

RHYTHMS OF PRESENCE

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Written reflection submitted to the University of Bergen, Faculty of Fine Art, Music
and Design in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the Norwegian Artistic
Research Fellowship programme

September 2017

Abstract

My artistic research project *Rhythms Of Presence* is based on considering rhythm as an important element within everyday life, and especially, for understanding bodily presence. In my research project I set out to explore rhythms of everyday steps through a number of projects, such as *Heredrum*, *Reading stanley brouwn*¹, *Rhythms of Presence* and *With A Passerby*. This led to a deeper knowledge about how walking is a complex weave of different contacts and interactions, between bodies, spaces and territories. Through such work, I came to recognize how by focusing solely on rhythm of this everyday activity may function as a key framework for repositioning understandings of presence that manifests besides subjectivity, territoriality, meaning and social life.

In my text, I unpack my research through a range of reflections about three works that I have accomplished, with a particular focus on the installation *Rhythms Of Presence*. I start this text by introducing the key elements that defined the general process of this project. These include: focus on the rhythms of everyday steps as infra-ordinary phenomenon, expanded listening and production of experiential artworks as methodology.

This is followed by an outline of my engagement with number of theorists and conceptual territories that became active in my work and deepened my own reflections on the installations and the topic of my research, among them Michel de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre, Karen Barad and Giorgio Agamben.

I continue by briefly situating my project within the context of past artistic practices engaged with the topic of walking. I point out my realization, that contrary to predominant understanding of walking as territorial and narrative practice, the focus of this project is rather on events of steps as negotiations between the body, the ground and the surroundings.

In the next section I define my writing as "situated writing" in that it aims towards articulating insights and philosophical concepts that are emerging from and are in dialogue with my artistic practice.

The main section of this reflection consists of three separate texts focusing on the projects *Heredrum*, *Reading stanley brouwn* and *Rhythms Of Presence*. They follow one another as they have been accomplished through the process of this artistic research project. Starting with public intervention *Heredrum*, where the focus on the events of steps rather than walking became clear. This is followed by reflection on the work *Reading stanley brouwn*, the project exploring the possibilities of relating to archival material as a set of instructions for future activity, and proposing the act of "directed" walking as embodied "reading".

Concluding this section is the central text on the installation *Rhythms Of Presence* which engages in a manifestation of presence through a remote transduction of rhythms of everyday steps, and how this procedure reconfigures bodily presence and spatiality as temporal and rhythmical phenomena.

After detailed engagement with the three artistic works, I conclude with a short statement about the possible reconfigurings of relations between the self, the other, subjectivity and presence that rhythm, as it is being activated within this research, might bring into presence.

Following the conclusion is an appendix consisting of brief descriptions of the remaining artistic works that I have accomplished as a part of my research. As a final contribution, two commissioned texts are presented. They were written by invited

writers Salomé Voegelin and Vladimir Vidmar for the occasion of the exhibition that took place in ŠKUC Gallery in Ljubljana, in November 2016.

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Presence is the rhythm of the body pulsating in-between its infinite impossibilities of being entirely ungraspable.

INTRODUCTION

Unpacking Infra-rhythm

Process

I have started my artistic research project as an investigation in how everyday non-performative bodily movements might manifest presence as rhythmical and acoustical phenomenon. I have set to explore such manifestations of bodily presence through an experimental and conceptual artistic practice, working towards accomplishing experiential artistic works. My methodology for accomplishing these works was to engage in the activity of expanded listening, involving sensors and connective network technology to capture the hidden and invisible rhythms of everyday bodily expressions. This method was used in order to rearticulate these rhythms, and to explore how these re-articulations might manifest presence beyond the directness of visuality and vicinity, and further, what kind of new poetics they might form.

Concretely, I have initiated my research focusing on the hidden rhythms of everyday walking as an infra-ordinary activity.

In a text *Approaches to What?* (1973), Georges Perec coins the term *infra-ordinary*:

What speaks to us, seemingly, is always the big event, the untoward, the extraordinary: the front-page splash, the banner headlines. Railway trains only begin to exist when they are derailed, and the more passengers that are killed, the more the trains exist. (...)

What's really going on, what we're experiencing, the rest, all the rest, where is it? How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?(...)

What we need to question is bricks, concrete, glass, our table manners, our utensils, our tools, the way we spend our time, our rhythms. To question that which seems to have ceased forever to astonish us. We live, true, we breathe, true; we walk, we open doors, we go down staircases, we sit at a table in order to eat, we lie down on a bed in order to sleep. How?Where? When? Why?²

Within this context I have established the understanding that the rhythms of everyday walking, being an infra-ordinary activity, act as a bodily infra-rhythm - an omnipresent and somehow overlooked phenomenon, that nevertheless crucially contributes to our situatedness in the world, as well as to our perceiving, experiencing and making of that very same world. Infra-rhythm is a pace, a measure, presence and reference for any other rhythm that might be perceived, felt or enacted.

As such, everyday walking is understood as a liminal, semi-conscious and semi-automatic activity in which rhythms pronounce bodily presence as a constant negotiation between the moving body and its inner being on the one hand, and its social, architectural, geographical surroundings on the other.

Theoretical research

As part of my research, I also engaged with a number of theorists and conceptual territories, of which I give detail to the key theoretical points that became active in my work, using them to deepen my own reflections on the artistic work. For instance I have engaged with the work of Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre in order to contextualize everyday walking as a part of the practice of everyday life, and to point towards material and immaterial forces and structures that might be rhythming the walking bodies into motion. I have related to Jean Luc Nancy's considerations of how body might constitute its presence outside of language, relating this to the articulations of bodily presence as they unfold in my artistic works. Exploring the notion of body as process, I have referred to Karen Barad's proposition of intra-action as a possibility for understanding the body as a site and as a process of becoming, and how such simultaneity might shed light on the "intra-dependency" between the visitors and artistic works, in the way they might be constituting one another as they are engaged in the process of intra-action.

Throughout my research I have been revisiting Giorgio Agamben's pertinent question of "What is Contemporary". Examining this question acted as a point for unfolding various possibilities that the attention towards the rhythms of steps affords in terms of contemplating on the relations between lived, endured, experienced and inaccessible passing of the present time.

From walking to steps

Besides engaging in theoretical research, I was also investigating existing artistic practices related to the topic of walking. In so doing, I have soon discovered an intrinsic connection between walking, territoriality and narrative approaches that in very general terms underlines much of the "walking art". This artistically manifests as acts of marking territories, mapping practices, tracing movement by GPS devices, literature and poetry derived from walks, or transforming found materials into sculptural objects by exhibiting them in the galleries and museums. The representatives of this rich tradition are many, most notable Hamish Fulton, Richard Long, Situationists International, Sophie Calle and Francis Alÿs to name just a few.

Through this discovery, accompanied with the experience of the intervention *Heredrum* (2014), I have realized that my interest in the practice of everyday walking differs from this intrinsic connection to territoriality and the related narrative, and is rather focusing on the event of a step as an occurrence that embodies bodily action and bodily sensation simultaneously. This defines a step as a relation and as a liminal event that is occurring in-between the body and the ground, in-between intentional and automatic movement, in-between self-expression and sensation of self. Therefore I have come to realize that my interest lies in the rhythms of everyday steps rather than in the rhythms of everyday walking, as I had believed from the outset of my research project. This steered my practice away from narrative and representational modes of expression towards experiential and conceptual works.

