



Duncan of Jordanstone  
College of Art & Design  
University of Dundee

# KATIE MIDDLETON

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The Embodying Connections of Interactive Art

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Fine Art

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# **The Embodying Connections of Interactive Art**

**By  
Katie Middleton**



Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design

University of Dundee

2025/26

## **Positionality Statement**

Through the eye of a multidisciplinary artist and spiritualist, dabbling in installation art, connection has become a key element in my studio practice and life, providing both energy and purpose. I have been immersed in spiritual practices from a young age, I take part in regular meditation and yoga practice, and I am trained in Reiki. Ultimately, this has strengthened my connection to the world, other people and myself. Another key retribute, was the experience of solo travelling, in the genuine interactions with a multitude of people. The mundane activities of life are brightened by the interactivity of the world and beings in it. I attempt to garner this concept within my dissertation and studio practice, as well as having an openness to connect with anyone in my everyday life too. This in turn, gave further insight to the need for connection, curiosity and interaction in society.

## **Abstract**

The fundamental need for connection, is not specific to civilisation, as it stretches to the intermodal relationship of the world. This is evident in the interactions of the mundane every day, and the unity of humankind through difficult periods, such as war. The emotional provocation, expression and freedom of speech channelled into art, serves as a critical talking point, and a catalyst to change. Art in many forms is a medium to connect with individuality, community, history and society. This serves not just the artist, but the viewer too, as they are allowed access to the artists perceptions and beliefs. Despite all art obtaining the power to connect on a metalevel, this dissertation's specific focus on 'interactive art', identifies it as a prevalent movement for connection. This led the discussion of the dissertation; interactive art's evolution, and how it creates this social cohesion and connection within society.

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## Glossary

Avant Garde - ‘As applied to art, Avante Garde means art that is innovatory, introduction or exploring new forms or subject matter’ (Tate, 2025).

Catharsis- ‘the process of releasing strong emotions through a particular activity or experience, such as writing or theatre, in a way that helps you to understand those emotions’ (Cambridge Dictionary, no date).

Chanteuse- ‘a female singer, especially one who sings on the stage in a bar’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025).

Dramaturg – ‘an expert in the art or theory of writing and putting on plays who edits or advises on a play or film script, especially for a particular theatre or series of performances’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025).

Metacommunication- ‘*n.* auxiliary or covert messages, usually conveyed in the form of subtle gestures, movements, and facial expressions, about the procedural aspects or the dynamics (rather than the actual content) of communication between two or more parties.’ (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, 2018).

Pedagogy- ‘the study of the methods and activities of teaching’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019).

Phenomenological- ‘Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object. An experience is directed toward an object by virtue of its content or meaning (which represents the object) together with appropriate enabling conditions’ (Smith, 2013).

Somaesthetic- ‘relating to or involving the sensory perception of bodily feelings, such as touch, pain, or the position of the limbs’ (Collins dictionary, 2025)

## Introduction

Do you feel connected to the world? People? Your body? Senses? Emotions? How do we define this embodiment of Connection? It is categorised as the state of being related to someone or something (Cambridge, 2023). And how does this idea of connection correlate to art? Connection appears through the communication of an artist's creative expression, themes and relatability. The artist seeks your curiosity; by allowing you inside their thoughts, feelings and experiences. This is not limited to the visual experience, it stretches to the physical experience of the body, through interactive art. What is interactive art? 'Interactive art describes art that relies on the participation of a spectator' (Tate, 2017). This form of art has had a place in many sectors of society; through performance, installation and digital art. How did interactive art begin? The medium of interactive art has been assiduously in and out of emergence throughout history. The quest for identity and community has been channelled through artistic expression since the Palaeolithic age, with cave paintings. However, in the lens of interactive art, this influence on an unbounded and engaged approach, first appears in Minoan ritual dance.

This dissertation aims to investigate how interactive art 'breaks the fourth wall' in the relationship between the audience, art and artist. This movement produces vast opportunity and accessibility for connection, through the communal and individual experience of interactive art. The necessity for civilisation to network and express themselves is essential, for evolution and change. The attributive role of interactive art allows the joint power of experience and connection, to gather an understanding of oneself, life and the world. This notion of life and art comes hand in hand and is questioned by philosophers and those alike.

In the first chapter, *Beginning*, I explore the origins of interactive art with the basis of Bronze Age Minoan ritual dances, and Ancient Greek theatre. The discussion reflects on expression and communication, through the outlook of both the individual and communal experience.

In the second chapter, *Emergence*, I look at the emergence of radicalisation and revolutionary uplift of society, and interactive art during the first world war. Through the preliminary birth of the avant garde movement Dadaism, with its origins of 'Cabaret Voltaire'.

In the third chapter, *Transformation*, I will investigate the transformational and innovative qualities of the fifties and sixties. In the retrospect of the post war re-evaluation of art's purpose and experience. In which the focus of art shifted to immerse the viewer through audience participation, representation and social change.

In the fourth chapter, *Principal*, I look at interactive art in its totality and bring together the consensus of its impact, on communities and the art world.

This dissertation concludes, producing the notion that the relationship of art and life, works cohesively to build connection. This is seen through the examples in the timeline of interactive art.

## Beginning

### 1.1: A Primitive influence of ‘Interactive Art’: The Pre-Greek Minoan Ritual Dances

The pre-Greek Bronze Age Minoan ritual dances, were a primitive inspiration in the evolution of interactive art. This notion, does not categorise the ritual dances as having the intention to be art, or to be perceived as the earliest form of interactive art. However, it does influence the perception and experience of art, through participation and community. The Minoan civilisation from the island of Crete had a rich collection of rituals, involving revered locations of sacred trees, altars and shrines. Often people gathered in the locations, taking part in hymns and dance, each with their own meaning and style (Mandalaki-Spanou, 2018). The interaction between the performers and spectators within the elements of the performances, created a strong sense of communal spirit and self-expression.

