

Tactile Journey

Founder of Futurism and poet Fillippo Marinetti (1876- 1944) wrote his manifesto on Tactilism (1924) that promoted the art of touch as a way to help us rediscover the world. Create your own tactile journey with this simple exercise.

- 1) Collect an assortment of objects.
- 2) Try and find objects with different temperatures, weights and textures.
- 3) Close your eyes and handle each object carefully.
- 4) Arrange the objects in an order that entertains your hands.
- 5) Write down or draw what the objects make you think and feel.





Top Tip: Marinetti advised to wear gloves before the activity to give you a thirst for new touch sensations.

Explore: Slowly explore your way around a room in complete darkness

Research: Try the activity with feet instead of hands.

The Manifesto of Tactilism

by F.T. Marinetti
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Futurism, founded by us in Milan in 1909, gave to the world a hatred of the Museum, the Academy and Sentimentalism; it gave the world Action-Art, the defence of youth against all senility, the glorification of illogical and mad innovative genius, the artistic sensibility of mechanisation, of speed, of the music hall, and of the simultaneous interpenetration of modern life, words in freedom, plastic dynamism, noise-intoners, synthetic theatre. Futurism today redoubles its creative effort.

Last summer, at Antignano, where the street named after Amerigo Vespucci, discoverer of America, curvingly coasts along the sea, I invented Tactilism. Red flags waved from the workshops taken over by the workers.

I was naked in the silky water that was torn by rocks, foamy scissors knives razors, among the iodine-filled mattresses of seaweed. I was nude in the sea of flexible steel, which had a fertile and virile breathing. I drank from the goblet of the sea filled to the rim with genius. The sun, with its long roasting flames, vulcanised my body and bolted the keel of my forehead rich with sails. A working-class boy, Who smelled of salt and hot stone, looked, smiling, at my first tactile board:

"Having fun making little boats?!"

I answered: "Yes, I'm building a craft that will take the human spirit to unknown waters." Here are my reflections, the reflections of a swimmer: The unrefined and elemental majority of men came out of the Great War concerned only to conquer a greater material well-being. The minority, composed of artists and thinkers, sensitive and refined, instead displays the symptoms of a deep and mysterious ill that is probably a consequence of the great tragic exertion that the war imposed on humanity.

This illness displays, as symptoms, a sad listlessness, an excessively feminine neurasthenia, a hopeless pessimism, a feverish indecision of lost instincts, and an absolute lack of will.

The rough and elemental majority of men tumultuously hurls toward the revolutionary conquest of the Communist paradise and definitively storms the problem of happiness, convinced that it has solved it by satisfying all material needs and appetites.

The intellectual minority ironically scorns this breathless attempt, and no longer enjoying the ancient pleasures of Religion, of Art, of Love, which previously constituted its privilege and its shelter, brings life, which it no longer knows how to enjoy, to a cruel trial, and abandons itself to refined pessimism, sexual inversions, and to the artificial paradises of cocaine, opium, ether, etc. That majority

and this minority both denounce Progress, Civilisation, the mechanical powers of Speed, of Comfort, of Hygiene, Futurism in short, as being responsible for their past, present, and future misfortunes.

Almost everyone proposes a return to a savage life, contemplative, slow, solitary, far from the hated cities.

As for us Futurists, we who bravely face the agonising drama of the post-war period, we are in favour of all the revolutionary attacks that the majority will attempt. But, to the minority of artists and thinkers, we yell at the top of our lungs: Life is always right! The artificial paradises with which you attempt to murder her are useless. Stop dreaming of an absurd return to the savage life. Beware of condemning the superior powers of society and the marvels of speed. Heal, rather, the illness of the post-war period, giving humanity new and nutritious joys. Instead of destroying human throngs, it is necessary to perfect them. Intensify the communication and the fusion of human beings. Destroy the distances and the barriers that separate them in love and friendship. Give fullness and total beauty to these two essential manifestations of life: Love and Friendship.

In my careful and anti-traditional observations of all the erotic and sentimental phenomena that unite both sexes, and of the no-less-complex phenomena of friendship, I have understood that human beings speak to each other with their mouths and with their eyes, but do not manage a true sincerity because of the lack of sensitivity of the skin, which is still a mediocre conductor of thought.

While eyes and voices communicate their essences, the senses of touch of two individuals communicate almost nothing in their clashes, intertwining, or rubbing. Thus, the need to transform the handshake, the kiss, and the coupling into continuous transmissions of thought.

I started by submitting my sense of touch to an intensive treatment, pinpointing the confused phenomena of will and thought on various points on my body, and especially on the palms of my hands. This training is slow but easy, and all healthy bodies can, through this training, give surprising and exact results.

On the other hand, unhealthy sensibilities, which draw their excitability and their apparent perfection from the very weakness of the body, will achieve great tactile power less easily, without duration or confidence. I have created a first educational scale of touch, which is, at the same time, a scale of tactile values for Tactilism, or the Art of Touch.

First scale, level, with four different categories of touch.

First category: extremely confident touch, abstract, cold.

Sandpaper,
Silver-coated paper.

