

Positions through Iterating

Through my initial experiments I was focusing on body language, facial expressions and the beauty of ambiguity in representing emotion. As I developed my iterations and broadened my research, my focus shifted to hands specifically. While working on this brief I've discovered a genuine interest in unconscious behaviour and the "unsaid" things that humans encode in these forms of body language. By analysing and researching human behaviour, I would like to explore the relationship between involuntary hand movements as a form of nonverbal communication and anxiety while considering the external factors that might be provoking them and why.

Annotated Bibliography:

1. *The Age of Insight: The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in art, mind and brain from Vienna 1900 to the present*. Eric R. Kandel. (Chapter 20)

In his book, Kandel talks about the artistic depiction of emotion through the face, hands, body and color. He makes references to scientists like Darwin and Ekman who emphasised how hand movements and gestures are as packed with social information as facial expressions.

I found this chapter of the book particularly relevant as it gives examples of artists that were keen on using the hands and body to provide additional information and insight about the subject's emotional state to the observer, something crucial in my practice.

My aim for this project is to convey emotional complexity through the body. In my previous work, I attempted to describe/illustrate emotion with a single static image or facial expression. I failed. This time my focus is on body language. Specifically hands, as they are carriers of significant information. Having said that, I was especially interested in Kandel's comments on Kokoschka's portrayal of hands. In his words, "In this family portrait he does not depict the parents' faces, instead he conveys their love for their infant child exclusively through their hands". He uses the hands as a symbolic substitute for the face and eyes in social communication.

2. Paul Ekman Group. 2022. Dr. Paul Ekman. [online] Available at: <<https://www.paulekman.com/about/paul-ekman/>> [Accessed 7 May 2022].

To fully comprehend what I was dealing with I used Paul Ekman's research on facial expression and body movements. Ekman states there are seven universal facial expressions that are innate: anger, disgust, happiness, sadness, fear, surprise and contempt. Nevertheless, feelings usually come in a package. No one is only feeling one emotion, it is usually a combination of many, which explains why I had difficulty portraying emotional complexity with a single expression in my previous work. Ekman's practice lead him to discover what he called micro expressions. These occur within a fraction of a second and consist of an involuntary emotional leakage. Essentially, people try to control and suppress emotions most of the time as we've been taught when, how and to whom it is appropriate to show our emotions to. So, to truly understand a person's emotional state one must pay close attention to these micro expressions and forms of non verbal behaviour. Ekman's understanding and explanation of non-verbal communication was crucial for my own practice as I will be focusing on the involuntary and unconscious forms of communication and how these relate to emotion.

3. Reinecke, K., Dvoretzka, D., Joraschky, P. and Lausberg, H., 2020. Fidgeting Behavior During Psychotherapy: Hand Movement Structure Contains Information About Depressive Symptoms. [ebook] *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*. Available at: <<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10879-020-09465-5.pdf>> [Accessed 7 May 2022].

After my initial iterations I decided to put my focus specifically on hands and what they transmit as vehicles for non verbal communication. The reason behind this decision was quite personal as someone that suffers from anxiety and tends to unconsciously engage in stress related actions that involve my hands like fidgeting, nail biting, cracking fingers, scratching, etc. My idea being to observe these kinds of behaviours in myself and others and understand the reason behind them. This paper talks about two types of fidgeting: repetitive movements and irregular movements. The first being movements that encompass a specific trajectory and the hands move repeatedly back

and forth. Usually it is about comfort, coping with stressful situations and self-regulation. However, irregular movements are unstructured and happen by themselves, like small uneven movements by one finger. They are associated with self-regulatory functions while speaking, cognitive stress, social anxiety disorder (SAD) and depression. This study gives me a better understanding of the origin of these movements as how to categorise them by what they are and what they might represent. Once again, it's all about unconscious non verbal communication which I'm trying to break down.

4. Blauvelt, A. Maurer, L. Paulus, J. Pucker, J. And Wouters, R. (2013) Conditional Design Workbook. Amsterdam: Valiz.

I thought the Conditional Design manifesto was relevant to my work as it refers to artists conducting activities using the methods of philosophers, scientists, etc.

We live in a world that is known for its constant change where new forms of human interaction, social contexts and communication surge continuously but we can use prior methods of study and guide our practice and broaden our understanding. As artists, we should adapt and try to comprehend our surroundings so we can portray the complexity of our reality. Show the *good* and the *bad*, not always trying to solve a problem but focusing on embracing and understanding what surrounds us. I was particularly interested in the text's definition of Behaviour, as it refers to a person's unpredicted character being expressed, which I think goes hand in hand with my research, as well as the definition of Complexity which I considered relevant as it mentions the unpredictability and richness in variety. I've been trying to portray emotional complexity and it being described as unpredicted and rich in variety only confirms what I thought and helps me understand why I had to redirect and broaden the focus of my investigation to be able to fully understand emotional complexity.

5. William Kentridge: Pain & Sympathy [video] Published by Art21 "Extended Play". <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1oK5LMJ3zY>
<https://harvardfilmarchive.org/programs/the-animated-films-of-william-kentridge>

I took Kentridge's work as inspiration for the first part of this project where like him, I was creating frame by frame animations from drawings. His animation work shows fictional characters he created to relate to his narratives but he is mostly known for his very expressive, gestural drawings in black charcoal and ink with few colour accents. I found his work very relevant to mine as he glorifies facial expressions and hand gestures. The pace of the animations are quite slow and have an analogue, hand-made character that I very much enjoy and include in my work.

6. Perec, G., ([1974] 1999). Species of Spaces and Other Pieces. London: Penguin

In this project I've found myself following Perec's approach by carrying out "practical exercises", more specifically those that involve observation. At first I had to pay close attention to facial expressions in order to create a smooth transition and the illusion of movement in my animations. Later on, when the focus of my project switched to hands, I did the same but this time observing third parties to collect information and record unconscious hand movements. I would like to find and record these unexpected moments while considering the surroundings, analysing the body language of the subjects, the factors that might be provoking these forms of behaviour and how they relate to anxiety.