Situating such artistic stance in relation to the "walking art" tradition, I found traces of shared affinities in works such as *Seedbed* (1972) by Vito Acconci and in the oeuvre of Stanley Brouwn, with whose work I have later actively and productively engaged as a part of my own artistic practice.

Writing

Writing was and is an important part of my artistic research process. Throughout the three years of my fellowship I was "writing along" my artistic practice as another modality for furthering my research. After completion of my fellowship I have spent

time gathering these writings, developing them and finally shaping them into the present reflection.

I would like to stress that with my writing I am not attempting to analyze or explain my artistic practice. My approach to writing is rather an attempt to formulate insights and philosophical concepts that are emerging from the embodied experience of my material practice, and that are at the same time questioning, contextualizing and in dialogue with this practice. In some instances rather than explaining or analyzing certain works, this process might further complicate their reception, as well as generate ideas for new artistic works. In this sense I understand my writing as being "situated".

Considering the process of artistic research in relation to the practice of material creation, reflection and analytical approach, I have recognized and endured a tension between the material creation of artistic works and the practice of reflective writing. I have come to realize that perhaps the main difference between the two activities is that when creating an artistic work, the process taking place is that of "packing", while when writing reflective text, the process is the opposite – that of "unpacking". As my artistic practice aims towards addressing the visitor as a whole body, I tend to aim towards producing a moment of suddenness of encounter between the artistic work and the visitor. This again, is in contrast to the temporality of writing and reading reflective text.

In the final process of editing this text, in particular the reflection on the installation *Rhythms Of Presence*, much of the material has been omitted, this in an attempt to achieve greater clarity and flow within the text.

I would like to conclude this introduction by re-inserting one of the omitted parts, after not being able to weave it in the final version of this text. I am reintroducing it as I nevertheless feel its pertinence looming above and around this reflection. I have asked myself:

“But - can language/discourse listen to this other body?

Instead of being preoccupied with colonizing it with knowledge?

Interviewed in the documentary film “*Examined Life*” (2008) Avital Ronell makes a point about the power relation between the notion of knowledge and the Other:

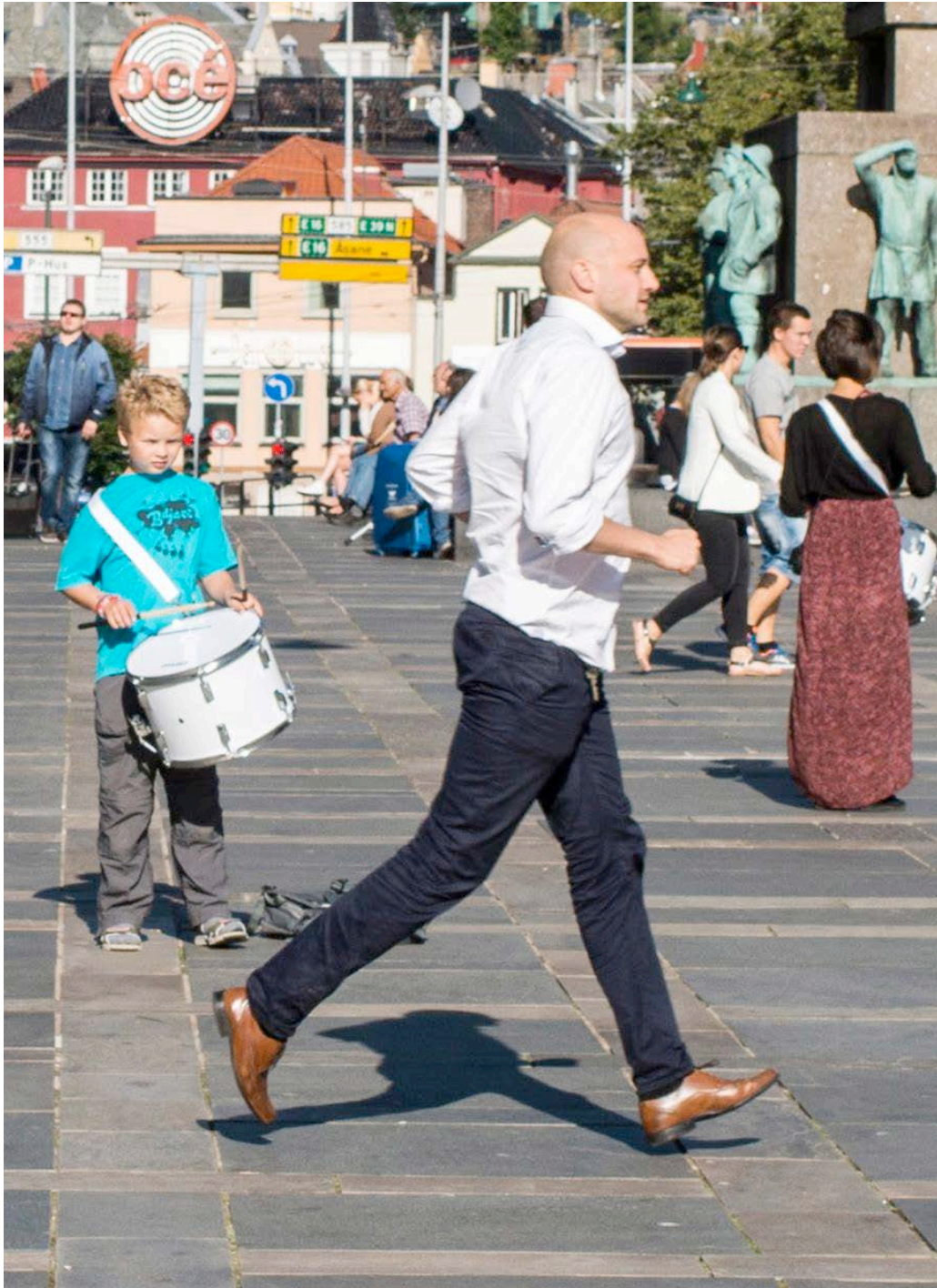
“You can't presume to know or grasp the Other. The minute you think you know the Other, you're ready to kill them.

You think, "Oh, they're doing this or this. They're the axis of evil. Let's drop some bombs."

But if you don't know, you don't understand this alterity, it's so Other that you can't violate it with your sense of understanding, then, um, you have to let it live, in a sense.””³

WORKS

Heredrum



Heredrum – sound intervention in public space. Bergen, September 2014.

Photo: Bjarte Bjørkum

Heredrum (2014)

Sound intervention in public space

Video documentation: <https://vimeo.com/126236781>

Introduction

This text is a contemplation on the sound intervention in public space *Heredrum*, written in the 2015 and remaining largely unchanged. This reflection starts with the description of the intervention, followed by laying out conceptual premises on which the intervention was conceived. The main body of the reflection consists of contemplations on the key elements that the intervention activates. These are including topics such as legs, steps, ground, ambiance, etc. The reflection concludes with the detailed speculation on the drum stroke as a catalytic event that reconfigures the relations between the stepping bodies, their steps and the ambiance, while it accentuates the passing of the present time, as the “*unlived element in everything that is lived*”.⁴

Description of the intervention

Sound intervention *Heredrum* focuses its attention on the imperceptible and hidden rhythms of everyday walking by attentively observing, capturing and performing these rhythms on the spot of their occurrences. A group of drummers with snare drums attached to their waists walks on a populated public square in an urban setting spreads evenly in a large formation sometime in the afternoon. Each drummer focuses on the steps of a random passer by, hitting the snare drum every time the foot of the observed person touches the ground. When the observed walker has left the square or the steps are out of sight, the drummer pauses for a short time and focuses on another passer by.