### 1.2: The Fluidity of Expression

The ritual dances were an integral part of everyday life in the Minoan community, despite being commonly linked to the religious practice (Aamodt, 2014). In fact, one journal ‘dance as a healing art’ (2023) explores the notion of dance creating a sense of communion, in the same light that Minoan ritual dance does (Cox, L. and Youmans-Jones, J. 2023). Demonstrated through unconventional processes such as a heightened state of consciousness and a contrast of emotions. This allowed participants to be immersed in these emotions, typically suppressed by society. To put it differently, the restorative release is achieved through rhythm, movement, and self-expression in the immersive experience of dance. The data suggests it is healing for the individual and has such benefits which are even greater within an experience of a group dance (Cox, L. and Youmans-Jones, J. 2023).



*Figure 1: Bastaki, A. (2019) Recreation of Minoan Dance.*

The dances were filled with gestures of fluidity and abstraction, unique and communicative of the Minoan culture. Evidence suggests gestural performance can engage all bodily senses (Morris and Goodison, 2022, pp. pp.13-30.) (Aamodt, 2014). Morris and Goodison (2022) analyse the experiential quality of gestural performance, in the context of Bronze Age Crete. They found a shift of an ‘exterior to internal’ experience, with the concept of ‘feeling through

the body' to engage and communicate with the world. Likewise, this engaging experience of the body, extends to the preconceived western notions of there being five senses (touch, smell, taste, sight, hearing), which is dissipated in other cultures, arguing there are seventeen senses (which could include balance, movement, temperature and pain). In addition, this encompasses the idea that senses can be 'interdependable or intermodal', with the example of smell affecting the taste of food, lending itself to the notion of ritual (Morris and Goodison, 2022, pp. pp.13-30.).

Moreover, this idea of the perceived senses has an influential quality, which coincides to the intense collaboration of ritual dances. The ritual dances contain both direct and indirect influences of each participant's; world views, emotions and subconscious (Chountasi, 2015). On the other hand, this also cements the notion of the heightened state, with the physical experience of dance and ritual dance, as expressed in Cox and Youmans-Jones journal (2023). Ultimately, the immersive nature and experiential quality of Minoan ritual dances, negates the idea of it being an accessory to the religious rituals. However, highlights it as a core and central part of the prehistoric ritual and social activity of this community, lending itself to the basis of interactive art (Morris and Goodison, 2022, pp. pp.13-30.) (Aamodt, 2014).

It is key to mention ritual dances were present within other ancient civilisations, such as Egyptian and Mesopotamian. Nonetheless, Minoan dances were distinguishable amongst other ancient ritual dances, as they were comparatively freer and looser. The other civilisations were singularly tied to ritual and celebration, whereas ritual dances played an important role in Minoan society and religion. Moreover, the dances were not just performances, they reflected the ideas of Minoan society through the physicality. Therefore, the ritual dances engaged and bonded the Minoan community, through the social cohesion and local cultural identity (*Minoan Dancers: Unraveling the Mystery*, 2013) (Mandalaki-Spanou, 2018).

Contrary to the benefits to a community, it is key to acknowledge individuality and the power of the body within the experience of a Minoan ritual dance, proving that it does not succumb to the collective experience. The multisensorial experience and physical knowledge of the individual body, produce understanding that is negated by the scholarly (Morris and Peatfield, 2004). Somaesthetic is a term examined and shaped by Richard Shusterman, which embodies this experiential spiritual ideology. This philosophy is an implement for self-expression, led by 'Soma' as the sensorial physical experience of the body, and 'aesthetics' as the understanding of the body. Arnold explores this with an outlook as an educator of physical education, and an interest in the art of dance. He quotes Shusterman's analogy of Somaesthetic:

the critical and meliorating study of the experience and use of one's body as a locus of sensory aesthetic appreciation and creative self-fashioning. It is... devoted to the knowledge, discourses, practices, and bodily disciplines that structures such somatic care or can improve it.

(Arnold, P.J. 2005; Haskins and Shusterman, 1992). Furthermore, this notion of the body's experience and Somaesthetic, can be displayed within the basis of metacommunication; the 'unconscious' form of communications conveyed through non-verbal and contextual clues (Chountasi, 2015; Turner 1967,1968,1969) (Collins, 2025) (Aamodt, 2014). Thus, relating to the gestural expression of Minoan ritual dances, which translated in its role of historical presidency within interactive art (Chountasi, 2015).

### 1.3: Ancient Greek Theatre

The pre-Greek rituals of Minoan culture inspired the sixth century evolution of theatre in Ancient Greece (Stanley, 1970). Long before structured theatre existed, people engaged in these participatory rituals and storytelling filled with movement, sound, and shared meaning. On the other hand, there have been other historical forms and influences which have been attributive to the formulation of interactive art, such as medieval pageants, puppet shows and community festivals. Despite the links to Minoan ritual dance, the origin of Greek theatre stems from religious rituals dedicated to the Greek god, Dionysia the god of wine, fertility and revelry (GHD, 2024) (*Celebrating Dionysus: The Importance of Community in the Dionysia Festival*, 2025). The Dionysia festival was introduced, with songs and performances dedicated to the god, gradually becoming more structured, and transformed into the more traditionally known Ancient Greek theatre. Masks, costume and the elaborate staging created an intimate connection, which was crucial in enhancing the immersive experience (*Celebrating Dionysus: The Importance of Community in the Dionysia Festival*, 2025).

