K21 Ständhaus.

In their introduction to the study, Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski noted that "the body's role in art experience is only a now emerging topic in empirical aesthetics" (Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski, 2023, p2). This lack of empirical information could suggest that there is only limited information available within art history and theory to develop our understanding of the body's impact on the art experience of the individual. The study had a particular interest in discovering what the body's role might be in facilitating the profound and transformative effects individuals frequently report in response to installation art and to determine the extent

to which their findings correlated with art historical and theoretical arguments (Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski, 2023, p3, p18).

On leaving the installation, individuals who participated in the study were asked to rate their subjective bodily experience of the installation across 28 categories on a 7-point scale, where the categories related to awareness of body movements and positions (e.g. physical effort, breathing) as well as felt inner experiences (e.g. sensing gravity, disorientation) (Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski, 2023, p18). They were also asked to complete an open text box describing any bodily experiences they had and answer several other specific open-ended questions related to their experience (Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski, 2023, p10).

The responses from participants show a wide variety of embodied sensations and physical perceptions which provide insights into the actual experience of being in and moving through an installation. For example, under the category “New/heightened body experience” specific respondents recorded the following: “I felt aware of my body in a way I didn’t before.” and “intensified body sensation” (Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski, 2023, p17). Respondents to the category “Awareness of other visitors”, recorded the following observations:

“Noticing and feeling the movement of the other participants was interesting and influenced me in my approach from time to time.”; “You learn very quickly how to move and you notice from the vibrations when other people enter the net.” (Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski, 2023, p17).

The study is extensive and the detailed results analysis are nuanced in where they identify correlations between the participants’ physical experience of the art and certain cognitive states that specific experiences tend to produce. In particular, one specific result noted was the “key role of disruption within the process of transformation in art experience”, where transformation was especially likely to occur if participants experienced introduction to a new environment where their routines were interrupted (Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski, 2023, p18). The study also found that installations that interrupt us and provide an embodied experience beyond the ordinary tend to induce the “perspectival change that we value in art” (Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski, 2023, p18).



## **1.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced installation art and highlighted where it differs significantly in the audience's experience from traditional art. It has elaborated the many ways in which the physical, spatial and interactive elements of installation art lead to a greater level of embodied engagement in the audience. The consistency of unifying experiential quality and the intensity of response in the audience which highlight the installation as being memorable was linked to Dewey's concept of 'an experience' - a significant experience that can be named. The results of an empirical study of visitors' self-recorded bodily, emotional, and transformative experiences in response to a specific art installation were presented. The study's result that is most relevant to this research found that transformative experiences are especially likely to occur in participants who are introduced to a new environment which interrupts their routines.

## **Chapter 2 – Transformation Through Embodiment**

### **2.1. Introduction**

In this chapter the links between embodied experience, our sense of self and agency are examined. Olafur Eliasson's intention to provide embodied experiences through his installation art for his audience to enable personal and societal transformation is explored. An installation by Eliasson that I experienced is described as an example of the dramatic inner transformations that installation art can initiate. The resonances between the embodied engagement of Eliasson's art and the emerging field of somaesthetics are explored. The research will establish that installation art, by providing a unified embodied experience to us which stimulates us physically and emotionally, has great potential to transform our sense of self. The historical view of agency as being determined by rationality will be contrasted with the contemporary perspective, with insights from somaesthetics which emphasise its embodied roots. The centrality of the experiences of the body to Eliasson in his art is discussed and how his work seeks to redress the dominance that thinking has over somatic experiencing in our culture. The roots of this prioritisation of the mind over the experiences of the body and emotions are shown to emerge from Cartesian thinking. The importance to Eliasson of the non-verbal felt-meaning are examined, and how installation art provides us with opportunities to access this non-conceptual knowledge through physical and emotional encounters, providing us with opportunities for growth and the transformation of the self.

### **2.2. Installation Art – An Experience**

I attended the Olafur Eliasson retrospective exhibition 'In Real Life' in The Tate Modern London in September 2019. As an example of a transformational experience that installation art can instigate I will describe here my experience discovering one of the artworks in this exhibition. This is described in the manner in which it unfolded using the first-person present tense so that it becomes more visceral and immediate for the reader. It also serves as a description of the physical elements of the art work as they are gradually revealed.

At one point in the exhibition I pass through a doorway with heavy drapes into a totally dark room - so black that nothing can be seen. Suddenly, I am momentarily blinded by a bright flash of white light off to my left. As my eyes gradually readjust to the darkness, I proceed towards

the location of the flash. Another flash of light, and a white form is briefly illuminated in space, apparently hanging above a table. I arrive at the circular table, joining the other people there. At the next flash, a different irregular shape is illuminated in the same spot suspended above the centre of the table. I am completely at a loss to understand what this white object is. The bright flashes continue at regular intervals with about 15 seconds between them, and each time a different, amorphous shape is brilliantly illuminated. I am totally absorbed in watching this unknown phenomenon unfold and find myself mystified and in awe. O’Hare states that there are “biological mechanisms of embodiment that are triggered by this work. The sensation of the work is overwhelming - it is instantaneous – and penetrates our visual perception to its core” (O’Hare, 2023, p32), and many visitors record finding the experience mesmerizing (Choudhry, 2020). For over a minute, my brain can find no reference point to explain this ever-changing form, and all my other thinking processes are suspended while it tries to process something completely unfamiliar. Eventually, I realise that I am looking at a fountain shooting a thick jet of water a meter vertically into the air. The strobe illumination is essentially visually ‘freezing’ a dynamic form, filling the 3D shape of the tumbling torrent with light for an instant so I can briefly see it. I later discovered the artwork was titled *Big Bang Fountain* (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Olafur Eliasson (2014). *Big Bang Fountain*.