Conceptual premises

Negotiating gravity, steps are continuously forming imperceptible flows of rhythms, their variations echoing a range of individual itineraries, intentions and emotions, as

well as spatial and social situations. The way the body moves through space, interacting with architecture and other bodies is echoed in the rhythms and modalities of walking. At the same instance, the way the body moves through and within the space defines how one perceives that space. The step as a contact point between the foot and the ground is thus embodying the relations between the body, a space, the inner mental state and social life, and it is both, a personal, strongly felt yet largely unnoticed sensation, and a public manifestation of presence simultaneously.

Immediate percussive accentuations of the perceived steps on the spot of their occurrences result in multitude of audible drum rhythms that are bringing into presence the hidden rhythmical modalities of everyday walking and enhancing the presence of walkers as moving bodies in an affective and evocative manner. At the same time this aural manifestation transforms the ambiance of the space, instantly affecting how one occupies and moves within this charged space as a walking individual. These consciously performed rhythms therefore accentuate and disrupt the way one inhabits public space, creating a moment of intense resonance and friction between the personal sensation of one's own step and a public manifestation of a walking individual as being a part of a crowd that is constituting social life of a place.

By echoing the steps, the sounding drumbeats act as immediate abstractions of concrete personal walking rhythms, which conversely transform the perception of the act of walking from being solely purposeful and automatic activity enabling a person to overcome distance, into a qualitative and symbolic, perhaps even poetic activity. The intervention is therefore both, an intrusive act of capture and exposure of personal bodily activity, and an emancipatory act of giving voice to the multitude of individual presences in a public space. By creating heightened awareness of being observed and at the same time of being heard, the situation challenges the walkers to actively explore and transform the given way of occupying public space. From being a passive citizen automatically following the culturally prescribed ways of behavior, to becoming an active agent whose articulated presence is having immediate influence and (trans)formative power on the social and symbolic place s/he is occupying. Affectively activating place in this way, the aim of the intervention is to experience and investigate this situation, and to furthermore observe how this activation transforms the place and the relations between the self, the public, the experienced and the symbolic.

Reflections on the key elements of the work

Legs

We stand on our legs, and they support us. Most of the time they are touching the ground. With our feet we sense the margins of our bodies, our weight and the possibilities and the limitations of our movement - we sense our bodily situatedness within the world. Legs remind us that we cannot really take matters into our hands entirely - an illusion that our instrumentalizing hands evoke so easily and so often. Legs, down below, are existential limbs, their movement echoing bare presence. They are our gravity-sensing organ, always active in carrying the weight of our bodies while sensing the ground. Legs fulfill our desire to move, enabling us to be in active physical relation with everything that is beyond the limits of our skin. Their movement unconsciously influences our beings as much as we consciously control them. When meditating on legs, it is difficult to imagine the Cartesian division between the body and the mind, movement and thought.

Steps

As we move our legs, they move our entire bodies, dislocating us spatially. Traversing the ground and overcoming distance, steps set our bodies into undulating motion – a sequence consisting of a short moment of almost weightless floating in the mid-air, then falling towards the ground with the force of our bodily weight multiplied by the gravitational acceleration, hitting the ground and rising again towards the weightless moment. We undergo this cycle with every step we take. This movement shakes our entire bodies, organs, bones and liquids, conditioning our most fundamental corporeal existence and mental state, which in turn influences the way we perceive and sense ourselves and our surrounding. Making a step is a semi-automatic action that has an enormous impact on subjectivity and perception, and is embodying an intrinsic connection between movement, sensation and experience.

As Erwin Straus writes in his essay *Forms of Spatiality*:

*(Expressive) movement cannot be produced apart from the immediate experience of which it forms and integral part. The immediate experience and the movement in which it actualizes its meaning are indivisible; the movement is not the cause of the immediate experience; neither is the immediate experience the purpose of the movement.*⁵

Even though Straus refers to expressive movement in the context of dance, I would like to point to his observation in order to highlight the unnoticed interdependence between bodily movement and sensation, that is constantly at play in each step we take. This intrinsic connection between sensation and movement points towards the fact that we are thinking bodies that inhabit a concrete space in a concrete time, and that the way we move is integral to the way we think, perceive, sense and make sense of ourselves, the surroundings and the other. Therefore the step is not only automatic and mechanical, but also a “lived movement” that expresses vitality and a modality of presence in its barest.

Externally, steps manifest as physical force hitting the ground, possibly leaving traces and radiating vibrations in two directions – downwards into the ground as weak shockwaves, and upwards into the air as sound. While the vibrations in the ground remain largely imperceptible to us, we can hear the steps echoing through the air. They are signaling presence and by doing so, they are contributing to the ambiance of the place. Attitude, age, agency, gender, weight and fashion can to some degree be evoked in an echo of a step.

Step as a contact point between the body and ground also serves as a probing gesture – sensing the firmness of the ground, revealing acoustic properties of the space, as well as giving us feedback regarding our own physical and mental conditions. Step-by-step, we are reading the ground we are walking on.

Ground

Ground as surface

Ground as point of contact

Ground as territory

Ground as margin of visibility

Ground as condition

Ground as possibility

Ground as resistance

Ground as limitation

Ground as stage

Ground as vibrant matter

Open ground

Ground as medium

Ground as construction

Ground as membrane

While walking, we are constantly hitting the ground with our feet, sending weak shockwaves through the solid matter down below. Inaudible to our naked ears, these shockwaves are vibrating the earth, exciting molecules in stone and asphalt or resonating in built caverns, chambers, parking lots or canalization tunnels below the surface. Absorbing our steps, the ground echoes our presence in the solid subterranean acoustics. Always in touch or less than a step away, this space remains inaudible, invisible and inaccessible to us.

Ambiance

Ambiance engulfs us. We are immersed in it, sensing it continuously with all our senses. Ambiance evolves in an empty space between the solid structures of built environment, ground, sky and the activities taking place. It is ephemeral, airy, transparent, immaterial and transitory. It is *“imperceptibly in the foreground”*⁶, affecting us without being noticed. We are always a part of an ambiance. Our individual movements, attitudes, appearances, voices and mental states radiate

through atmosphere, fusing into an overall ambiance of the space. Therefore we are active agents of the ambiance that engulfs us. Being a result of countless human and non-human activities in a place, ambiance makes us behave in a certain way. Our behavior in turn reinforces the mood of that ambiance. Where does the initial mood originate? Is it communal, is it subjective, is it imposed or is it self propagated?

In his paper *A Sonic Paradigm Of Urban Ambiances?* Jean-Paul Thibaud describes ambiance as follows:

*(Ambiance) questions the idea of a clear distinction between the perceiver and the perceived, the subject and the object, the inside and the outside, the individual and the world. (...) ambiance enable us to emphasize the “in-between” and the “in-the-middle”, and through them a relational thought can develop.*⁷

Perhaps this “in-between” is a relation that ambiance has with itself. A moment or a duration, an event or a constellation between one or many, living or not, active or passive. Not being fixed to a place or time, this relation can occur between any of the elements at any moment, noticed or not.

Perhaps this “in-between” is the moment when the ambiance hears itself.

Perhaps this “in-between” is another way of saying that the ambiance hears itself.

