
Intersentient States: A Foundational Note.

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Abstract

This brief statement outlines ongoing work on a concept I term *Intersentient States*¹. The term describes conditions of shared or reciprocal awareness that arise between material forms, maker, and viewer. It proposes that artworks can mediate perception rather than merely receive it. Drawing upon vessels, sculpted heads, and paintings from my own practice, the concept advances a poetics of embodied relation, in which attention is distributed across object and observer. While the idea shares philosophical affinities with new materialism and phenomenology, it originates directly from studio experience. This short article serves to register authorship and introduce the conceptual field ahead of a forthcoming peer-reviewed paper.



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Keywords: *Intersentient States; intersentience; material perception; relational aesthetics; perceptual reciprocity; ceramics; embodied cognition; Carlo Scarpa; Hans Coper; Shōji Kamoda; Elisabeth Frink; Elizabeth Fritsch; Gordon Baldwin; Takahiro Kondō.*

Main Text

This phrase, *Intersentient States*¹ — names a field of relation, not a theory. It refers to times when perception feels shared, when material, maker, and beholder seem harmonised within a single, mutable awareness. The term *intersentient* extends beyond *intersubjective*. It does not depend on consciousness between persons but acknowledges that attention itself can be enabled through form. The term *intersentient* does not suggest that materials, artefacts, or objects are themselves sentient. Rather, it names a perceptual reciprocity that occurs when awareness seems to travel between maker, material, and beholder. The artwork, once shaped by a sentient being, may appear to register and reflect traces of that awareness — not as consciousness, but as configuration.” The sentience belongs entirely to those who perceive; what is shared is not thought or feeling within the object, but the perceptual field that arises through encounter. Intersentient States does not claim novelty of experience, but novelty of articulation — offering language for perceptual conditions long encountered in art but rarely named without recourse to anthropomorphism or metaphor.

The origin of this idea lies in making. Returning to full-time ceramics after decades in experimental science, I recognised familiar dynamics — systems held at threshold, tensions between containment and release, matter poised between phases. In the studio these principles become perceptual. Clay appeared to record touch; surfaces held traces of their making; a vessel conveyed its weight in the room. I use the term *agentive* not to imply autonomous action, but to describe this sensation that form conditions perception through its physical and visual presence.

I have sensed this too in the ceramic works of others: in Hans Coper’s vessels of compressed stillness, Gordon Baldwin’s weathered bowls, and Elizabeth Fritsch’s rhythmic groupings, where forms appear attuned to one another across space. Each articulates presence as something reciprocal — a stillness that acts back upon the viewer. A related sensitivity to perceptual interval can be sensed in the ceramic practice of Takahiro Kondō, particularly in his use of silver and gold overglaze, where surface becomes a site of delayed optical response. Kondō’s vessels do not assert presence through form alone; rather, they modulate perception through reflection, opacity, and temporal instability. Light does not simply strike these surfaces but is slowed, fractured, and redistributed, so that the vessel’s appearance changes with position, movement, and duration of looking. What emerges is not an attribution of agency to material, but a heightened awareness of the conditions under which perception takes place. The work requires pause. In this sense, Kondō’s practice exemplifies how form can be composed to sustain attentiveness — not by animation, but by withholding resolution — allowing perception itself to remain active within the encounter.

The *Tribute* sculptures of Elisabeth Frink embody a parallel charge, their poised forms intensifying the viewer’s awareness as much as form. Likewise, Carlo Scarpa’s architectures seem cut to fit memory rather than utility; his apertures, thresholds, and suspended geometries shape how perception moves. My own vessels and heads follow that lineage of attention. They inhabit sentience rather than depict it. The quiet agency I sense in my own work owes much to Coper’s example — his mastery of balance, compression, and release. His vessels seem less made than found at the threshold between containment and openness — forms that can seem to return attention. Echoes of this reciprocity appear in far older works: the violin-shaped marble idols of the Early Bronze Age, such as the Beycesultan types from Anatolia, already fuse body and vessel into a single attentive presence — early signs that awareness might find expression through form itself.

Within this framework, *Intersentient States* describes how form holds relation and is not a metaphor for consciousness. The phenomenon belongs entirely within human perception: the artefact, once shaped, carries formal and tactile qualities that can make it appear to meet the observer halfway. This reciprocity arises in the act of looking, not within the material itself. *Intersentience*, therefore, names a perceptual relation — an event of awareness distributed through attention, rather than any intrinsic sentience of matter. A vessel too resolved can lose attentiveness; an unfinished surface can remain receptive. Grouped together, such works may sometimes form resonant configurations — spatial ecologies where objects appear attentively related to one another. In such charged proximities, perception becomes plural.

Parallels with scientific practice remain close. In both domains, understanding emerges through both experiment and observation. This continuity between disciplines is captured by Arthur Koestler’s notion of *bisociation*, which hypothesised that creative thought is born from the collision of distinct frames. Recent neurocognitive studies now

¹ Definition — *Intersentient States*: A perceptual condition in which awareness appears distributed between perceiver and material form - without implying consciousness within matter, but naming the reciprocity of attention that arises when a shaped object seems to return the gaze or awareness of its maker or viewer. The sentience lies not in the object but in the relation: a circuit of perception that moves through, rather than merely between, participants.

suggest that artistic and scientific insight share the same underlying neural circuitry, demonstrated by the dynamic interplay between imaginative and evaluative networks and mediated by neurochemical modulators such as dopamine. Whether composing a score, designing an experiment, or shaping a vessel, the act of creation seems to draw upon the same physiological substrate of curiosity and reward.

To call a work *intersentient* is therefore to describe an epistemic event, where perception is distributed across matter and mind. The studio becomes both the site and instrument of enquiry. Each form, whether a leaning sculpted head, a composite vessel, or a muted painting, records not expression but embodies attention held in material. These are not objects of representation but thresholds of awareness. Additionally, the ethical dimension is quiet but present. Recognising material as an active context, rather than a passive medium, invites a slower, more reciprocal form of seeing. It aligns with Jane Bennett's *vibrant matter* and Karen Barad's *intra-action*. These are frameworks in which agency emerges through relation, not dominance. *Intersentient States* therefore proposes an aesthetic ecology — one that values presence over assertion, and listening over display.

This note cannot encompass the full articulation of the concept, which will appear in expanded form elsewhere. Its purpose is to register the term, indicate its origins in practice, and suggest its philosophical reach. *Intersentient States* designates those fragile conditions in which material, maker, and beholder share perception — each shaping the other within a field of mutual regard.

Conclusion

To speak of Intersentient States is to admit that awareness may flicker when matter is arranged to receive it. In such moments, art is less an object than an event of co-presence — something that happens between the maker, the material, and whoever stands before it.

Author's Note on Transparency

This text was developed from my own writing and reflections, with the assistance of an adaptive generative-language system used solely for editorial refinement. All ideas, examples, and frameworks originate from my personal research and artistic practice.

This paper is a companion text to the author's extended essay "Intersentient States: Studio Reflections" (2025), which develops the same concept through expanded discussion and visual analysis.

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