Several hours afterwards, I noticed that my emotional demeanour had completely changed - I felt positive and uplifted. I traced this change back to this extended period of mental discombobulation coupled with the eventual 'Aha!' moment when I finally understood what I was looking at. My lived daily experience afterwards changed from one of stress and depression - I was going through grieving my mother who had died earlier that year - to a vibrant openness to life and experiencing joy on a simple direct level, which could coexist with the intermittent heaviness of grief. I did not expect that experiencing just one art exhibition could effect such a profound transformation, nor was I expecting such a significant - and largely persistent - shift in my disposition that endured for many months afterwards. This transformative experience validates the empirical study result cited in Chapter 1, where being introduced to a new environment and experiencing disruption was noted as a key factor with a high likelihood of eliciting transformation through the art experience (Kühnapfel, Fingerhut and Pelowski, 2023, p18).

### **2.3. Art and Transformation**

What inner dynamics are at play within installation art? What are the elements of engaging with an art installation in the exterior world that contribute to a significant change in the interior felt life experience of a participant? To start to explore and understand what factors are involved, we can explore what Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson said in an interview about his exhibition entitled 'In Real Life':

When one leaves an exhibition like mine, I hope that it's not as if you had stepped into some kind of 'dream machine' and then you walk back out into reality. I really hope that you step closer to reality - you see things in higher granularity. (Jordahn, 2019)

Eliasson states that his intention with his art is to bring about a change of perception within the viewer/participant, whereby they become more connected with the world that surrounds them. Later in the same interview, in referring to the viewer as participator in the art, he expresses that he would like the viewer "To come out saying "Well, I'm an artist too. I went in and I produced my own reality. Reality is relative. I can change things." " (Jordahn, 2019). In this example we see Eliasson's installation art facilitating the viewer towards a realisation of their own agency in relation to the way in which reality is created and experienced in their lives. The idea of agency will be explored later in this chapter.



Eliasson elaborates his point of view further in an interview with Albrecht (Albrecht, 2023) about his 2023 exhibition ‘The curious desert’ in Doha, Qatar. This exhibition included twelve site-specific large-scale outdoor installations in the desert (Fig. 5):

I know that the scale of my works might make people think I am interested in creating spectacles but, for me, scale is rather a way to explore embodied experience. I'm interested in how we put our senses to use, in how we use our awareness.

I want these environments to invite viewers to be co-producers of their experiences, and to use more than just one sense to explore the artwork.

I have long questioned the idea that what is presented inside museums is a simple representation of the outside world. Rather, my artworks strive to be a continuation of the outside world; to embody transformation rather than stability and stasis. (Albrecht, 2023)



Fig. 5. Olafur Eliasson (2023). *The curious desert*. Exhibition view. Doha, Qatar.

These statements define the essence of what Eliasson is trying to achieve through his art. The experiences Eliasson creates impact participants so that they become more engaged and

resourced individuals in finding solutions to our modern-day challenges such as climate change and sustainable living. Thus for Eliasson the art object isn't just a thing to enjoy for its beauty or other aesthetic qualities. Instead it is art that has the effect of engaging with the participant across multiple senses and creating an affective link. This produces a deeper impact on the person through a strong felt-sense in their body, motivating them into a new state of action and has as its ultimate outcome the possibility of a global transformation in the sort of society we create.

The aim of generating social change situates Eliasson's art within the Social Practice movement – art that is concerned with issues in society at large and how we may address them. (The Art Story, no date). How art can contribute to social change is nicely summarised by Eliasson himself:

“Nowadays, art has great potential for changing the world and improving people's lives,” he explains. “Partly because it can nurture a degree of trust... And it can bring about not only the potential for feeling, but also for acting.” (The Art Story, no date).

#### **2.4. Somaesthetics and its impact on Meaning-making**

The approach that Eliasson uses in his art to create embodied experiences that bring about transformations in the viewer/participant such that they want “to turn thinking into doing in the world” (Shusterman, 2018, p59) has strong resonances with discoveries in the emerging field of somaesthetics. Somaesthetics is a term coined by American pragmatist philosopher Richard Shusterman in 1996. It is defined as “the critical study and meliorative cultivation of the body as the site of sensory appreciation (aesthesia) and creative self-fashioning” (Shusterman, 2018, p1). Reflecting its roots in pragmatic philosophy, somaesthetics integrates theory and practice. It aims to improve one's somatic experience – perception, affective capacity and experience, performance and body consciousness. (Shusterman, 2018, p2). The field of somaesthetics and its focus on investigating the body and emotions over the past quarter century is providing rich insight into how the interplay of body and emotions affect our experience of life and our sense of self. These insights go some way towards identifying the reasons why installation art tends to have a strong somatic impact on us.

Mark Johnson is an author and Professor of Liberal Arts and Sciences in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Oregon, and is very aware of how the body and emotions

contribute to meaning-making. Much of his writings and research explore this topic by drawing together research from the fields of cognitive science, pragmatic philosophy and the philosophy of art. For example, he has drawn on research in infant psychology “to show how the body generates meaning even before self-consciousness has fully developed.” (Johnson, 2007). The idea of developing meaning before self-consciousness has developed is an important point as it demonstrates the primacy of the body over the mind in generating meaning from our early physical experiences as sensing beings in the world, even before we had the conscious ability to think and speak. Johnson points out that contemporary cognitive science supports the view that “meaning is shaped by the nature of our bodies, especially our sensorimotor capacities and our ability to experience feelings and emotions.” (Elkins, 2012, p150). Thus meaning has been shown to be somatically based and something that we continuously create through our physical and emotional engagement with our surrounding environment. Art installations, by providing a stimulating immersive environment through which we physically navigate, can therefore affect us deeply through the meanings we generate for ourselves as we engage with and respond to the artwork.