Everyday walking

Taking one step after another, following an invisible itinerary that is negotiated between our will to get from here to there, our physical ability to move and the external conditions, we walk. We stroll, we hurry, we drift, we hike, we follow, we protest, we run away or we walk towards. Depending on physical and social conditions of the space, we adjust the way we walk and which itinerary we follow.

In this sense walking is a liminal activity, shaped by the walker as much as it is conditioned by the space where it is taking place. Walking never belongs to us entirely. The way we move through space and the itinerary we choose, defines how we perceive that space, and conversely, while moving from one point to another, we

bring the space we traverse into presence, infusing it with our vitality. According to chosen itineraries, we are generating various intensities of the spaces we are passing through.

Perhaps it is in this sense that we can read Michel de Certeau when he writes:

(Footsteps) weave places together. In that respect, pedestrian movements form one of these “real systems whose existence in fact makes up the city”. They are not localized; it is rather they that spatialize.⁸

These dynamics constitute an interdependent relation between the walker and the surroundings – as much as the spaces condition movement and itineraries, walking through them charges and brings these spaces into presence.

Manifesting externally as kinetic, acoustic and visual phenomena – consisting of pace, rhythm, intensity, direction and modality, walking as such does not convey meaning, but it rather gives a “tone” to our presence. As much as we assert our presence through walking, walking “speaks” through us. Its rhythms reveal as much as they hide.

Drummers

The drummers are an organized group, focusing their attention on the steps of passers-by, drumming their rhythms as they see them. Out of countless activities taking place on the square, they are only interested in the rhythms of steps of strangers. Being tuned into this activity, they pay attention, observe, surveil and expose. They amplify, interpret, articulate and make audible these otherwise imperceptible rhythms. They are in service of the place or of some other invisible and opaque entity, intentionally marking a semi-conscious activity of walking and therefore giving a voice to something that is there, that sounds, but has no voice. They are voicing an automatic, unreflected everyday human activity. One could say that the drummers become a selective ear of the place, that is transforming the ground into a strange vibrating membrane, which makes some steps on the square resound as drum strokes, while others remain silent.

By hitting the drum, the drummers are not expressing themselves, but rather voicing somebody else's presence. This inverts the usual relations between the drum, the body and the foot – while the drum usually dictates the movement of the foot and the body, in this case the foot dictates the drum. The drummers are also surveilling and exposing, and perhaps terrorizing the passers-by with their activity.

Drum stroke

Drum stroke follows, makes public, commands, questions, comments, punctuates and accentuates. It exposes, it disturbs, it gives voice, it arrests and it stimulates movement. By hitting the snare drum every time the foot of the observed person touches the ground, the drum stroke inserts itself in-between the foot and the ground at the moment of touchdown. It occupies a concrete and imaginary space. Drum stroke does not only establish a complicated relation between the walker and the drummer – the one who is being observed and the observer, nor does it solely resonate acoustically, making audible the otherwise imperceptible rhythms of walking. Altering acoustic and social properties of a place, it is destabilizing the usual relations between foot, ground, step, ambiance, space, individuality and sociality. Marking the moment of each step, the drum stroke also causes a pause in the flow of time – a gap where time as experienced and time as represented simultaneously occur within a single stroke. In doing so, the drum stroke is resonating and disrupting the way of being present. This makes the drum stroke an open gesture resisting interpretation and meaning. Located in-between the foot and the ground, it marks the intersection between subjectivity and objectivity of a single step that is always a personal sensation and a public manifestation of presence. It marks the margin between automatism and consciousness of walking. It inscribes the ground and transforms the ambiance with its sonic presence. It manifests as act of surveillance and attention.

Always being on the margin and in the intersection, the drum stroke beats yet another, invisible and imperceptible rhythm. Making conscious that which is automatic, making part of sociality that which is personal, creating a series of discrete events out of continuous flow, loudly manifesting silent observation, surveillance or attention, each drum stroke creates a possibility for a shift of awareness. A series of

drum strokes therefore beat a rhythm of disruptions that grasps the walker, the bystanders and the place, making them oscillate between subjectivity and objectivity, experience and representation, self and other, inside and outside.

Following steps like a score or a text, a sequence of drum strokes enunciates the rhythm of walking. However, immediate sonic doubling of steps in the place of their occurrences makes the drum stroke bounce back towards the walker. Not conceptually nor intellectually, but affectively and totally. Following the walker, the drum stroke demands, it wants something from her/him, but it does not reveal what exactly. It manifests as a concrete and firm instruction, a command, a suggestion that nevertheless remains oblique and obscure, with its demands unclear. It is irrational, ungraspable and challenging. It provokes uncertainty. Perhaps it pushes the walker into the present, into the contemporary – perhaps it opens up the void of the lived present, that we are enduring but are not really “living”, a condition that Agamben is referring to when he writes:

*The present is nothing other than this un-lived element in everything that is lived. That which impedes access to the present is precisely the mass of what for some reason (its traumatic character, its excessive nearness) we have not managed to live. The attention to this "un-lived" is the life of the contemporary. And to be contemporary means in this sense to return to a present where we have never been.*⁹

Perhaps the drum strokes are drumming into the place this “*un-lived element in everything that is lived*”, which is the void of the present itself. Pausing the flow of time, the drum strokes therefore push the situation into the void of “the now”.

All these procedures make the walking bodies central to the intervention – they are the source, the context and the “audience” of the action. They are being brought to the fore, their rhythms of steps captured and given voice. They are being followed, addressed, instructed, affected, transformed and offered the power to become active agents.

This gesture towards the walking bodies is unexpected un-curated, un-moderated, un-translated, un-explained, but rather direct, immediate and physical disruption. This disruption destabilizes the usual relations and flow of life,

transforming and charging the place with intensity that creates a possibility for attention, activation and transformation to take place.

Reading stanley brouwn



Reading stanley brouwn – installation view. MSUM - Museum of Contemporary Art
Metelkova, Ljubljana. November 2015.

Reading stanley brouwn (2015-2016)

Book by stanley brouwn *my steps 12.12.2005 – 1.1.2009*¹⁰, modified metronome, table.

Duration: 21 days

Video documentation: <https://vimeo.com/178716570>

The following text is a reflection on the work *Reading stanley brouwn*, written in 2016. It is conceived as a first person account of being engaged with this work.

As such it reflects on a relationality that the project embodies through establishing a direct bodily and personal relation with the work of stanley brouwn.

The reflection starts with an introductory description of the elements of the work and the condensed conceptual premises underlining it. This is followed by the main body of the text consisting of four parts. Starting with the question of who is stanley brouwn, which is followed by trying to outline the essence of brouwn's book. The reflection continues by giving a first person account of the process of reading this book and related existential and philosophical insights. The reflection concludes with the contemplation on the embodiment of the act of reading brouwn's book, that materialised as an installation.

Introduction:

The work entitled *Reading stanley brouwn* addresses the theme of everyday walking, measuring, archiving, reading and rhythmic temporality.

By way of reading the artistic book *stanley brouwn - my steps 12.12.2005 - 1.1.2006*, the project establishes a relationship with the opus of the conceptual artist stanley brouwn (Suriname/Netherlands), whose many works address the (im)measurability and materiality of the distances and their archivisation through the process of counting his one's own steps.

The present work questions the understanding of the written documentation-archive of everyday activity as something tied exclusively to the past, and through the process of re-enactment suggests a reading of the archive as an instruction. This gesture transposes the archive outside the passing of time, giving it rather a double temporal orientation — into the past and simultaneously into the future.

