

The tacit and the trace: Towards syntax of the creative act

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Tacit knowledge represents an embodied understanding of experience which shapes our form and action (Polanyi). For this study, the mimetic transformation of this ‘hidden’ knowledge is described as a process of active engagement in order to arrive at a conditional representation of experience that may be tested for efficacy in the world.

Drawing from the seminal definition of the principles of abstract art posed by Kandinsky in the early years of the twentieth century, and contextualizing that knowledge in contemporary cognitive metaphor theory (Johnson and Lakoff), the study attempts to arrive at an understanding of how cognitive structure emerges in pragmatic self-observation during the artistic process. Through application of the concept of “enaction” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch), the research proposes a first-person approach to the exploration and derivation of a syntax of interactive creativity.

We attempt to define a cognitive framework capable of representing the artist’s pre-expressive state (the tacit) and its relationship to the final realized artwork (the trace). An artist’s embodied experience constitutes an experiential understanding of interactive creativity, an understanding that takes as its foundation the practice of intentional expression and reflective self-observation of contextual response (fig. 1, fig. 2). This creative conceptual engagement of expressive and reflective perspective constitutes process in the act of painting (Kandinsky, Dewey, Arnheim). The polarities of this process define a space of interaction that begins with the latent intentionality of the pre-expressive moment of the artist and ends with the creative artifact (Bloom; Levinson, Kornblith; Thomasson).

The artist’s embodied experience therefore presents a lived, if unspoken, understanding of how spontaneous variation emerges in the creative act through an embodied shaping of conscious thought by the cognitive unconscious (Baars, Johnson and Lakoff). The syntax of creative experience may then be framed as a Deleuzian perpetual becoming, where “the abstract doesn’t explain but must itself be explained”. This framework may be used to represent the spatial and temporal dimensions of the artistic impulse and its representation in the procedural space of an emergent grammar of artistic process (fig. 3).

In our case study, we investigate this act and artifact pairing between a fine art painter and the realized painting through a comparative analysis of the discourse around process and the emergent artifact of that process. It is hypothesized that the artist’s engagement within this framework forms a discernibly continuous and dynamic modeling of the tacit.

This preliminary investigation invites contributions from a wide range of disciplines engaged cognitive research to contribute in a discussion towards the development of an interdisciplinary understanding of interactive creativity.

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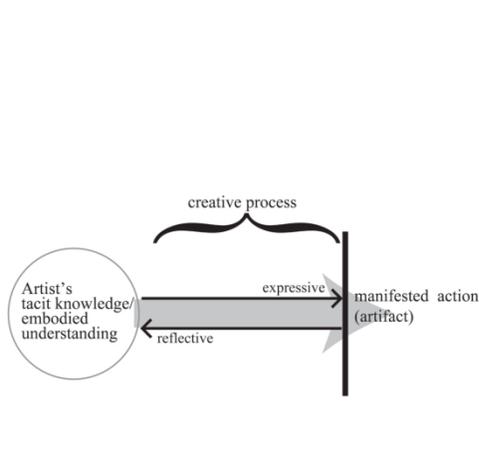


Fig 1. Creative process

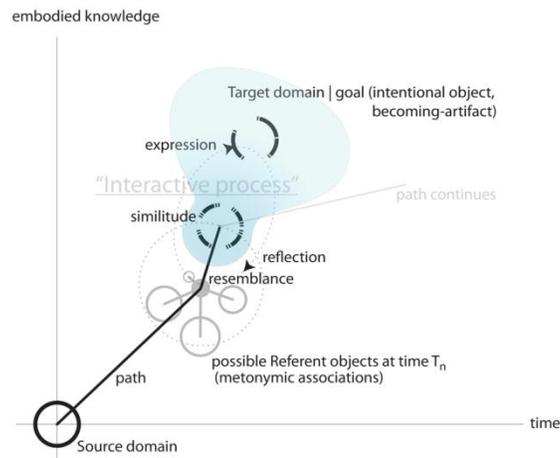
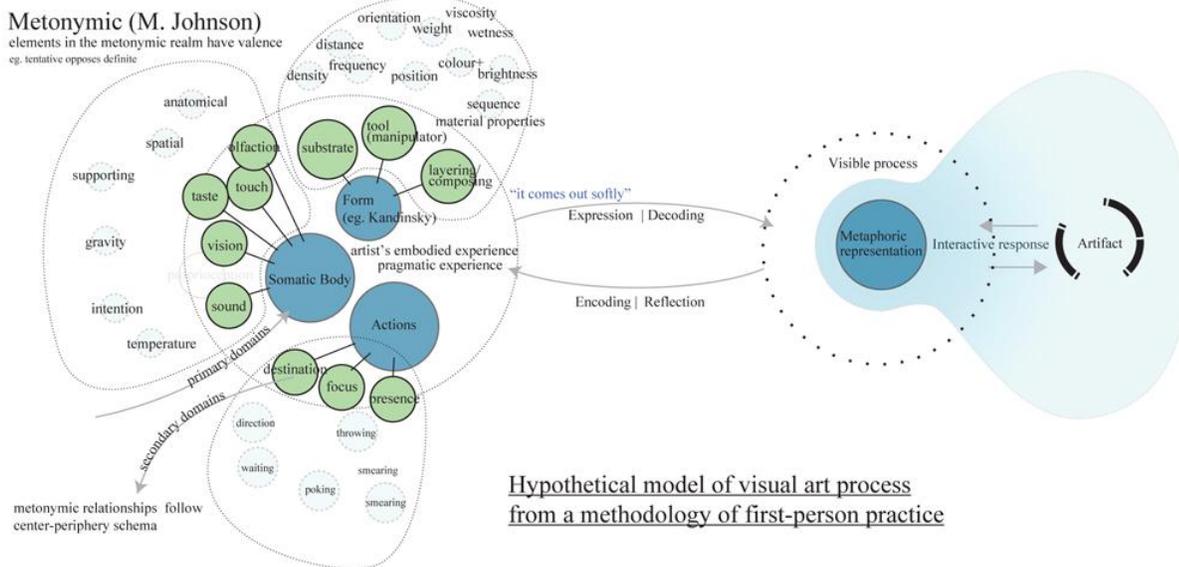


Fig 2. Source, Path, Goal in Creative Process. An approach to the Source Path-Goal Kinesthetic Image Schema (Johnson & Lakoff)



Hypothetical model of visual art process from a methodology of first-person practice

Fig 3. Development of creative process. Body, form, and actions combine through metaphoric association during the creative process, suggesting possible relationships between creative action and metaphoric structures in language.