Written response 5——contextualising

Written response 1

We chose exhibitions as our research focus for the first week. During our visit to the V&A Gallery, we realised that accessibility for visually impaired visitors was highly limited, with a lack of tactile exhibits, audio descriptions, and Braille signage. This prompted us to search for literature like *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need* and *Identifying Barriers to Accessibility for Museum Visitors Who Are Blind. and Visually Impaired.* Interviews with visually impaired individuals in the study highlighted the barriers they face in exhibitions and suggested possible improvements. This made me realise that accessibility in many exhibitions remains passive and additive, rather than being fundamentally designed around the perceptual experiences of disabled communities.

Based on this, we raised the central enquiry: How can exhibitions be re-imagined to enhance the experience of blind and visually impaired visitors? We explored three directions: improving pre-visit information, optimising navigation and signage in the exhibition and how to make the exhibits better understood by the visually impaired. After discussion, we decided to focus on how to "translate" the exhibits so that they could be presented in a multi-sensory way to help the visually impaired perceive the artworks, thus breaking the visually dominant exhibition formats.

This process helped me more clearly understand Disability Justice, confirming that accessibility is not an add-on aspect but an integral design ethos. It also encouraged me to reflect on my own designer identity—not only to adapt disabled people to fit dominant narratives, but to intentionally design inclusive, diverse, and equitable cultural experiences. Going forward, I aim to explore multi-sensory design, touch-based experiences, and

interactive media to transition away from traditional, vision-led exhibition models. This will encourage a more interactive, richer, and compassionate experience for visitors with diverse perceptual needs.

Reference

Costanza-Chock, S. (2020) *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Fortuna, J., Harrison, C., Eekhoff, A., Marthaler, C., Seromik, M. and Ogren, S. (2023) *'Identifying Barriers to Accessibility for Museum Visitors Who Are Blind and Visually Impaired'*, Visitor Studies, 26(1), pp. 1–20. doi: 10.1080/10645578.2023.2168421.

Written response 2

The annotated bibliography

2 texts from the reading list：

1.Bolt, B. and MacNeill, K. (eds.) (2019) *The meeting of aesthetics and ethics in the academy: Challenges for creative practice researchers in higher education*. London: Routledge.

Statement：

Barbara Bolt and Kate MacNeill (2019), in *The Meeting of Aesthetics and Ethics in the Academy*, explore the intersection of aesthetics and ethics, emphasising that artistic creation is not only about aesthetic value but also about social responsibility. When art enters the public sphere or academic framework, creators must consider their role in shaping, influencing, or limiting audience experience. This discussion prompted us to re-examine a central enquiry of our project: when designing multi-sensory art experiences for visually impaired audiences, how can we create a sensory-rich experience while respecting their perception, rather than inadvertently imposing or controlling their engagement?

This research deepened my understanding of accessible exhibitions as more than just technical translation or information substitution; they also involve the distribution of perceptual agency. Currently, in our project, the curators (us) determine how colour, brushstrokes, and light/dark contrasts are translated into sound and touch. However, Bolt and MacNeill's work led me to reflect: Are we unintentionally dictating how visually impaired

visitors ‘experience’ art? If these transformations are solely curator-driven, is accessibility still a one-way transmission rather than true empowerment?

This prompted me to re-evaluate our design strategies. An accessible exhibition should not be a pre-determined ‘alternative experience’ but a space where audiences can actively shape their own perception. Moving forward, we plan to explore more open sensory interactions, allowing visitors to adjust, select, and combine sound and tactile feedback, rather than passively receiving curator-defined experiences.

Through this reflection, I came to understand that accessible exhibitions must go beyond making artworks audible or tactile—they must ensure that perception itself remains free, inclusive, and adaptable to individual needs. If sensory transformation remains curator-driven, accessibility is still a top-down intervention rather than genuine engagement. In the future, we aim to integrate personalised adjustments and interactions, allowing audiences to actively explore, define, and create their own perceptual experiences, transforming the exhibition into a truly inclusive and participatory art space.

2.McLuhan, M. and Fiore, Q. (1967) *The Medium is The Massage: An Inventory of Effects.* New York: Bantam Books.