The project contains three elements — the book *stanley brouwn - my steps 12.12.2005 – 1.1.2006* of the artist stanley brouwn, my action of “reading” the book, and an installation which repositions the book and the action “in the now” as an unclear and elusive rhythmical instruction, suggestion, norm or support for movement, reflection or listening.

The book *stanley brouwn - my steps 12.12.2005 – 1.1.2006* consists of twenty-one pages, each page having the date and the number of steps printed on it. I read the book so that in the period of twenty-one days (from 1.2.2016 – 21.2.2106), on each day I walked precisely the prescribed number of steps, simultaneously recording their rhythms. The installation consists of the book and a modified metronome which ticks in the recorded rhythms of my steps.

Through the activity of inscribing the text into my own body, I inhabit brouwn’s archive with with my own presence. The measured-out walk makes concrete the printed number of steps by bringing them back into the everyday, from which they have originated. If brouwn’s archive points to a walked distance and thus invites the reader to imagine this distance, of which the measuring unit is an unknown variable, brouwn’s step, then my reading transposes this (un)defined distance into the qualitative dimension of time — into rhythm and duration.

The recorded time of the steps constitutes a new invisible digital archive of rhythms, whose variations echo my walked path, my intentions, as also my spatial and social bearings. And like brouwn’s, this archive too is imperfect, abstract, directionless, ambiguous and open.

Who is stanley brouwn?

I have decided to answer this question with two answers; the first answer is a quotation of an attempt of a short biography, as it was found on the internet on occasion of an exhibition. The second answer is taking in consideration stanley brouwn’s resistance and refusal of biographical approach. Based on this, the answer is rather attempting to outline brouwn’s absent presence as it manifests throughout his works.

1. Answer

Stanley Brouwn, one of the most important representatives of the Fluxus movement and Conceptual Art, is, in the truest sense of the word, one of the most forceful and inaccessible artist personalities. He does not want his art written about, neither does he want any photographs taken of himself. What is known about him is that he was born in 1935 in Surinam, has lived in Amsterdam since 1957, and for many years taught as a professor at the Kunstakademie Hamburg.

*Since 1960, his work has been shown at nearly all of the important exhibitions, e.g., documenta 5 in 1972, documenta 6 in 1977, documenta 7 in 1982, and most recently at documenta 11 in 2002, at the MACBA in Barcelona in 2005, and at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2006. Since the seventies, an integral part of Stanley Brouwn's artistic work has been the publication of books. His conceptual works deal with distances, measurements, or spaces between two points, persons, and places, but also, in line with his most well known artist's book *This Way Brouwn*, with paths. For his layout sketches, he asked passers-by he accidentally met on the street to make a sketch from memory of certain distances they had covered. Indeed, for Stanley Brouwn, motion, dealing with distances in space and time are the primary material for his artistic activity. He examines this fundamental human activity in ever new contexts and measures distances according to his own units of measure, such as the Brouwn cubit, the Brouwn foot, or the Brouwn step. In 1976 he published his artist's book *1m 1step*, which consists of two lines—one the length of a (his) step, the other one meter long. Thus his own, subjective unit of measurement (the sb foot, the sb cubit, the sb step) is in opposition to a generally acknowledged, universal metric system or an—outdated—local unit of measurement.*

Stanley Brouwn's works are situated in the field of tension between the abstract and the generally valid and could be summed up under the postulate: people walking on the planet Earth.¹¹

2. Answer

A record of measures, distances, lengths, directions, steps, crossings, encounters, relations, measurings. The record of a living body that doesn't want to be seen, that

wants to stay absent and detached from its own archived records, and that resists to be captured. This perhaps in order to point attention towards the liminal zone where concrete and abstract bodies converge, touch, coexist or cross. The liminal zone where biological life and a life of concepts inscribe each other. One could say that perhaps therefore, it is possible to know stanley brouwn partially and absolutely, at the same time.

The way of reading stanley brouwn

The publications are long lasting exhibitions.

stanley brouwn

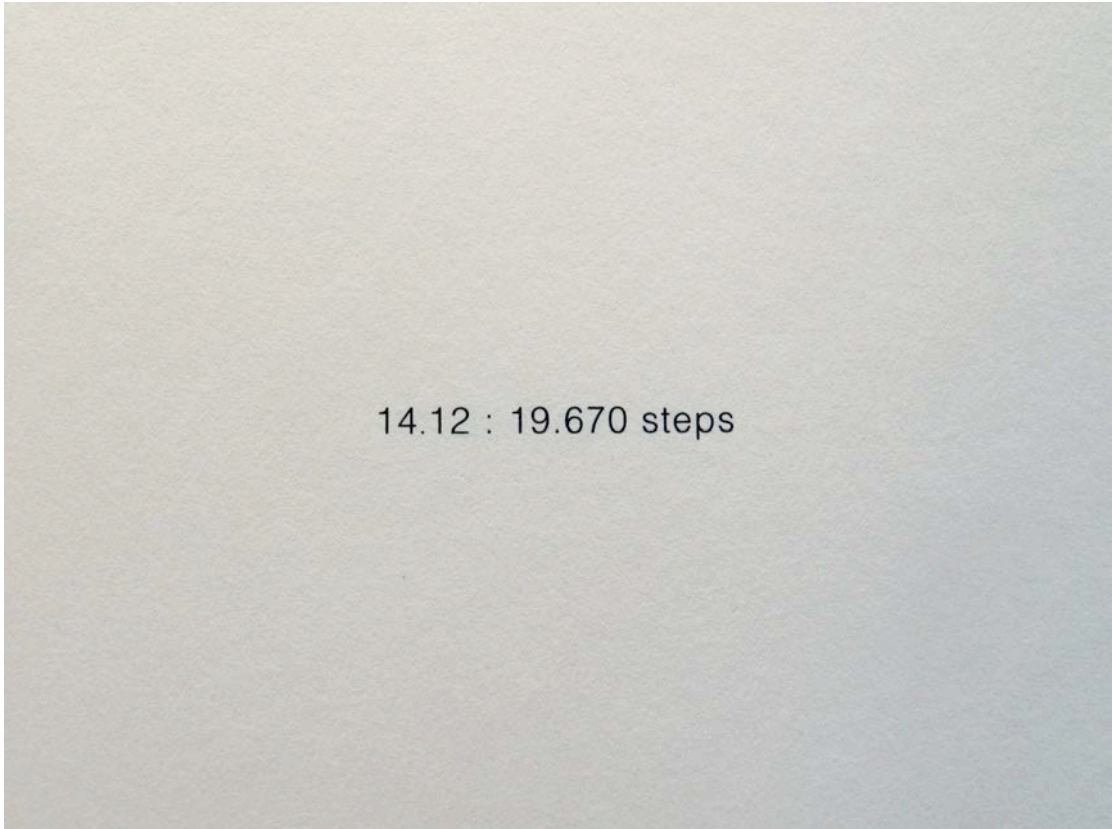
The book

The book *stanley brouwn - my steps 12.12.2005 – 1.1.2006* contains an archive of steps without directions, without a pace, without a place, or any other geographical references. We only know the quantities of steps that were taken by stanley brouwn on each specific day. One could say that the content of this book consists of statistically archived quantities of steps as used-up potentialities of movement. Following this line of thinking a bit further, one could claim that the archived steps are the singular steps that have been used-up by stanley brouwn out of the infinity of all possible steps. In any case, the archived steps point towards a record of presence of a particular body being alive in particular period of time. And it is this stepping body that wrote the archive.