### 1.4: The Power of Visuality

The visual power in the context of art and social reality of Ancient Greece, is coated in the concept of 'Lebenswelt' ('lifeworld'), which is the awareness of reality through the direct experience of the world (Tonio Hölscher, 2018). Holscher (2018) explores the concepts of this 'culturally stamped perception' of society's environments, built for both the individual and collective experience (Tonio Hölscher, 2018). Clearly, the 'interdependable or intermodal' concept of Minoan ritual dances, stretches to this notion of the unconscious absorption of visual reality in Ancient Greece (Morris and Goodison, 2022, pp. pp.13-30.). However, Holscher argues visuality has a significant role in Greek society, with the tangible forms of human beings and intangible forms of 'Gods, ancestors, hero's', known through images. In addition, this highlights the concept of these images and indirect knowledge, as being equally as influential as the material world (Tonio Hölscher, 2018).

Conversely, Minoan ritual dances embody the analogy of 'feeling through the body' with gestures and metacommunication of each participant. Despite the external visuality of Greek society, the internal viewing through participation of ritual dance, is evident within Ancient Greek theatre (Morris and Goodison, 2022, pp. pp.13-30.). This highlights the importance and imperative vitality of both the visual experience, and the embodied interactive experience of art and life. Furthermore, this connects the origins of the concepts behind interactive art, such as the communal and individual experience (Tonio Hölscher, 2018). This is relevant in

the eventual transformation of the Avant Garde approach, in Dadaism and the interactive art movement.

### 1.5: Audience Participation

The Audience participation seen within Greek theatre was a diverse technique of 'organization theatre'. This created togetherness of the audience and actors, awareness of the issues portrayed, and a catalyst for change within society. It played a key role in the concept of 'catharsis' which ultimately signified the 'power of theatre to change the minds and hearts of the audience' (Meisiek, 2004). Moreover, 'catharsis' was exclusive to the medicinal terminology of ritual acts and feasts, until the fourth century BC. Additionally, the Dionysian cult embodied this element of catharsis, using it as a tool to release sickness through ritual dance and feasts, comparable to Minoan culture. The shift of 'catharsis' into the classical theatre theory, was established by Aristotle (384-322 BC), contradictory to Plato (Meisiek, 2004). Ultimately, this term is not limited to the social, medical or art scenes. It correlates to the concept of art and life, expressed in the interactive art movement.

On the other hand, Bertolt Brecht was a German theatre practitioner and playwright, his notions that theatre must train the audience to act, feel and change reality, so that they believe they have control (Ernst Fischer, Berger and Bostock, 2010). However, Greek theatre is displayed as an interactive experience, hosting the similarities of Minoan ritual dance, with the internal direct viewing. This is negated through the ideas of Brecht, in which viewers are told what to feel, which directs the experience as a tangible 'external' form, disguised as an 'internal' viewing, through audience participation (Ernst Fischer, Berger and Bostock, 2010) (Morris and Goodison, 2022, pp. pp.13-30.). The idea of 'catharsis' envelopes this notion, ultimately the theatre is an experience which provokes emotions and curates' opportunity for the audience to interact, react and question. Furthermore, Ancient Greek theatre is a direct sensory experience, the evidence suggests that the narrative of an experience, can be simultaneously altered, by the group and the individual's perceptions and ideas.

Despite, the difference in the trained response of theatre, to the full sensorial experience of Minoan ritual dance. This idea of changing the audience's mind and hearts, ties to the 'intermodal and interdependable' philosophy, in the direct and indirect influence of other participants and senses (Morris and Goodison, 2022, pp. pp.13-30.). This evidently produces the notion that there are inconspicuous influences, from both the sensory and visual experiences of these examples, like the experience of life. These points demystify Brecht's notion of theatre as a singular catalyst, to the change of an audience's beliefs and feelings. Despite this, Brecht also notions that the audience is liberated in being taught to feel, he suggests that the emotion of the theatre is felt by both 'the inventor and discoverer', and that it provides a full immersion of emotion on a more embodied level (Ernst Fischer, Berger and Bostock, 2010). Thus, highlighting the effective role of the artist to foster this connection, through the communication and relatability of their art.

In total, the opinions and ideology are consistent with the eventual nuance of Ancient Greek theatre, the modern 'interactive art' movement, and the later examples of the sixties: Allan

Kaprow, Marta Minujín, Yayoi Kusama (Meisiek, 2004). Furthering the notion that Ancient Greek theatre hosts similarities to Minoan ritual dances and has eventual influence on the interactivity of modern art, through the ideas of Lebenswelt, catharsis, somaesthetic and metacommunication.

## Emergence

### 2.1: The Birth of Dadaism: The Survival of Humanity and Art in WW1

Emerging from the gruelling emptiness and loss of the first world war, the term 'Dada' came to fruition in 1916. The branding was evolutionary for a variety of groups, and people hailing from different backgrounds. The 'Dada' slogan was the braiding of Hugo Ball and Emmy Henning's joint experiences, travelling and performing in variety troupes. This ultimately generated a group of young artists and intellectuals, under the label 'Cabaret Voltaire' (Howard and Lewer, 1996). Dada is best described as paradoxical, without a definitive medium or outcome (Kristiansen, 1968). Critically, Franz Alexander (1953) singles out Dadaism in his disregard of modern art, stating it as an "aggressive denial of the objects in the form they are commonly perceived". Alexander envelopes the movement as "a residue of childish revolt against the obligation to be orderly and sensible". Despite this seeming a slight to Dada, it encapsulates the dadaist absurdity and rebellion of sense (Kuspitt, 2018; Alexander, 1953).