In his essay ‘Identity, Bodily Meaning and Art’ Johnson explores how our sense of self can be strongly impacted by engaging with art (Roald and Lang, 2013, p15). To illustrate why, he draws on the work of Dewey along with neuroscience and cognitive philosophy developments over the last hundred years which have demonstrated that “the self that defines our personal identity is not a thing, but rather an ongoing experiential process” (Roald and Lang, 2013, p15). Our sense of self, rather than being fixed, can continually change in response to the environments we find ourselves in and how we respond to them. Dewey took a pragmatic and phenomenological view of the world, and his views on the body were significantly different from his contemporaries in that he argued that the self “develops in and through its organic biological and cultural engagement with its environment.” (Roald and Lang, 2013, p15). He argued that if we want to understand humans as humans, we cannot merely focus on separate systems in isolation such as the brain, the nervous system, motivations, etc.: “Instead, we need an explanatory framework that is capable of taking the continuous, dynamic interactions among these systems as the basic unit of analysis.” (Skorburg, 2013, p74). Dewey thus emphasised the importance of our experience of continuity in the world as being central to the self as an embodied process of meaning-making. (Roald and Lang, 2013, p20). This definition of our sense of self as being continually created through our lived experience means that our experiences have the potential to change our sense of self - who we perceive ourselves to be.

Because our experience of self is connected through our physical senses with our environment, “it can be dramatically influenced by art, which is a culmination of intensified, unified, and harmonized experience.” (Roald and Lang, 2013, p15). This intensification and unification of the experience presented to us is one of the hallmarks of installation art, which affords a deeper understanding of why encounters with installation art have the potential to transform our sense of self.

## **2.5. Art and its Impact on Agency**

Caldwell outlines how agency was traditionally viewed in philosophy and how this concept is not standing up to a more contemporary scrutiny. She refers to Meynell’s introduction to Dewey’s ‘Embodiment and Agency’, where Meynell notes that in the European philosophical tradition, a person’s agency was primarily identified with the rational capacity of the mind and linked with free will, decision-making and autonomy (Caldwell, 2012, p6). Caldwell disputes this traditional philosophical view of agency by referencing Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* in discussing the role of the body in generating meaning and how we navigate our way in the world by integrating these meanings (Caldwell, 2012, p30). She states:

In short, Merleau-Ponty describes ways in which the “I” of consciousness is largely not constituted by a mind interpreting stimuli and orchestrating thoughts, but of a body interacting with its world in ways most often taken for granted. (Caldwell, 2012, p30).

Caldwell thus challenges the traditional idea of agency in the individual as comprising of rational decisions which the individual makes to guide their autonomous behaviour. Instead she makes the argument that agency emerges through an embodied sense that has a felt, experiential quality – trusting in one’s sense of self and one’s abilities to engage with and respond appropriately to situations which arise as an active participant in the world. (Caldwell 2012, p6, p37).

Activating our agency as creators of our social reality is the aim of Eliasson’s work, and he achieves this activation by providing stimulating and novel embodied experiences through his installation art. The somatic effects of his art on his audience validate the theories of self, meaning-making and agency as being body-based.



## 2.6. Eliasson and the Importance of Embodiment

Art historian Bukdahl states: “Eliasson’s work seems to assert that contemporary art is activating more than the brain. It affects the entire body of the viewer.” (Shusterman, 2018, p60). Bukdahl goes on to elaborate that

Eliasson’s projects show a new and stimulating understanding of the body’s role in the arts, viewing it as a resource for working not only on the problems of creating and interpreting art but also on benefitting life and society more generally. (Shusterman, 2018, p61).

Bukdahl’s highlighting of Eliasson’s focus on the role of viewers’ body in his art underscores it as a very important component of his work, which emerges from his life experiences as a teenager. In his youth Eliasson was a breakdancer and “he considered breakdancing his first ever artwork” (Alderson, 2015). He credits the early experience of dancing and encountering the world through his body and movement with giving him a physical relationship with his environment that has stayed with him and caused him to make the viewer’s physical experience central to his work (Alderson, 2015). This influence of his early background with a strong appreciation of physicality is apparent through the work he makes which invites a physical response from the audience.

Eliasson is aware of Shusterman’s work on somaesthetics, as evidenced from his comment that he likes how Shusterman has combined the words soma and aesthetics, and stating that it reflects his own view of the body as well (Shusterman, 2018, p64). In the interview transcript, Eliasson himself emphasises the importance of the body to him, and expresses his amazement that the role of the body is very rarely discussed in the artworld, as vision is still the predominant lens through which critical and theoretical analysis is undertaken (Shusterman, 2018, p64). Considering his early experiences in breakdancing, it is easy to understand why the body is so important to Eliasson. His comment also implies that for many people an embodied experience is not their first point of reference, rather it is their mind’s interpretation of events that dominates their experience.

The dominance of thinking over somatic experiencing in our culture is of concern to Eliasson, and something he seeks to rectify directly through his engaging art installations. Eliasson expresses that in contemporary society, thinking about an experience has come to replace the **actual** experience, so that we mistake the description of an art experience as equivalent to

having the experience itself. (Shusterman, 2018, p64-65). That is to say that when this happens, we have disregarded or overlooked our immediate somatic experience which unfolds through time as we engage with the artwork, focusing instead on our thoughts *about* our experience. Eliasson states that art as experience is central to his work, emphasizing art's resourcefulness "in its ability to create a statement that by definition is not verbalizable, because if it were verbalized, it would be something else." (Shusterman, 2018, p68). He cautions how as artists we can tend to underestimate the incredible potential that this non-verbal communication through art represents, especially in our society that is obsessed with quantifiability (Shusterman, 2018, p68). Concluding the interview, Eliasson praises the primacy of the 'felt meaning' we experience in response to an artwork as being of much more value to us than just thinking about the experience:

A felt meaning is something we sense without the conceptual grid or architecture of words to attach to it. I believe there is great potential for art if we are daring enough to get hold of the felt meaning, without having to justify it in words in order to give it a place in society. (Shusterman, 2018, p69).