Second category: touch without heat, persuasive, reasoning.

Smooth silk,
Silk crepe.

Third category: exciting, lukewarm, nostalgic.

Velvet,
Wool from the Pyrenees,
Wool,
Silk-wool crepe.

Fourth category: almost irritating, hot, determined.

Granulous silk,
Plaited silk,
Spongy cloth.
Second scale, volumes

Fifth category: soft, hot, human.

Suede,
Horsehair or dog hair,
Human hair,
Marabou.

Sixth category: hot, sensual, spirited, affectionate.

This category has two branches:

Rough iron
Soft brush,
Sponge,
Wire brush,
Plush,
Human or peach fuzz,
Bird down.

Through this separation of tactile values, I have created:

1. Simple tactile boards that I will present to the public in our contactilations or conferences on the Art of touch.

I have arranged the previously catalogued tactile values in wise harmonic or antithetical combinations.

2. Abstract or suggestive tactile boards (hand journeys).

These tactile boards have arrangements of tactile values that allow hands to wander over them, following coloured trails and experiencing a succession of suggestive sensations, whose rhythm, in turn languid, cadenced, or tumultuous, is regulated by exact directions.

One of these abstract tactile boards made by me, and that has as a title Sudan-Paris, contains, in the part representing Sudan, rough, greasy coarse, prickly, burning tactile values (spongy material, sponge, sandpaper, wool, brush, wire brush); in the part representing The Sea, there are slippery, metallic, fresh tactile values (silver-coated paper); in the part representing Paris, there are soft, delicate, caressing tactile values, hot and cold at the same time (silk, velvet, feathers, down).

3. Tactile boards for the opposite sexes.

In these tactile boards, the arrangement of tactile values allows the hands of a man and a woman, tied together, to take a tactile journey together and evaluate it. These tactile boards are extremely varied, and the pleasure that they give is enriched by the harnessing of rival sensibilities, which will attempt to feel more acutely and better explain their rival sensations. These tactile boards are destined to replace the brutalising game of chess.

4. Tactile pillows.

5. Tactile sofas.

6. Tactile beds.

7. Tactile shirts and dresses.

8. Tactile rooms.

In these tactile rooms, we will have floors and walls made of large tactile boards. Tactile values of

mirrors, running water, rocks, metals, brushes, lightly electrified wires, marble, velvet, rugs that will give the bare feet of the male and female dancers varied pleasures.

9. Tactile streets.

10. Tactile theatres.

We will have theatres arranged for Tactilism. Seated spectators will rest their hands on long, running tactile ribbons that will produce tactile sensations with different rhythms. It will also be possible to place these ribbons on small rotating wheels, accompanying them with music and light.

11. Tactile boards for the improvisation of words in freedom.

The tactilist will express aloud the sensations that his hands' journey transmits to him. His will be a free-word improvisation, that is, freed from all rhythm, prosody and syntax, an improvisation essential and synthetic and with as little of the human element as possible. The improvising tactilist may be blindfolded, but it is preferable to wrap him in the light of a projector. The new initiates, who have not yet trained their tactile sensibilities, will be blindfolded. But, as for the true tactilists, the full light of a projector is preferable, since darkness has the drawback of concentrating sensitivity into an excessive abstraction.

The education of the sense of touch.

1. It will be necessary to keep the hands gloved for many days, during which the brain will attempt to condense in them the desire for varied tactile sensations.

2. To swim underwater, in the ocean, trying to distinguish tactilely the plaited currents and different temperatures.

3. Enumerate and recognise every evening, in absolute darkness, all of the objects in the bedroom. It was precisely with giving myself over to this exercise in the underground darkness of a trench in Gorizia, in 1917, that I made my first tactile experiments.

I never claimed to have invented the tactile sensibility, which has already manifested itself in

genial forms in the Jongleuse and in the Hors-nature of Rachilde. Other writers and artists had premonitions of tactilism. Moreover, the plastic art of tactilism has been in existence for a long time. My great friend Boccioni, futurist painter and sculptor, felt as a tactilist when he created, in 1919, his plastic ensemble Fusion of a Head and a Window, with materials that are absolute contraries in tactile weight and value: iron, porcelain, and women's hair.

The Tactilism created by me is clearly distinct from the plastic arts. It has nothing to do with, nothing to gain from, and everything to lose by association with painting or sculpture. It is necessary to avoid, as much as possible in the tactile boards, a variety in colour, which lends itself to plastic impressions. It will be difficult for painters and sculptors, who tend naturally to subordinate tactile values to visual values, to create significant tactile boards. Tactilism seems to me particularly suited to young poets, pianists, typists, and to all erotic, refined, and potent temperaments.

Tactilism, nevertheless, must avoid not only collaboration with plastic arts but also morbid erotomania. It must, simply, have as a goal tactile harmony, and it must indirectly collaborate in the perfecting of spiritual communication between human beings through the epidermis.

The identification of five senses is arbitrary, and one day we will certainly discover and catalogue numerous other senses. Tactilism will contribute to this discovery.

F. T. Marinetti