*Figure 2: Hugo Ball, Cabaret Voltaire (1916) Tate.*

Initially the war was embraced by both the contrasting groups, following extremist and fundamentalist ideology. After a few months, the bustling energy welcoming the war, shifted to disappointment and contempt, due to the horrific reality of war taking centre stage (Howard and Lewer, 1996). Throughout the war several movements and revolutions took shape, with the vocalization of war beckoning an international revolution in Europe (Howard and Lewer, 1996). Nonetheless, the dire state of war produced ample opportunity for unity. Richard Shusterman (2000) argued that the cohabitation of human beings and the world,

rendered a meaningful notion of unity through the experience of living (Shusterman, 2000). To put it differently, the 'interdependable and intermodal' effects of humanity and the natural world, is displayed in the context of war, with the demand for unison and community. Dadaism notably emerged with this intent, supported by Morris and Goodison's (2022) evaluation of experiential quality in a Minoan gestural performance (Morris and Goodison, 2022, pp. pp.13-30.).

In Shusterman's analysis of 'Art as an Experience' (1934) by John Dewey, he discusses Dewey's idea of the heightened senses being mastered through the unity of aesthetic experience. Dewey defined 'aesthetic experience' as a 'moving, fragile and vanishing event'. Thus, he did not believe in the permanence of experienced unity, he instead argued that the artist does not shun 'moments of resistance and tension' but rather 'cultivates them, not for their aura's sake, but for their potentialities' (Shusterman, 2000; Dewey, 1934). This links to the refinement of many modern art movements, in reaction to social issues, with the prime example of Dadaism. Furthering this notion, Ernst Fischer argues that all art represents the state of humanity and the specific historical period. He also suggests that art goes past this limitation creating 'a moment of humanity, promising constant development' (Ernst Fischer, Berger and Bostock, 2010). Thus, highlighting the effect of WW2 on modern art, with Dadaism.

The emergence of Dadaism was due to the prevalent role of Switzerland in the war. Despite the fact, Switzerland remained diplomatic during the war and revolutions; it was inevitably forced to catalyse their army, implement rationing, and provide refuge for both exiles and evacuees (Howard and Lewer, 1996). The capital city of Zurich, was a popular destination, known for its lack of censorship and a thriving cabaret scene, it attracted refugees, artists, writers, and intellectuals. The vast number of exiles living in the city at the time inescapably meant that employment was difficult to come by, resulting in creative improvisation to earn a living. Thus, giving way to 'Cabaret Voltaire' and the Dadaist movement, in reaction to the war, and the necessity for societal change. Therefore, being vital to the survival and future of this community and the arts. This promoted the move away from traditional art, and the incline of modern art (Howard and Lewer, 1996).

Ball was prominent in the development of Dadaism, with his introduction of experimental theatre (Melzer, 1973). Ball was a German artist, who escaped to Zurich alongside his future wife Emmy Hennings. They both were poets and had formerly held roles within the arts; Ball as a 'Dramaturg', occasional cabaret performer, and Hennings as a 'Chanteuse'. During this time, Ball was a preliminary member of the Expressionist movement. His pre-war attempts to establish an Expressionist theatre in Munich, captured the essence of Dada. This foreshadowed his shift to Dadaism. Artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc and Richard Seewald collaborated on this, with a perspective of taking theatre in a new direction (Howard and Lewer, 1996). Despite Dada's origin of the 'Cabaret Voltaire' performance, it was not strictly a performance or interaction-based movement. Although, it is key to mention that it played an instrumental role in the evolution of interactive art. The standpoint of this

piece of writing, is to analyse the influential quality of this innovative movement, in pushing the boundaries of the art world, questioning the relationship of art and life, and furthering the idea of art as an experience.

## 2.2: The Rejuvenation of Social function in Art: Influences of Dadaism

The renewal of social function in art, exists in ‘Cabaret Voltaire’ and the modern interactive art movement, with the concentration of the relationship between art and life. Conversely, this link spans back to Ancient Greek theatre, Minoan ritual dance and Kandinsky’s philosophies. Ball’s ideology and art practice was rerouted, with Kandinsky’s principles of a modern Gesamtkunstwerk (total work of art), a term coined by Karl Trahndorff in the 19th century (Howard and Lewer, 1996). Gesamtkunstwerk was a revolutionary collation of architecture, sculpture, painting and music, within a context of religious buildings (chapels, churches, cathedrals) (Chadwick, 1986). The result was to break the fourth wall between the spectator and the artistic medium, to reveal the sequential role of Gesamtkunstwerk. Thus, influencing Dadaism, and the concept of experience and unity of art, as seen in the sixties ‘Happenings’. These spaces were known for their sense of community and connection, within a religious agenda of weddings and funerals. Even with the divergence in the traditional views of religion, and the modern art movement’s innovative approach. They nonetheless are brought together by the core beliefs they embody. Moreover, this coincides with the relationship of art and politics during the war, with the non-conformist politics and radical art of Dadaism. The influential qualities of Kandinsky’s theories, were a key turning point for the birth of Dadaism, and the eventual development of interactive art.