Through the varied somatic art experiences he creates, Eliasson demonstrates his dedication to the value of non-verbal communication by facilitating multiple opportunities for a visceral felt meaning to emerge in the audience. This non-verbal felt meaning precisely describes the experience I had with Eliasson's *Big Bang Fountain*, as described earlier in this chapter. The inexplicable situation I found myself in with no conceptual frame of reference to understand what I was seeing pushed me into having a direct unfiltered and very visceral experience with remarkable long-term effects in my life.

Knowing only through the cognitive mind is a legacy we have inherited from Cartesian thinking, where the mind was seen to exist completely independently from the body. The body, which was perceived merely as the physical vehicle whose function was only to house the mind, was consequently seen as being of much less interest than the mind, and was largely ignored as being worthy of investigation. So since Descartes's time science and philosophy have, in the main, continued along a path of focusing their enquiries on the mind rather than the body. Johnson elaborates on this view of distrust of the body in mainstream Western epistemology (Elkins, 2012, p150). Johnson argues that because emotions were historically perceived as noncognitive it was assumed that they could not contribute to our understanding of the world (Elkins, 2012, p150). That is to say that emotions had no place in analytical

science, which focused on the conceptual/propositional as the only relevant means of knowing (Elkins, 2012, p150).

This historic prioritisation of the mind over the body and emotions has filtered into our culture and has had the impact of defining knowledge as primarily being limited to conceptual knowing. We see this in how society has given prominence to knowing all *about* things, as in, amassing ever-increasing facts and information in your brain about an object, such as an art object. This intellectual way of knowing something through collecting information about it that can then be described to others is the way most people are familiar with. Understanding somatic experiences as representing a different kind of knowing can therefore be difficult for the majority of people living in the western world because of our conditioned cultural bias towards conceptual knowledge.

But there are other ways of knowing which do *not* involve having a consensus-reality store of ‘objective’ information at hand to which we can conveniently refer and claim as inviolable. Instead, these other forms of knowing arise directly from our non-verbal embodied experience – the immediate sensory impact on the body; how the felt senses respond; experiencing something directly across multiple senses without being able to name it; even the ability to be thrown out of any frames of reference by the sheer *unknown-ness* of some experience we encounter. It is these other forms of knowing that can be a rich source of learning and re-orientation. Through these more embodied ways of knowing we re-form our view of the world, how we perceive ourselves in it and how we wish to navigate our life through it.

These direct forms of encounter with the world, knowing through our own immediate visceral experience are what installation art aims to deliver. Installation art provides us with a myriad of opportunities to experience and gain non-conceptual knowledge through intensified physical and emotional encounters. As elaborated in the more contemporary theories of self and agency discussed earlier, this embodied knowledge provides us with opportunities for growth and the transformation of the self.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

This chapter has presented research which supports the view that meaning-making and our sense of self are deeply rooted in our embodied experiences, emotions and surrounding environment. An Eliasson installation I visited was described to give a visceral sense of the

intensity and strangeness of the experience and the personal transformations that can arise as a result. Eliasson's intention to enable personal and societal transformation through his installation art for his audience was explored through the lens of the embodied experiences he creates to enable their sense of agency in their lives. Transformation through embodied engagement in Eliasson's art was linked to research in the emerging field of somaesthetics, which validates his somatic approach. The contemporary view of agency which emphasises its somatic foundation in the individual as an active participant in the world which can therefore be influenced by somatic experiences was contrasted with the historical view of agency as being influenced by rationality. The centrality of the experiences of the body and the importance to Eliasson of the non-verbal felt-meaning in his art were examined, and how his work emphasises somatic experiencing over thinking for the audience. Installation art was shown to present opportunities for growth and the transformation of the self through providing a somatically engaging environment for its audience which facilitates access to non-conceptual knowledge.

## Chapter 3 – Perception and Reality

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the idea that the ‘site’ being investigated through an installation artwork may be the interior world of the audience. The participants’ encounters with each other through engaging with the installation is examined as an essential element in the realisation of Eliasson’s work. James Turrell’s work is introduced as having an intentional resonance with Eliasson’s, and the influence of Turrell’s installation art on the embodied act of perceiving is discussed. Roden Crater, Turrell’s monumental work in the Arizona desert is explored through a participant’s experience. Through bringing attention to our perception in his art Turrell reveals how we create reality and how this is deeply linked to our somatic experiences.

### 3.2 Site as the Interior World of the Audience

Installation art, because it is usually created at large scale, by its nature tended to be site-specific. However, for contemporary installations the physical location in which the art is situated rarely serves as the only focus of installations. Site-orientated art practice has changed over time such that the primary site of interest for the artist has shifted away from the physical location of the work and into their conceptual area of investigation (e.g. social, environmental, transformational) (Kwon, 1997, p90-91). Kwon is a curator and dean of UCLA’s Art History Department whose work focuses on contemporary art, land art and site-specific art (Academic Accelerator, no date). Kwon elaborates how site-orientated art has undergone a non-linear journey of development since its emergence in the late 1960s (Kwon, 1997, p93, p95, p103). In particular she notes that through this journey the possible meanings of ‘site’ have changed and expanded, to become “informed by a broader range of disciplines (i.e., anthropology, sociology [...] psychology...)” and evolved to include the context of site as being defined by the artist’s interests (Kwon, 1997, p92).