Considering the title, numeric, temporal and durational aspects of the book, there is a hidden structure constituting the book, which situates it in an ephemeral and to my imagination perhaps even sculptural dimension. If one looks carefully at the dates and the number of days of archived steps: 12.12.2005 – 1.1.2006 one notices that all the digits that are marking the days are combinations of the digits “1” and “2”. Furthermore, the number of days within the specified period is 21.

This structure is partly reiterated in the chosen dates when I have read the book: 1.2.2016- 21.2.2016.





14.12 : 19.670 steps

How to read this book?

The abstraction of concrete steps, their detachment from the body that took them, the missing narrative – this blankness, this clearing, this void, points towards everything that is left out of this archive, which in turn gains presence as an absent contingency that has nevertheless already taken place.

Being provoked and intrigued by this suggestive and inaccessible contingency, I have read this openness as an invitation to activate myself, and to read this archive as an instruction, thus inhabiting this void, this clearing, this absence of body with my own body and with my own being. This gesture transposes this archive outside of the passing of time, giving it rather a double temporal orientation — into the past and simultaneously into the future.

Besides this shift of temporal orientation resulting from the decision to read the archive as an instruction, there is another reconfiguring of relations between the book and the reader taking place. If the archive has a status of a record to be read as an evidence that is to be assessed, the instruction on another hand, is pointing towards the reader, making her central and demanding her immediate activation. I have

decided to read this archive as a score, as instruction, so that in the period of twenty-one days (from 1.2.2016 – 21.2.2016), on each day I walked precisely the prescribed number of steps, simultaneously recording their rhythms, that are now applied to a modified metronome that is playing the recorded rhythms of my steps.

The act of reading:

What happens when I inhabit and embody the book of stanley brouwn?

What relations between steps, bodies, presence and absence, temporalities and geographies come into play in the process of *Reading stanley brouwn*?

By sticking to the rationed amounts of steps by stanley brouwn, I became a host for this archive, for the steps noted in the book. In this sense, my body became a vessel for the stanley brouwn's steps, so they could come to life through my activity of walking. From being abstractions, they become actualized through my steps, and brought back to the everyday reality where they originated from – of course a displaced everyday reality that is mine. One could say that I was reading, hosting, embodying, incarnating, and perhaps also stealing the steps of stanley brouwn.

The following is a quote from notes that I was taking in the period of twenty-one days of reading stanley brouwn (all the texts in italics bellow are the quotes from the same notes).

5.2.2016

15.765 steps

12:41

(...) the steps found a body to incarnate them again, with a long delay, they vibrate, they set my body in motion, make me go walking, so that they become actual again, back in motion, back on the street, at home in my body, along my everyday reality. They found a body to inhabit.

Through the gesture of hosting, my being becomes an intersection, a crossing, a site of negotiation between the rhythm of my everyday life and the hosted rhythm of stanley brouwn's steps. My body thus becomes a shared body, where I am walking myself, and at the same time I am "walking the other". Stepping through these two

realities, the actual time, or temporality of my steps becomes unclear and ambiguous. Each of my steps becomes temporally threefold – it can be a delayed echo of archived brouwn’s step, it can be a straight forward everyday present step, as it can also be a performative step that will manifest as such only through exposed metronome tick in the future installation. These are the three temporalities that I am inhabiting, and that are passing through me as I am reading stanley brouwn – they interfere with each other, unsettling my temporal situatedness, generating an inaudible and invisible rhythm of my being, that is oscillating in-between the echo of the past, the actual present and the performative future.

Where are these steps taking me?

6.2.2016

19.241 steps

17:00

I am walking through the city, through the streets, buildings, shops, cafes, in my house, but these circumstances only partially affect my walk – since, what determines my path, my rhythm, is another invisible entity that I am inhabiting and following. As constellations of streets are designed to rhythm and steer our movement and our public and private daily schedules, at this given moment, my movement is not defined by these structures. Even though I am following a concrete path, my path is somewhere else (...) my steps are detached from the ground they are stepping on. My desire to walk and to move does not come from the city and it has no geographical location.

19.2.2016

17.740 steps

16:09

But nevertheless – where am I walking when walking the steps of sb? What am I doing with these steps?

Nothing extraordinary – I noticed that I stick to known routes that I usually walk in the city, I wander the streets, visit museums and galleries, stores and

My writing - the tact of the metronome

26.2.2016

15:21

Metronome

A body always weighs; it lets itself weigh, be weighed. A body does not have a weight, it is a weight.¹²

Could it be formulated similarly, and say that the steps are, and make the rhythm (...) they are not rhythmical or a-rhythmical, but they are rhythm, pace and measure all together (...) They are the infra-rhythm that makes any other rhythm possible. (...) which is in this sense ultimately qualitative.

The metronome ticks the rhythms of my recorded steps, actualizing their temporal qualities. My reading transposes brouwn's book from a quantitative archive into the qualitative dimension of time — into rhythm and duration, that again entail double temporal orientation – delayed echoes of my steps, and through their embodiment as metronome ticks, they call for activity that the metronome wants to support. There is a tension in this embodiment of rhythms in the metronome;

2.2.2016

17.828 steps

22:37

The metronome is indifferent to the present situation. In this sense, it is not here to perform (for the visitors) (...) It rather enacts a past itinerary that is passing by, embodying the utterly other. The one that doesn't see you, the one that doesn't know you, and that doesn't know you are paying attention (...)

Nevertheless, the ticking of the metronome is present affectively “in the now”, addressing the visitor as it is calling for action. In this sense the metronome ticks resist being in the present as much as they insist being in the present. And this again unsettles the temporal situatedness of the whole project. As much as the archived numbers of steps of stanley brouwn are detached from his body, and similarly the rhythms of my steps are detached from my body, the metronome ticks are out of time,

ticking the pace of the infinite in-between. In this sense the project institutes the present moment through constant resistance of stable temporality, and instead establishes a “temporal void” that gives time for the multitude of individual and singular present times to unfold.

As such, one could say that the project unfolds as a continuous insistence of staying in the temporality of becoming while resisting representation. From the steps of stanley broun to the ticks of the metronome, the project evades interpretation, but instead articulates presence of an absent body as a possibility for activating and rhythming other bodies with its presence, into their own.

Rhythms Of Presence



Rhythms Of Presence – installation view. ŠKUC Gallery, Ljubljana. November 2016.

Photo: Dejan Habicht

Rhythms Of Presence (2015)

Sensfloor, software, hardware, floor.

Variable dimensions.

Video documentation: <https://vimeo.com/202962979>

Introduction

This essay is conceived as a reflection about the installation *Rhythms Of Presence*, which I consider central to my artistic research project. The reflection unfolds on the basis of the experience of the exhibited installation on three different occasions in 2015 and 2016 that took place in Berlin, in Bergen and in Ljubljana. Complementary to these experiences, I also engaged with a number of theorists and conceptual territories, for instance the work of Michel de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre and Karen Barad amongst others. In this essay, I give detail to the key theoretical points that became active in my work, using them to deepen my own reflections on the installation work. As such, this reflection stems from my own reception of the work itself, and takes that experience as the starting point for further speculations that are informed by the relevant theoretical frameworks and conceptual territories. This in order to inform my own artistic practice as well as to explore the potentialities of this research, testing if and how it might inform contemporary conditions of everyday life and related theories. In this sense this writing is not based on quantitative evidence or qualitative research (a sociological approach), but is rather situated on the crossing between artistic practice, embodied experience and theoretical engagement.