The unification of the collective deviated art has a reminiscence of the Avant Garde approach, with the attempt at a rejuvenation of art and society. It was a term both adopted by militants and artists, stated on the Tate website ‘As applied to art, Avante Garde means art that is innovatory, introduction or exploring new forms or subject matter’ (Tate, 2025). Thus, the goal of Avant Garde is transformation of all art, rather than reformation. Roberts (2011) argued that in a recent survey of Avant-Garde manifestos, they draw the conclusion that the meaning and conventions of art, and the ‘total work of art’ or ‘totalizing’ theory is matched within the oppositional sides (e.g. Futurist movement). Due to the common enemy of art, which is the detachment from life, and both its social and spiritual function (Roberts. D, 2011). Consequently, this highlights the missing factor inside the typical delineation of the Avante Garde movement, which reignited the obvious failure to neither progress nor disperse (Roberts. D, 2011). In addition, despite the obvious requisition of the Avant garde movement, it still proves to be a central influence for many modern art movements, such as Dadaism and the ‘Happenings’. This missing factor, is resolved in these later movements, putting social function of art as the focal point.

Furthermore, this notion was best described by Gabriel-Désiré Laverdant, a participator and follower of the Fourierist philosophy, with a view of transformation, from societal revolution into self-reliance (Roberts. D, 2011). Roberts (2011) backs up his point, in the quotation from Laverdant’s statement in 1845: “Art, the expression of society, manifests, in its highest soaring, the most ad-vanced social tendencies: it is the forerunner and the revealer. Therefore,

to know whether art worthily fulfils its proper mission as initiator, whether the artist is truly of the avant-garde, one must know where Humanity is going, what the destiny of the human race is.” (Roberts. D, 2011; Laverdant, 1845). Despite the time of this statement, the relevance is still profound to the Dadaist movement, and the present interactive art movement. Thus, furthering the embodiment that both the art and the artist, has a timeless role as the fulfiller and initiator of change, and societal upheaval (Roberts. D, 2011). Therefore, this highlights the key element of connection between society and art, and the mutual necessity of the relationship. Thus, this defined the relationship as crucial, in the transformational qualities of society’s interaction with art and the world, in Dadaism and modern art. This links back to the concept of ‘Lebenswelt’ (lifeworld) seen in Ancient Greece (Holscher, 2018).

This brings the point back to the influences and linear components of Avante Garde and Gesamtkunstwerk, later leading onto Dadaism. The three movements had a concentrated goal of unity and community, in alternate applications leading the evolution of modern art. The human nature has a desire for connection and interaction, especially in the oppressive, unconfiding state of war. Despite Ball’s previous challenges to conjure this level of attention and interaction from society, his aspirations to construct an interactive theatre, was prevalent to the production of ‘Cabaret Voltaire’. Thus ignited the inauguration of Dadaism, a change of perspective for art’s potential and role in society. Moreover, this created a correlation in the discussion of the visuality and experiential quality of art, which is amplified with the interactive essence of Dada. Likewise, this coincides with the ideas behind Ancient Greek civilisation and theatre, which promoted both the visual and experiential. Overall, these points translate into the transformational components of the interactive art movement, identifiable in the progression of the sixty’s modern art scene.

### 2.3: Significance of Dadaism

The significance of Dadaism and the period it arose, in the first world war, was a time of brutality and darkness. Despite this, it was subsequently a time where communities, art and freedom blossomed. Therefore, it provided an inevitable catalyst, in the fight for equality and change in society. At this time, women took on the stereotypical responsibilities left by men, which created an alternate reality in which opportunity, possibility, and a new way of thinking was born (Prior, 2018). It is also key to mention, that prior to the first world war, the essential work of the Suffragette movement (1903-1914), in the fight for equality. Despite this, women did not garner full legal equality in the UK until 1975 (Allwell Uwazuruike and Dawson, 2025). This acknowledgement is relevant to society’s necessary coercion for a revolution, which correlates to the art world’s necessity for change through modernity. Additionally, this idea of the ‘intermodal and interdependable ‘relationship of society and art, finds correlation once again.

This notion extends to interactive art’s communication of relatability, which fosters a metalevel of connection, and understanding with the viewer. This is evident through the struggle for representation and equality in history, with the examples of gender and race. Furthermore, this struggle has powered the desire for change, through the medium of

Dadaism, and the modern 'interactive' art movement. As an example from the sixties, Yayoi Kusama faced prejudice for her race, gender and nonconformist art style (Lenz. H, 2018). This was based on both society and the art world's 'ideal' perception, of what both the art and the artist should simulate, which denotes the human right to have 'freedom of expression'. This links to the Dadaist revolt against traditional art, and the improvement of freedom in the modern art world.

This struggle for change prior to the first world war, was established by Dr Gerry Oman (2018) of Swansea university, in the statement: "Even before 1914 there had been some attempts at education and pension reform, but it took a combination of an event as massive as World War One, and someone with the radical North Wales nonconformist background of Lloyd George, to shake up conventional political wisdom." (Prior. N, 2018). This highlighted the eventual strike for change during WW1, which was only deemed possible in the relentless high-pressure situation of a war budding. Additionally possible, with the shake up from the traditional conformist politicians, which corresponds to the disparage of traditional art, with 'Cabaret Voltaire'. Lloyd George and Dada comparatively attempt to garner connection and community within society. Despite the oppositional qualities of art and politics, the relationship is of importance, like the divergent qualities of Gesamtkunstwerk.

Moreover, art is the freedom of speech, expression and provides the innovation required for this spark of change and understanding of the world. Overall, this era and Dadaism was key, for the social cohesion and the modern outlook of possibility, within art and society.