Eliasson’s installation *The Weather Project* (Fig. 6) in the Tate Modern in 2003 provides a good example of an installation artwork where ‘site’ can be interpreted to work at multiple levels, including the interior world of the audience and their encounters with each other. For *The Weather Project*, the entire ceiling was tiled with mirrors to reflect the hall below when viewed from the ground, giving the impression of doubling the space in the Turbine Hall.

Artificial mist was introduced into the room and one end of the hall had 200 yellow mono-frequency lights secured to the wall to create a glowing semi-circle. The lights reflected in the mirrored ceiling above created the illusion of a massive indoor sunset. Eliasson has stated in interviews that the participants' encounters with each other through engaging with his works are an essential element in the realisation of the work, to the extent that it is not even important to him whether they know or care about the theoretical elements behind his work (Alderson, 2015).



Fig. 6. Olafur Eliasson (2003). *The Weather Project*. Tate Modern Turbine Hall.

By making this statement Eliasson prioritises his interest in generating quite specific affective and emotive participant responses over their engagement with the conceptual elements present in the work. Eliasson's statement emphasising affect over concept is further supported by the fact that his works have their physical means of execution present and available as part of the installation for participants to view if they wish to deconstruct the 'mystery' presented (Cooke, 2003). For example, in *The Weather Project*, it is possible to access the higher floor in the gallery and walk behind the 'sun' and look behind the 'sky' (Cooke, 2003). The importance of the presence of the audience in completing the artwork is further emphasised in Eliasson's approach to the photographic documentation of his exhibition (Jiang, 2023). Along with the artwork, Eliasson always includes in the photographic frame visitors to the gallery, contrary to most artists who exclude the audience and focus only on documenting their artwork on its own (Jiang, 2023).

In his review of *The Weather Project* Jonathan Jones comments on the transformations of human social behaviour he observed in the gallery-going public's response to the immersive artwork (Jones, 2003). A convivial, communal atmosphere developed as barriers between people dissolved. Strangers even started to interact and connect, aligning their bodies together on the ground to spell out anti-war slogans and make peace sign shapes, guided by their reflections far above them in the mirrored ceiling (Jones, 2003). This high level of social interaction observed by Jones demonstrates Eliasson's effectiveness at creating an increased sense of trust between audience members through his art. This increased trust gave rise to a greater sense of openness and comfort level between participants than would usually be the case in social situations in London. The experience of being in this installation thus broke down barriers between people and gave them an expanded sense of self so that they felt they had permission to reach out and co-operate together. This is social transformation in action – the sense of agency has been activated in participants through their somatic experience.

Jones also observes that the immense scale of the work had "... a dreamlike effect, collapsing the distinction between inside and outside." (Jones, 2003). He continues in his review to explore the focus of contemporary installation art:

Art, it seems, is turning increasingly into this kind of spiritual mass event. Something really is happening here... [...] Perhaps art at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is more about the public than the artist. [...] The atmosphere as people lie on the floor shaping themselves into a reverse G2 borders on reverent. (Jones, 2003).

Jones' allusion to 'a spiritual mass event' demonstrates the extent to which art installations can have a profound effect on people. This shows how many of the specifics of installation art outlined earlier can work together to remarkable effect, particularly in Eliasson's case with his strong focus on the audience experience. Jones' comment about the art at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century being more about the public than the artist highlights what installation art can achieve because of its emphasis on the participant's experience. Through its multisensory nature and deep bodily and emotional engagement installation art is much more focused on impacting its audience with a view towards transforming society than on bringing attention to the skills of the artist as a creator. Through the creation of his multisensory installation Eliasson appears to have caught the contemporary zeitgeist for an embodied, engaging and socially interactive experience that bordered on the numinous. The public came out in droves to participate in this artwork, making it the most successful ever in the Tate, with an estimated two million coming to see it (Alderson, 2015).

*The Weather Project* (Fig. 6) can be read on multiple levels, as outlined here below. The installation works as a site-specific piece in the traditional physical sense of utilising and being responsive to its location by relating its constituent parts to the large space and previous use of the turbine hall. The creation of an internal weather system with both an artificial sun and a mist generating system in a former power station raises issues around energy, the environment and sustainability, which are key themes in Eliasson's work. Through its overwhelming scale and sensory engagement on multiple levels *The Weather Project* has the effect of making us more aware of our own experience in the present and the relationship we have with the physical world we inhabit. Rachel Cooke, writing about Eliasson's work and her gallery experience in her review of *The Weather Project* notes:

He describes his work as 'devices for the experience of reality'. By introducing natural phenomena - water, mist, light - into an unexpected setting, he invites us to reflect on our perception of the physical world. He refers to this moment, when you pause to consider what you are experiencing, as 'seeing yourself seeing'. (Cooke, 2003)

On another level, the numinous quality of the responses it engenders in participants indicates that the true intended "site" of artistic investigation and intervention is actually the phenomenological world of the participants.



### 3.3 Playing With Perception

Heightened awareness of audience perception of the physical world, this ‘seeing yourself seeing’ that Cooke refers to above has strong resonances with James Turrell’s work. Turrell is an American artist whose work centers around the use of both natural and artificial light and space and how these are perceived. He studied perceptual psychology and this is evident in the intention of his work and in the way he uses both light and space in his art to create mesmerizing experiences that have palpable physical effects in his audience. He is perhaps best known for the many ‘Skyspaces’ (Fig. 7) he has created in locations all over the world. These are specially built rooms with an aperture in the ceiling opening directly to the sky, and seating around the inside edge so that visitors can sit back, relax and observe the sky.