Statement：

Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore (1967), explored how media shape human perception. They argue that the way a message is delivered is just as important as the content itself, and that, to some extent, the medium itself is the message. McLuhan (1967) emphasises that media are not passive transmission tools but active forces that shape perception and experience. Different media not only affect how information is conveyed but also directly alter perceptual structures, influencing how people understand content.

This perspective is particularly relevant to our study. McLuhan (1967) points out that a change in medium is not merely a shift in transmission but a reconstruction of meaning. A painting, when perceived visually, offers one kind of experience; however, when translated into sound or touch, it becomes an entirely new work. This prompts us to consider: when ‘translating’ a work of art, how do we ensure that we convey its essence rather than inadvertently altering its core meaning? For example, the frequency and rhythm of a sound evoke emotions distinct from those conveyed by colour or composition. Similarly, the texture and temperature of a tactile experience introduce sensory dimensions that vision alone cannot provide. In this sense, we are not simply switching media—we are redefining how art is experienced.

The Medium is the Massage makes us realise that our project is not just about accessibility but about reimagining how multi-sensory interaction deepens artistic engagement. If the medium defines the experience, then our goal should not be to simply substitute the visual with the auditory or tactile but to create a self-sufficient, multi-sensory art experience. This realisation compels us to reassess our design strategies, ensuring that sensory transformations are not mere technical substitutions but emotional and conceptual extensions of the original work, preserving its integrity and expressiveness within a new perceptual framework.

2 texts outside the reading list:

1.Bourriaud, N. (1998) *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Les Presses du Réel.

Statement:

In *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud (1998) redefines art in the contemporary context as an interaction practice of a social nature, arguing that meaning in art is not predetermined by the artist but co-authored through human interaction. Criticizing the modernist attention to artistic autonomy, he advocates for the active participation of the spectator in the building of artistic experiences. In case studies, he illustrates how art has the ability to blur the distinction between artist and viewer. For example, Rirkrit Tiravanija makes art a social experience by having dinners in museums, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres's candy installations invite audience participation, which makes the artwork dynamic and fluid. These examples demonstrate that art can be a living social experience and not a fixed presentation.

Bourriaud's (1998) contention that "an exhibition should be seen as a social space rather than a one-way transfer of information" led us to wonder how to rethink more inclusive and more innovative ways of translation, rather than simply providing accessible alternatives. Instead

of merely duplicating artwork in terms of hearing or touch, we wanted to translate the art process itself so that visually impaired visitors can be an active part of the exhibition. We tried various translation methods, extending beyond basic sensory substitutions to analyze color, brushstrokes, and light-dark relationships, constructing a multi-sensory interaction that conveys the core essence of the artwork. We also aim not only to make such interactions accessible, but immersive and affective as well, enhancing the depth of audience experience.

2.Costanza-Chock, S. (2020) *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Statement：

In *Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*, Costanza-Chock (2020) explores Design Justice, arguing that accessibility should be a fundamental design principle rather than an afterthought. Critiquing mainstream User-Centered Design (UCD) for prioritizing dominant groups (e.g., the able-bodied) while marginalizing disabled individuals, the author asserts that true accessibility cannot rely on patchwork fixes but must be integrated from the outset. Co-Design, as proposed by Costanza-Chock, ensures that people with disabilities actively shape their environments rather than being passive recipients of accessibility measures, fostering more equitable and inclusive design.

This book profoundly influenced our project, prompting us to reflect on how exhibition accessibility is often treated as an add-on rather than a core strategy. At the V&A Museum, we observed that accessibility features were minimal. Even where audio devices were

available, they were hard to locate, with non-adjustable volume, limiting engagement for visually impaired visitors. This reflects Costanza-Chock's Spiral of Exclusion, where failing to consider disabled communities in the design stage leads to their continued marginalization.

Furthermore, Community-Led Design challenges us to go beyond retrofitting exhibitions for visually impaired visitors and instead empower them as co-creators. As a result, our focus shifted from simply adding accessibility features to developing a truly immersive, multi-sensory exhibition. We experimented with translating visual art into tactile, auditory, and spatial experiences, moving away from the traditional visual-centric model.