## Transformation

Following the Dadaist's contribution to interactive art and theatrical events, other prominent figures including Bauhaus, Oskar Schlemmer and Kurt Schwitters, who led this initiative for the modern art 'Happenings' (Glimcher and McElroy, 2012). The fifties played a key role in preparing society for the sixties, paving the way for the re-evaluation of art, and its role within social issues and representation. This decade was a revolutionary reaction of experimentation and radicalisation (Watson. K, 2015).

### 3.1: The Dictatorship of Creative Expression: The McCarthy Decade

The previous decade of the 1950's brought turmoil in the art world, known as the McCarthy decade. Following the second world war, American Senator Joseph McCarthy had the neurotic fear of communist ideology, he intrinsically believed extremist views were fuelled into all radical activities, especially artistic forms (Hauptman, 1973). It is key to mention that America were under nuclear war threat during this time, which procured this precaution of the modern and unknown (Glimcher and McElroy, 2012). The notions of McCarthy were powered into the attacks by other congress, the most notable being George A. Dondero, who had no previous knowledge or background in art. Despite Dondero's strong opposition against communist beliefs, his speeches were coated in dictatorial expression and oppression, denying artists and those in congress freedom of expression.

In an interview with Emily Genauer, the critic of New York world telegram, Dondero made his views on modern art very clear: "Modern art is Communistic because it is distorted and ugly, because it does not glorify our beautiful country, our cheerful and smiling people, and our material progress. Art which does not glorify our beautiful country in plain, simple terms that everyone can understand breeds dissatisfaction. It is therefore opposed to our government, and those who create and promote it are our enemies." (Hauptman, 1973). Art cannot be defined or categorised, if this were the truth then there would be no innovation or adaption, to further humanity or evolution. Furthermore, there would be no enjoyment or creativity to fuel the designs of the world, or capture moments of historical prevalence. Dondero fails to justify the reasons specifically, that have led him to categorize all modern art as having communist ideology.

Dondero's failure to give valid evidence to these extreme accusations, on a large sector of society is profound, especially with his legal background. According to Miller (2018), the distinction between explanation and justification, both 'describe the belief or action in question' but to justify and form a solid argument, an evaluative supporting rationale is needed (Miller, 2018). Dondero's views of modern art being unamerican is highlighted within his statement, it was a term used for alienation of the public into political conformity, and to strip individuals of their rights. Therefore, a categorization technique to create a division and discriminate the non-conformists and minorities. Despite America being known as a 'melting pot' of nationalities, this furthers the notion of the bullying dictatorship attempts of Dondero, to implement his desires of control. Therefore, animosity rose in communities, as people

would turn anyone suspicious of anti- American principles into the government (Hauptman, 1973). This was a difficult time that required change, and new ideas to guide society through the post war hardships, thus freedom of speech was essential. Similar, to the wave of modernistic art in WW1 with Dadaism.

### 3.2: The Power of Artist Communities

This innovative period further catapulted those in the arts to bond, forming a sense of community within each other, bolstered by their artwork's power to promote this inclusivity and connection. This idea of a tightknit community can be seen in the prime example of 'Black Mountain College', based in the rural mountains of North Carolina. This feeling of community was implemented through an anti-hierarchical scheme, reductions in wages, staff and students living amicably and the collective work program, which aided the college's survival (Zommer, 2008).

It was not specifically an art school; however, it was a place that allowed art to be a defining feature and viewed with the same impartiality as other subjects. Miller (2018) justified the educational value of art at the college: "idea that artistic seeing is a 'form of knowledge distinct from, yet equally valuable to forms of knowledge'". Clearly art has mutual necessity and benefits, likewise to other subjects (Miller, 2018). The college epitomised experimental pedagogy and used art as a tool for new concepts in the discussion of art and life. The college was viewed with great suspicion during the McCarthy decade, for both its artistic and liberal tendencies. Despite being watched by the government, it was a place for those to escape the tyranny of society. They were a very inclusive community, who disregarded the contrasting outside views of society, in regard to race and gender, in the same way they did with teaching and art. However, the college had a short existence from 1933 to 1957. The innovative and collaborative pedagogical approach of the college, ultimately shaped 20<sup>th</sup> century modern art, and became a 'laboratory for American Avant Garde'. (Zommer, 2008).

During this period, it is key to mention other important communities that helped to revolutionize modern art. New York's 'Greenwich Village' was used as a hub for artists, musicians and creators (Meyers and Young, 2019). Likewise, 'The Cool School' in Los Angeles, countered the states conservative ways and established the LA modern art scene (Neville, 2008). Similarly to the college, these communities also transcended a scene of artists from varied backgrounds, into a collaborative centre of support and counterculture. Thus, enabling discussions for change within society and the art world.

The 'Black Mountain College' had been the making of many great modern artists such as Abstract Expressionists Willem and Elaine De Kooning, Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage. Cage was an avant garde musical composer, who had challenged orthodox dramatic forms and distorted the relationship between life and art, with his unique performance 'Theatre Piece No.1' in 1952 (Zommer, 2008). This was known as the first 'Happening', a term later coined by Allan Kaprow. Kaprow was a student at 'New School for Social Research' in New York, where he attended Cage's composition class. He was influenced by

Cage to join the Fluxus art movement, which later led to the development of the 'Happenings' (Wainwright, 2019).