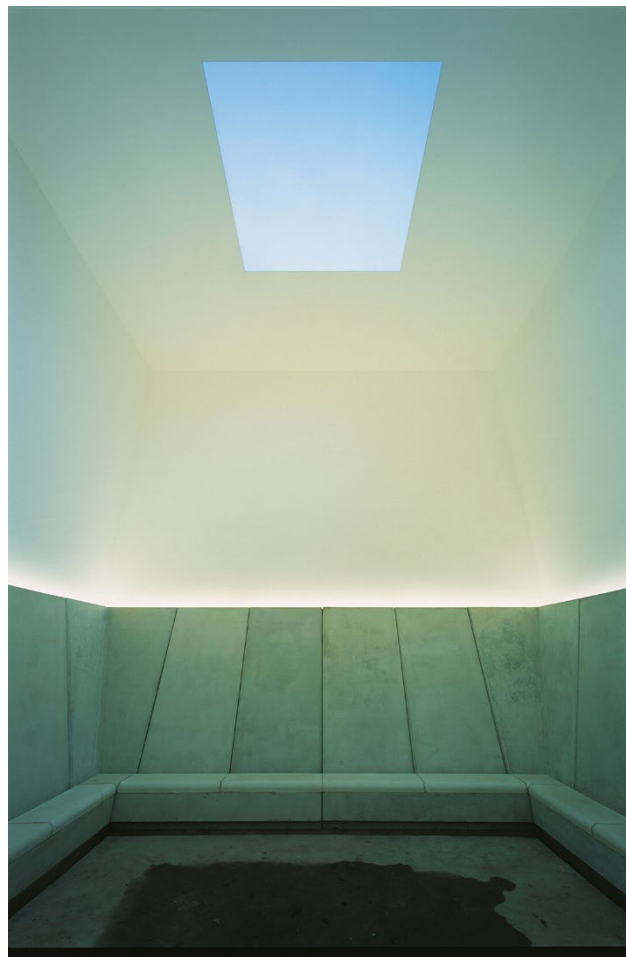


Fig. 7. James Turrell (2006). *Deer Shelter Skyspace*. Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

As shown in figure 7, the Skyspaces frequently include recessed illumination on the walls and ceiling which frame the open space to the sky. This ambient lighting which may gradually

change colour – depending on the specific Skyscape in question - has the effect of radically changing the appearance of the sky, making it seem closer and even physical, almost as if you could reach out your hand and touch it. In his visit to Turrell’s Arizona ranch Paul Trachtman interviews the artist for the Smithsonian Magazine, where Turrell expounds on how he uses light and what the purpose of his skillful manipulation of it is:

“I like to use light as a material,” he explains, “but my medium is really perception. I want you to sense yourself sensing. To see yourself seeing. To be aware of how you are forming the reality you see.” (Trachtman, 2003)

Here again we encounter an artist whose site of investigation is really the interior world of his audience, as similar to Eliasson he uses his art to make the audience aware of how they are creating their own reality. The importance to Turrell of the embodied experience of his audience is evident in his use of the term ‘to sense yourself sensing’.

Roden Crater (Fig. 8) is Turrell’s enormous work-in-progress (ongoing since the late 1970s) - a monumental installation situated on his desert ranch in Arizona inside an extinct volcano.



Fig. 8. James Turrell (2013). *Roden Crater*.

Roden Crater itself is a mile in diameter at its base and 700 ft high (Trachtman, 2003). When completed it will have twenty-four viewing spaces from which to view the desert sky (Roden Crater, 2024). It has been precisely constructed to take account of its orientation to the cosmos and the paths of the sun and the moon on their journey through the skies (Faller, 2019). Combining input from multiple disciplines to realise its construction, “Turrell’s work at Roden Crater is a fusion of art, engineering, astronomy, architecture and neuroscience” (Faller, 2019).

Trachtman experiences for himself how viewing conditions can cause a dramatic change in his perception of the sky. Sitting inside a viewing room Trachtman watches the fading sky through the aperture as sunset approaches. The observed sky changes dramatically over the next half hour through an array of colours, eventually resolving into what has the appearance of a solid, physical black “sitting like an obsidian slab on the ceiling of the room.” (Trachtman, 2003). Turrell asks him to go outside again and view the sky in its entirety. Doing so, Trachtman is amazed to find that the sky looks totally different - “glowing twilight blue of lapis lazuli”- in contrast to the solid black appearance it had when viewed from inside the room (Trachtman, 2003). Turrell tells Trachtman that he has created the lighting in the room to interact with the light of the sky at sunset in a way that alters how it is perceived when viewed from inside (Trachtman, 2003). Turrell elaborates further:

“We’re not very aware of how we create reality,” he says. “My work is just a gentle reminder that we’re making this world, that we shape it, literally, we color it, literally. We give the sky its color; it isn’t something that is just received.” (Trachtman, 2003).

Trachtman’s experience demonstrates Turrell’s effectiveness is using his expert knowledge of human perception to manipulate our experiences to his desired effect. As Turrell states, his purpose however is not to deceive, but to make us aware that what we perceive is perhaps not as objective as we tend to think. The manner in which our senses respond to the conditions in our surrounding environment in ways that we are usually not aware of also contributes to what we experience.

At another point in their tour of Roden Crater, Trachtman and Turrell walk through a 900ft long tunnel observing a circular aperture to the sky ahead of them (Fig. 9) increase in size as they approach it (Trachtman, 2003). Trachtman is surprised as they near the end of the tunnel to see the circular aperture slowly change shape into an ellipse as he gets closer (Fig. 10), finding the change in shape inexplicable (Trachtman, 2003). Turrell reassures him, explaining that it’s just a consequence of the geometry of the viewing angle changing as they get closer

and states: “It’s one thing to know the math ... but I want you to feel the shape change as a real, physical experience.” (Trachtman, 2003).