Formally the essay is structured around three key areas of interest: Body, Space and Temporality. These are preceded by a short description of the installation and an outline of a situational impression of the installation serving as a starting point for reflection.



Rhythms Of Presence – installation view. Errant Bodies Space, Berlin. November 2015.

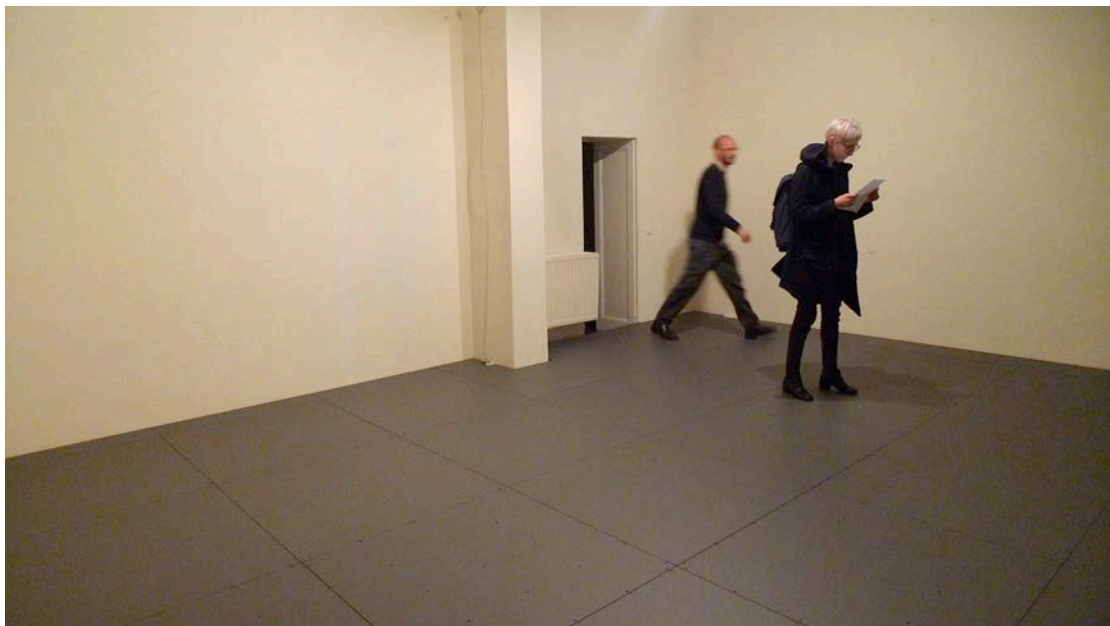


Rhythms Of Presence – installation view. Rom 8, Bergen. September 2016.

Description of the installation

The installation *Rhythms Of Presence* is comprised of two twenty square meters large floor surfaces. One is discretely installed at an undisclosed location and the other in the exhibition space. They are identical in size and shape. The floor surface at the undisclosed location is sensing human steps, transmitting their temporal and spatial information to the exhibition space, where a grid of mechanical knockers is invisibly tapping the rhythms of the remotely detected steps and following their paths from below the floor surface.

Focusing solely on rhythms and paths of everyday walking, the installation *Rhythms Of Presence* aims to capture the invisible aspects of walking and investigate how they contribute to constituting presence, temporality and spatiality. Displacing and superimposing the walking rhythms and paths of one place to those of another, the installation creates a hybrid and asymmetrical space where two simultaneous present times and presences interfere. A floor that becomes unknowingly performative and a floor that echoes steps from an unknown origin together form an open unsitely space that is both here, somewhere else and at the same instance nowhere and in-between. Stepping in this space one inhabits a concrete, yet un-mappable and disoriented territory.



Rhythms Of Presence – installation view. Errant Bodies Space, Berlin. November 2015. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Entering the installation, one finds herself in a situation that is uncanny, disorienting, confusing, unfixed and unadaptable. Bright and seemingly empty room with nothing to hold on to besides a short text on a piece of handout paper describing the proceeding that is taking place in the installation, there seems to be no body of work, no narrative, no structure that could anchor the visitor. In other words, it is not clear where this work is taking place, it has no beginning and no end, no dramaturgical or compositional structure and not much physical presence. As such, this work has no single topographical site, there is no center. It exists in several places, real and imaginary at the same time. In this sense the exhibition space does not serve as the central place of representation, where one could grasp the work in its entirety, but it rather operates as an evasive and unstable crossing, a place of interference between sites (some known, others not, some visible, others not), bodies, presences and absences that are appearing and disappearing without compositional structure or any comprehensible order.

Contrary to this topographical dispersion, the work possesses a temporal unity that comes into being through the synchronicity of a shared event of a step that touches, sounds, echoes, resonates, vibrates and re-sounds across all the sites simultaneously. By doing so, this procedure is embodying the activity of listening to a fragment of the hidden rhythms of everyday life. As such, the work doesn't aim towards analysis, understanding, interpretation and representation of these hidden rhythms, neither is it aiming to signify these uncovered rhythms. It is conceived rather as a place that is accommodating these hidden rhythms to appear in their unexpected and illegible otherness as a sonic, tactile and spatial figures. This, in order to investigate what kind of bodily presence, spatiality and temporality they might produce within the setting of the present installation, and how these might inform some contemporary conditions of being situated in the networked reality.

I. Key area - BODY

In this section, I will focus on the question of rhythm as a bodily force and how it manifests and complicates the notion of bodily presence in the given context of the installation. I will contemplate how bodily presence might manifest solely through the rhythms of steps and furthermore what kind of bodies might be constituted and imagined through such reduced manifestations of presence. Starting from the experience brought forward by the installation as a departure point, I will speculate on broader external contexts that might shape these rhythms, but that nevertheless remain hidden and illegible. I will then speculate on the rhythms of steps as being somatic utterances of such possible bodies.

Knocks heard as decontextualized rhythms of everyday steps

The process of capture, transduction, displacement, mediation and kinetic re-embodiment of the moments and points of contact between the foot and the ground is extracting the steps from the bodies and the ground that brought them into being. The decontextualization and abstraction of the rhythms of steps erases much of what they are expressing and articulating when perceived in context, hiding the identities of the bodies, their visual appearances and spatial context in terms of location, position and sociality. This procedure opens up the space in-between the foot and the ground, making the transduced steps appear as bodiless and groundless, yet not other-worldly. Invisibly tapping below the floor, they are signaling anonymous presences that are in search for their bodies and places that they are inhabiting.

In the following paragraphs I will examine how through their appearance the rhythms of steps constitute bodily presence and body as such, and ask: what are the forces that might rhythm these bodies into motion and how?

These questions cannot be answered in a singular way. They are rather generating a plurality of suggestions that are opening up possibilities of what these concrete bodies might be. I will examine these questions by exploring body from three different points of understanding; Body as mass, Rhythmed body and Body as

rhythm. I will conclude this key area with a section on rhythms of steps as hidden involuntary somatic utterances of a body in motion.

I. Body as mass - illegible body of weight

In his essay *Corpus* Jean-Luc Nancy defines body as follows:

Bodies are first masses, masses offered without anything to articulate, without anything to discourse about, without anything to add to them. Discharges of writing, rather than surfaces to be covered by writings. Discharges, abandonments, retreats. No “written bodies,” no writing on the body, (...).