### 3.3: The Birth of 'The Happenings'

The official birth of the 'Happenings' movement in 1958, was consolidated with Kaprow's debut of his performance piece '18 Happenings in 6 parts' (Glimcher and McElroy, 2012). The 1960s saw a continuation of Avant garde and Dadaist ideas through the Fluxus movement, which questioned the boundaries of art (Tate 2017) and influenced the 'Happenings'. This transformation from the domineering period of abstract expressionism to interactive art, evolved as a response to the social change of the 1950s/60s (Glimcher and McElroy, 2012). The notion of the 'Happenings' was to bridge art and everyday life, to create an element of interaction and experience. Kaprow's first condition of 'Happenings', was that "the line between art and life should be as fluid, and perhaps indistinct as possible" (Allen, 2015; Kaprow, 1966). Thus, Kaprow explored 'breaking the fourth wall' in the relationship between the art, artist and audience (Collins, 2014). Consequently, this allowed collaboration and freedom from the tensions of society, through the medium of interactive art.



Figure 3: McDarrah, Fred.W. (1958) *Allan Kaprow's '18 Happenings in 6 Parts'*, Moma.

The 'Happenings' were fleeting performances, displayed to appear spontaneous and unrehearsed, with elements of participation for the audience. They were curated by a collective of trained artists, and singular performances, in which only those in attendance would understand (Glimcher and McElroy, 2012). The first Happening was described by writer Samuel Delaney as "sparse, difficult, minimal, constituted, laged by absence, isolation, even distraction", whereas theatre critic J.H. Livingston, questioned if appropriate

to categorise it as Dada (Hoberman, 2025; Delaney and Livingston, 1958). Thus, promoted the idea of Dadaist influence on the sixties' modern interactive art scene. Livingston further notes 'There is not a shattering awareness of unawareness. Things are looking at us, but we cannot see them', this links the ideas of the 'unconscious' and the heightened state, that is seen within Minoan and Ancient Greek culture (Hoberman, 2025; Livingston, 1958). Livingston notions the "overall effect is wonderment" and that it was "of high originality and at times beauty and revelation" (Hoberman, 2025). Thus, outlining the exponential depths of the 'Happenings' and interactive art.



Figure 4: Marta Minujín, *La Destrucción* (1963) Tate

This post war worldwide re-examination of culture and society can be linked to the popularization and transformation of modern art, specifically the influence of the 'Happenings'. (Glimcher and McElroy, 2012). This imperative evolution of interactive art in the sixties, was not just specific to America and Europe. In South America, Argentinian artist Marta Minujín, had her own happenings and radicalised ideas. Minujín's first 'Happening' in 1963 was called *La destrucción* (The Destruction), an exhibition containing the sculpture work from her three-year fellowship in Paris. She invited artists to collaboratively come to destroy her art, in which she later burned the remnants (Doran, 2019). This drive to explore the value of audience participation within the reconceptualization of art's purpose, shows the prominence of her work and audience experience (*Marta Minujín – 'I Believe in Magic'* | *TateShots*, 2016). Thus, correlating to the predeceasing values of Ancient Greece. Minujín discusses the importance of the experience, within the purpose and relationship of art and life, "art was a way of intensifying life, of having an impact on the viewer by shaking him up. Why, then, was I going to keep my work? So that it could die in cultural cemeteries, the eternity in which I had no interest? I wanted to live and make others live." (Doran, 2019). Therefore, Minujín's excavation of art's experiential qualities correlates to the conceptual thread of the interactive art movement, and the evident phenomenological work of Albers and Dewey (Miller, 2018).

### 3.4: The Embodiment of Art

The endeavour of interpreting art is both a communal and an individualised practise. Art can be simultaneously understood and perceived as an experience, effect and communication of a social issue, of the artist or a deeper understanding of oneself. An artist can take control of the audience's perception and alienate the audience into understanding the artist's life and views, as well as simultaneously creating a link for them to relate (Barrett, 2003). This understanding relays back to the Ancient Greek theatre, and Bertolt Brecht's argument on the liberating quality of art. Brecht's argument is embodied in the simultaneous provocation of change, and in the result of metacommunication between the artist and audience (Barrett, 2003).

Dewey (1934) discusses how other philosophers attempt to interpret and define art as an experience. However, art cannot be singularly categorised in terms of an activity, emotion, reason or sense. Thus, highlighting society's need to categorize and control. Whereas imagination and innovation do not have a singular set answer and is required to lead society. This further links back to the struggles of the emerging modern art scene, during WW1 and the McCarthy decade (Dewey, 1934). Moreover, the notions of Dewey were extended by Josef Albers, a renowned artist and educator at Bauhaus and Black Mountain College. (Rockwell, 2022, pp. 255–260). Albers motioned that artistic perception is connected to a more developed awareness, of oneself and one's social environment, further linking to the concept of 'Lebenswelt', Ancient Greece, and the work of Minujin (Miller, 2018; Albers, 1935).

Yayoi Kusama was a young female artist in the sixties, her innovation during this period revitalised society's perspective, on how art can be a communicator of social issues, beliefs and relatability. Kusama embodied this notion of experience through her view of renaissance art, which failed to take control of the viewer with perception and space. Kusama builds on this within 'Kusama: Infinity' (2018) stating that the attempt was diminished in it being 'encompassed by a frame', and that "it wasn't enveloping you". (Lenz. H, 2018). Interactive art allows audience participation; the audience duly become part of the art and are provided a connector to the world. Moreover, the audience participation of Kusama's art, correlates to that of Ancient Greek theatre. Comparatively, Kusama's art is more effective, as she is not trying to control or trick the audience. Kusama's own perception of immersion comes from an experience of being lost in her physical environment, on her family's flower farm (Lenz. H, 2018). This feeling works alongside the conscious, and her own knowing of self. Her practice was informed by this experience, her difficult upbringing and the conservative nature of Japan, highlighting her drive to garner connection to herself and the world around her (Lenz. H, 2018).