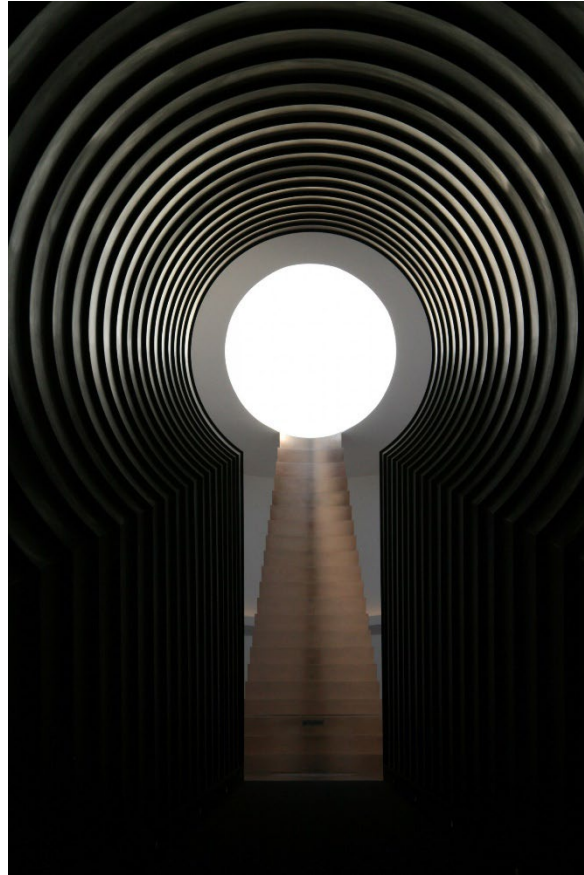


Fig. 9. – James Turrell (2003), *Roden Crater –East Portal, distant view through tunnel.*

Through Turrell’s explanation to Trachtman we see the artist’s emphasis on the phenomenology and centrality of the body in experiencing his art in contrast to the Cartesian, conceptual knowledge of the maths involved. To accurately construct the tunnel to achieve the desired visual effect in the artwork as it is approached, the artist must use the cognitive logical tool of maths. However, experiencing the change viscerally through your body and emotions is the aim of the artwork, and is a direct responsive experience that does not require of the participant any cognitive knowledge of maths at all.



Fig. 10. – James Turrell (2003), *Roden Crater - East Portal, closer view*.

In another of his large works with light, *Perfectly Clear (Ganzfeld)* (Fig. 11), Turrell creates an immersive environment where the participants are completely surrounded by a uniform colour field<sup>1</sup>. This can give rise to the Ganzfeld Effect - a perceptual phenomenon that occurs when your entire field of vision becomes totally featureless (Langner, 2021). This situation almost never occurs in reality - other than possibly in a snowstorm or extremely thick fog - as we are always surrounded by objects that we can perceive at various distances, and these help us to orient ourselves and determine our relative position in space. However, when confronted with a uniform and featureless field of view and deprived of all visual cues for depth perception and distance, our brain experiences sensory confusion and within a few minutes may experience an altered state of consciousness or try to fill the sensory gap with visual and/or

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<sup>1</sup> Ganzfeld is a German word which translates as 'whole field'



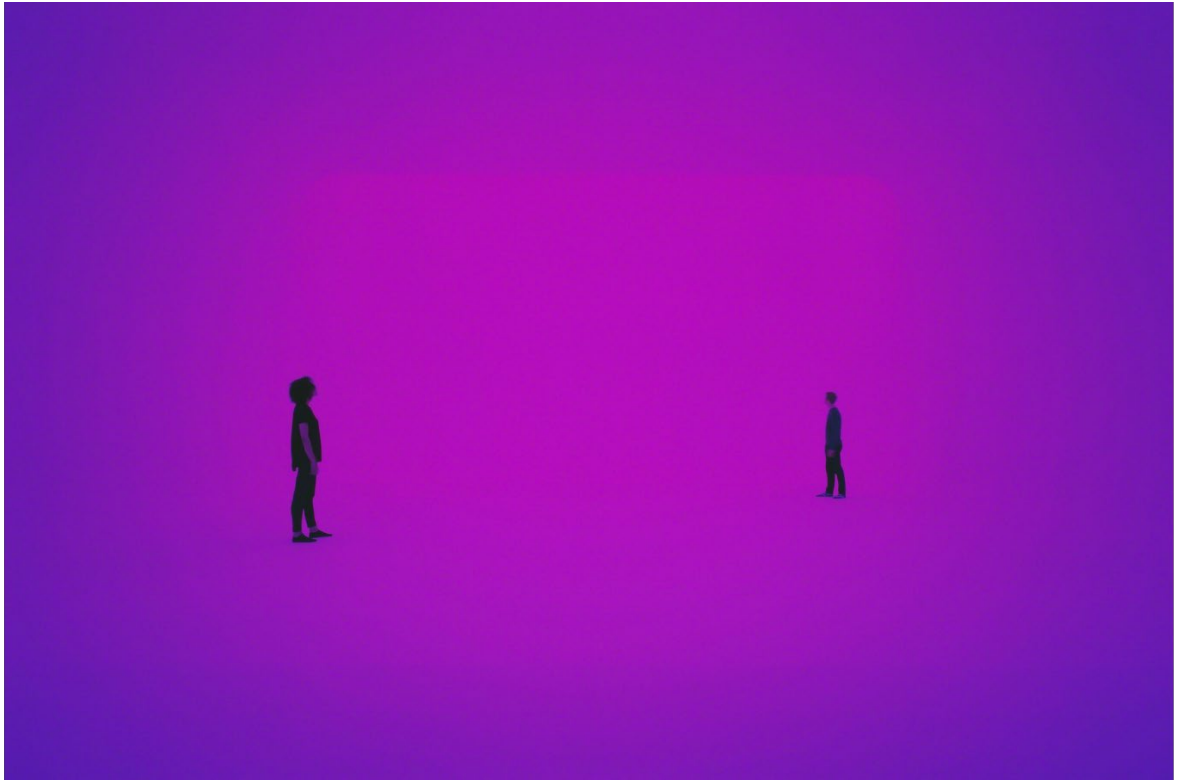


Fig. 11. James Turrell (1991). *Perfectly Clear (Ganzfeld)*.