Moving forward, we aim to explore Collaborative Methodologies, such as co-organizing workshops with visually impaired individuals to involve them directly in the design process. This approach will ensure accessibility measures genuinely meet user needs and shift exhibitions from “compliance accessibility” to “holistic and inclusive design”, fostering a fairer and more diverse cultural experience.

2 design practices/projects：

1.Art Gallery of New South Wales (2018) 80Hz: Sound Lab. [Interactive Project].

Statement：

‘80Hz: Sound Lab’ is an interactive project launched in 2018 by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia. It uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) to analyse paintings’ visual features—such as colour, contrast, and brushstroke movement—and map them to instruments,

rhythms, and melodies, generating unique musical compositions. By turning a Reel, audiences can select paintings and “listen” to their corresponding sounds, experiencing their emotion and structure through hearing.

As a technical reference for translating paintings into sound, ‘80Hz: Sound Lab’ demonstrates how visual elements can be mapped to auditory dimensions. The project’s AI-driven approach extracts visual features (e.g., colour, contrast) and programmatically converts them into sound features (e.g., instruments, rhythm). This method informs our own experiments, where we focus on translating an artwork’s composition (colours, strokes, light and dark) into auditory experiences. However, unlike ‘80Hz: Sound Lab,’ we prioritise a more intuitive and perceptible translation, aiming to convey not just the final artwork but also its creative process, emphasising the dynamic and multi-sensory nature of art.

Additionally, while ‘80Hz: Sound Lab’ relies on automated, data-driven sound conversion, our project seeks to enhance audience participation, allowing them to actively shape their experience rather than passively receive it. In the future, we aim to integrate AI or sensing technology with interactive user engagement, making sound transformation an explorable and creative process. For instance, visually impaired participants could freely combine and adjust sound elements to create their own “Sound Painting”. Furthermore, by directly collaborating with the visually impaired, we hope to refine interactionsand ensure that sound translation is not merely a substitute for visual perception, but rather a deeply emotional, immersive, and

personalised artistic experience—one that transforms exhibitions into open, co-creative, and multi-sensory platforms.

2.Flying Object (2015) Tate Sensorium. [Interactive Project]. Developed for Tate Britain.

Statement：

Developed by Flying Object for Tate Britain in 2015, Tate Sensorium uses sound, touch, smell, and taste to challenge the traditional visually-driven exhibition model, allowing visitors to experience art through multiple senses rather than just seeing it.

Traditional accessible exhibitions often focus on providing information—such as audio tours, Braille labels, or tactile models—but tend to overlook immersion and enjoyment. Tate Sensorium, however, presents a breakthrough in multi-sensory interaction, making art more intuitive, vivid, and emotionally resonant. This highlights the central challenge of our project: how can we enhance accessibility for visually impaired visitors while also making their participation more engaging and enjoyable?

One of the particularly compelling elements is taste—chocolatier Paul A. Young created an edible interpretation of Francis Bacon's Figure in a Landscape using charcoal, sea salt, cacao nibs, and smoked tea. This sensory experienceallows onlookers to engage with the emotional atmosphere of the painting rather than relying on curatorial description. In contrast to one-way information transmission, it encourages personal engagement, challenging us to

ask: how can visually impaired audiences not only ‘hear’ or ‘touch’ art, but actively create their own sensory experience?

Additionally, Tate Sensorium also makes us think about the question: is multi-sensory interaction always pleasurable? Strong smells or low-frequency vibrations might be overwhelming for some, reducing engagement rather than enhancing it. This makes us reflect on how to balance multi-sensory experiences with individual comfort—should exhibitions offer adjustable sensory inputs rather than a one-size-fits-all approach?

Currently, our project focuses on translating visual elements into sound and touch, but these transformations are still curator-defined (by us), limiting audience agency. Inspired by Tate Sensorium, we aim to shift towards greater viewer autonomy—allowing visitors to adjust and mix sound elements, shaping their own experience rather than passively receiving pre-set interpretations. Moving forward, we will explore AI and sensing technology to refine interactions, ensuring that accessibility goes beyond function to foster joyful, immersive participation.