Figure 5: Yayoi Kusama, Mirror Performance (1968) Moma.

In *'Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Rooms'* (2017) Kusama and the editor Mika Yoshitake delve into the inner workings of her art, and her goal for it to be a catalyst of connection. Evidently, the 'Mirror performance' (1968) was an eminent piece which embodied this goal. Kusama invited dancers to perform and paint each other with glow in the dark paints, under subdued lighting. This created a hysteria of pattern, connection with the participant's senses, and stimulated the viewer's realm between 'unconsciousness and consciousness'. (Yoshitake, M., Kusama, Y. 2017). Similarly, this experiential quality and engagement of all bodily senses, links to the gestural performance of Minoan ritual dances (Morris and Goodison, 2022, pp.pp.13-30.). In addition, the performance theory of the dances, plays with this idea of the unconscious experience, and the rejection of outer observers. Furthermore, the unconscious sense promotes metacommunication through interpretive frames (Chountasi, 2015).

Nathaniel Stern investigates how interactive art has a system to push the body's potential, similar to the effects of Minujín and Kusama's art. Stern frames up the notion of interactive art and embodiment, in relation to the body, stating: "Interactive art frames moving-thinking-feeling as embodiment; here 'the body' is addressed as it is formed, and in relation. Interactive installations amplify how the body's inscriptions, meanings, and matters unfold out, while the world's sensations, concepts, and matters enfold in. The work creates situations that enhance, disrupt, and alter experience and action in ways that call attention to our varied relationships with and as both structure and matter." (Stern, N. 2013). This idea of art as an experience, clearly coincides to the ideas of metacommunication through art and experiences. The interactivity of performance and immersive installations play a vital role in developing both understanding of oneself and the relationship humanity has to the world.

## Principal

The role of interactive art throughout this evolution, has undoubtedly become an emblem of communication, connection and change in society. In addition, this resurgence is ongoing and ever present in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Despite the focal point being the evolution of interactive art, and the relationship of art and life to foster the connection. This relationship has been pondered by philosophers and artists, in the embodied and experiential quality of interactive art. Thus, it being key to mention the awareness that interactive art has notably found principal in communities, spiritual practices and the healthcare sector.

In Terry Barrett's book of interpreting art (2003), he explores the interconnected relationship of art and the world, quoting Donald Kuspitt: "I began to feel that the artist is not exempt from life. There is no way out from seeing art as a reflection or meditation or a connect on life. I became interested in the process, including the art and life. I became interested in how art reflected life issues, existential issues with which we are all involved" (Barrett, 2003). This acknowledges the mutual need and dependency in the relationship. To put it differently, art is a simultaneous connection for civilisation and the world, not exclusive to the viewer or creator.

### 4.1: The Impact of 'Interactive Art': Outside the Gallery Space

This notion of promoting community and connection for those isolated by circumstance, without access to means of self-expression, proves the vitality of art. On one hand this is reflected in the 'Community Arts' movement, which came into play during the sixties (Matarasso, 2011). It originated from the ideals of Avant Garde, with the flair of diversity, collaboration and the accessibility of arts within communities (Matarasso, 2011). On another hand, this is evident in Tom Luyten's pilots' studies 'VENSTER' (2017) and 'Morgendauw' (2020), in which he assessed the use of interactive art within nursing homes (Luyten, 2017, 2020). Luyten analysed how the participants' curiosity and senses were evoked, evolving their focus, self-expression, sense of involvement and connection to the world (Luyten, 2017, 2020). Thirdly, the spiritual relevancy to art is seen within the experiential and unconscious philosophies noted throughout this dissertation. Also, encapsulated in the endeavours to deepen the understanding of oneself, the world, and to go between the realm of consciousness. This links to the spiritual practices of mediumship, reiki and meditation. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, interactive art has been revolutionised to transform galleries and communities, with the example of Van Gogh's paintings, being reenvisioned into an immersive experience (*An Immersive Art Experience Celebrating Vincent Van Gogh*, 2025).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this brief synopsis on the evolution of interactive art in the specific lens that it fosters connection in society, is justified through the acknowledgement of a variety of sources. This is evident in the effects on society, which is backed up by philosophers, art movements and history. This meliorates in the understanding of the collaborative nurturing of connection, created in the mutual dependence of society and art. The understanding in the effects of this movement on society, can be identified through the key philosophical terms; somaesthetic, metacommunication, and catharsis. These terms all find functionality within the relationship of art and life. Some notable examples of artists who embody the notions of these terms, include, John Cage, Allen Kaprow, Yayoi Kusama, and Marta Minujín. Thus, furthering the concept of connection in the interactive art evolution.

From the beginnings of interactive art, the influence of communication and expression in the communal and individualised experience is seen within the context of Minoan ritual dance and Ancient Greek theatre. Moreover, this influence promoted the artist as an enabler of expression and creative freedom, for individuals and society. Secondly, the emergence, of ‘Cabaret Voltaire’ essentially gave birth to Dadaism, and the first interactive art performance. Inevitably this movement, brought about radicalisation and uplift to society, and modern art. The third period, which could be deemed as the official transformation of interactive art, came into form in the sixties in which art’s purpose was revalued, the concept of art as an experience and the audience experience was further explored.

In totality, in this evolution of interactive art, it is abundantly clear the timings and need for interactive art in these specific periods, which thrived within their newfound innovation, modernity and radicalised change. Thus, further highlighting the interconnected and important qualities of interactive art, in the relationship of art and the world. The principal of art in differing communities, bonds all these time periods, artists and audiences together.

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