auditory hallucinations (Brennan, 2021). In a review of Turrell's *Perfectly Clear (Ganzfeld)*, Bennett notes that "Turrell describes light within the ganzfeld as a thing of substance that participants often reach out to "try to touch." " (Bennett, 2019, p2). This evidences what Turrell has often spoken about, that light is a physical substance, and under the right conditions we can experience it as such.

Turrell is quoted later in the article emphasising that it is through the body and the emotions that he wishes his work to be experienced, rather than being appreciated for the technical proficiency of its execution:

In a 2013 interview with PBS journalist and talk show host Charlie Rose, Turrell described the effects of his artworks as "the joy of sensing, which is, the sensual", and lamented the trend to focus on the technical, rather than the emotional and physical experience of his work. (Bennett, 2019, p5).

Turrell's emphasis on the primacy of the body and emotions in experiencing his work, as opposed to appreciating its technical elements echoes Eliasson's views on his own work.

Comparing both Turrell's and Eliasson's approach to making art and what they direct their intention in their art towards, we can see that these two artists have many overlapping similarities in their practices. They both put the embodied experience of the participant at the centre of their work, and create visceral experiences for the participant so that they become more aware of their immediate environment. Through the medium of your sensory experience rather than your conceptual mind, both artists want to awaken you to the awareness that you create your reality through your embodied perceptions, and because of this you have agency to change that reality.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed how the meaning of 'site' has evolved since installation art originated to the point now where the site being investigated is defined by the artist's interests and may include the interior world of the audience. This expanded idea of site was explored in the context of Eliasson's *The Weather Project*, along with Eliasson's emphasis on the participants' encounters with each other as essential to the realisation of the work. The high level of interaction observed in the audience was attributed to Eliasson's effectiveness at using engaging embodied experiences in this installation to create affective encounters between participants which transformed their social behaviour. The idea that contemporary art is more about the public than the artist was evidenced by Eliasson's dedication to making the audience experience central to his work, so that his art can even facilitate a spiritual experience for the participants. James Turrell's work was introduced and explored as the intention in his art is similar to Eliasson's – to create installations which make the audience aware of the embodied experience of perceiving and how their perception contributes to the reality they experience. Turrell's monumental work in the Arizona desert, Roden Crater, was discussed through a participant's experience, and illustrates Turrell's use of both light and space in his art to create palpable physical experiences. These somatic experiences were linked to the phenomenology and centrality of the body in experiencing art rather than to a cognitive understanding. This chapter finished by underscoring the parallels between Eliasson's and Turrell's work, which emphasise the importance of your embodied perceptions in creating your reality.

## Conclusion

This thesis has explored installation art from the perspective of the transformative somatic impact that it can have on the audience. The research has reviewed what installation art is and has explored the ways in which it differs from traditional art. The research has discussed how these differences and the differences in viewing installation art create a more intense, embodied response in participants and how this contributes to the impact of installation art. An empirical study of a specific installation and the audience response has been presented which has been shown to validate art and philosophy theories of the importance of the role of the body in responding to art. A key finding of the study was the role that disruption plays within the process of transformation in art experience.

The research examined intention in Olafur Eliasson's art, with its emphasis on embodied experience for participants to enable personal and societal transformation. Somaesthetics was introduced and some of its key theories explored for their relevance in supporting the idea that installation art, by providing a unified experience to us with deep embodied engagement, can transform our sense of self. Agency was examined and shown to emerge from interactions between the body, emotions and surrounding environment rather than being identified with decisions of the rational mind, as it was traditionally assumed in Cartesian-based European philosophy. The centrality of the body in Eliasson's work was used to show how he seeks to redress the legacy of dominance that thinking has had over somatic experiencing in our culture. Discussing non-verbal felt-meaning and its importance to Eliasson for personal growth and transformation led to showing that we can access non-conceptual knowledge through the physical and emotional encounters that installation art provides.

Site as the interior world of the audience was investigated with reference to Eliasson's art installation *The Weather Project*, and the importance to him of the participants' encounters with each other as an essential element in the realisation of the work. The level of trust Eliasson creates in the audience was shown to facilitate the high level of social interaction observed in the public's response. It was noted that Eliasson putting the audience experience central to his work helped elevate it to the level of a spiritual experience for the participants. James Turrell's work was introduced as being thematically similar to Eliasson's, in that his art is concerned with making us aware of the embodied act of perceiving. Turrell's monumental work in the Arizona desert, Roden Crater - a fusion of art, engineering, astronomy, architecture and neuroscience - was explored to elaborate the somatic intentions in his art through a participant's



experience of some of the viewing spaces it incorporates. The intent in Turrell's work is shown to be similar to Eliasson's in drawing our attention to how we create reality and how this is deeply linked to our somatic experiences.

In conclusion this thesis has examined the contributing factors in effect within installation art that create profound transformative experiences in the audience.

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