For indeed, the body is not a focus of writing. No doubt one writes, but it is absolutely not where one writes, nor is it what one writes – it is always what writing excrites. In all writing, a body is traced, is the tracing and the trace – is the letter, yet never the letter, a literality or rather a lettericity that is no longer legible. A body is what cannot be read in writing.¹³

In the context of the installation at stake, the rhythms that are invisibly punctuating the floor in the exhibition space might be evoking the illegible weighted bodies that Nancy is writing about. The bodies appearing as masses that are stepping through the space somewhere, while they are being sensed through the presence of the knocking as bodies that are populating and *excriting* this place with their own presence in their becoming. Their presences sensed and felt as they are resisting being identified and inscribed with meaning. These bodies are not leaving any traces, as their excrptions are transient – marking their presence in the present moment.

Nancy continues writing, bringing up the relation between this resisting body and its representation through the institutions of knowledge and philosophy:

The body does not know; but it is not ignorant either. Quite simply, it is elsewhere. It is from elsewhere, another place, another regime, another register, which is not even that of an “obscure” knowledge, or a “pre-conceptual” knowledge, or a “global”, “immanent,” or “immediate”

knowledge. The philosophical objection to what philosophy calls "body" presupposes the determination of something like an authority of "immediate knowledge" – a contradiction in terms, which inevitably becomes 'mediated'; (as "sensation," "perception," synaesthesia, and as immense reconstitutions of a presupposed "representation"). But what if one could presuppose nothing of the kind?

What if the body was simply there, given, abandoned, without presumptions, simply posited, weighed, weighty?¹⁴

In his effort to emancipate the body from being defined through philosophy and therefore from being reduced to the limitations of what various philosophical discourses are capable of conveying, Nancy writes about body that exists outside of philosophy, outside of discourse that signifies it, as he puts it “*Quite simply, it is elsewhere.*” For Nancy a body is something that is in constant becoming, that weights, that is weight, and that manifests itself as such. A body that is always more than its definition, more than the discourse about it.

Nevertheless, as he is pointing towards the body that exists outside of philosophical discourse, Nancy’s project presents us with a general question whether it is possible at all to use language and theory to emancipate the body from their own definitions, representations, conceptualizations and reifications. Thinking from this point about the relation between body, knowledge and language, just the fact that the written language is being used in order to liberate the body from the writing itself, presents itself as a challenge if not as a problem – a contradiction in itself.

A passage from Christof Migone (who is rooted in critical and conceptual sound practice as well as being a thinker, a reader and a writer) briefly, vehemently and bluntly summarizes this complex relation between written language, representation and body, tracing it back through history of philosophy. He is asking if we are:

(...)[S]tuck in, with and within methods of representation? We might, but from Plato’s chora, to Benjamin’s auratic, to Barthes’s punctum, to Proust’s mémoire involontaire, to Freud’s uncanny, to Bataille’s formless, to Derrida and Artaud’s subjectile, to Kristeva’s abject there seems to be a continual

drive to incorporate (political) strategies with the very process they choke on. In other words, one cannot deploy these strategies for they are inextricably accidental. They function as foreigners; they are only, as Kristeva would say, “present in abeyance – Not belonging to any place, any time, any love. A lost origin, the impossibility to take root, a rummaging memory, the present in abeyance.”¹⁵

In this sense, methods of representation such as language, discourse and knowledge present themselves as the foreigners, as the Other in relation to the body.

Coming back to the installation, it is my intention to explore manifestations of bodily presence outside of language and written discourse. In this light, couldn't we say that the way the bodily presences appear through the invisible tapping could be these weighting bodies that are illegible, existing outside of discourse and knowledge, resisting representation, assessment, classification and recognition? Couldn't we say that through the activity of decontextualization, abstraction and a specific mode of excription of bodily weight, this installation conveys the presence of these bodies as the ungraspable Other? Their immediate sensible manifestation of presence and spatial dislocation acknowledging their condition of “*always simply being somewhere else*”, and not trying to bring them “over-here”. Not trying to understand them, to translate them into language, or to contextualize them. Letting them be ungraspable, illegible, outside of knowledge, outside of discourse, outside of writing as they appear hidden and invisible - passing by in their becoming?

Sensing their presence without naming them, as a sonic, rhythmical and spatial figures?

As such, rather than trying to define body in relation to language and knowledge, this project establishes an immaterial body that is outlined and sensed in terms of weight, rhythm, movement, sound and space.

II. Rhythmed body

Hearing the illegible rhythms of steps produced by the body of weight, I will contemplate on the forces that might rhythm this body into motion and how.

This not in order to make these formative forces legible through analysis or to try to identify and name the rhythmized bodies. Instead, my aim is to outline the complexity and plurality of these forces and their interferences as they are passing through the body and by that rhythmizing it into presence. This in order to further accentuate the impossibility of legibility of such bodily presence that manifest as rhythmical, immaterial and spatial figure.

Cultured body - body as a public space

The rhythms of everyday steps are signaling movement that seems to be non-performative in its purposeful and somatic activity. Yet, there are external immaterial forces that are shaping the modalities of everyday bodily movements and gestures. They are cultural inscriptions onto the body that are silently performing through the way the body moves. Not conveying direct meaning, but rather radiating a tone, a modality of movement – not unlike the way utterance of word in speech contributes to the meaning of the word uttered. These modalities of movement are therefore not enacted nor perceived as consciously performative, but are rather internalized through a consensus of cultural normality. The rhythms of steps might be radiating a portion of this hidden culturalization that is performing through purposeful everyday bodily movements.

In his essay *Techniques of the body* (1934) Marcel Mauss analyses the culturalization and socialization of everyday bodily movements, or as he calls them “*physio-psycho-sociological assemblages of series of actions*”¹⁶, among them also walking.

A few quotations below illustrates his understanding of situatedness modalities of everyday bodily movements:

*I was ill in New York. I wondered where previously I had seen girls walking as my nurses walked. (...) Returning to France, I noticed how common this gait was, especially in Paris; the girls were French and they too were walking in this way.*¹⁷

These 'habits' do not just vary with individuals and their imitations, they vary especially between societies, educations, proprieties and fashions,

*prestiges. In them we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason rather than, in the ordinary way, merely the soul and its repetitive faculties.*¹⁸

*To sum up, there is perhaps no 'natural way' for the adult.*¹⁹

*(...)[W]e are dealing with techniques of the body. The body is man's first and most natural instrument.*²⁰

Marcel Mauss suggests that the body is a technical object and technical means that is being dressaged into a certain modus governing everyday movement, which is dependent on nationality, gender, social class as well as the physiology, psychology and biology of the subject. Culture is always in negotiation with the individual body, in that through appropriating the position of the master, it finally subordinates the individual bodily behavior into culturalizing it through techniques of imitation, drill and repetition. The “*modes and tonuses of life*” thus speak silently of a certain cultured bodily presence.

Within the same line of thinking Henri Lefebvre similarly observes the misconception of “natural” bodily movement and behavior, while he further elaborates on the difference and sometimes even confusion between this notion in biological terms versus the same notion in cultural and sociological terms, when he writes:

What does one mean when one says of a boy or girl that he or she is fully natural? That his or her movements and gestures are expressive or gradous? etc. Whence comes the effect? Where is the cause?

Nature can serve as a reference point. But one that is rather hidden. If one could 'know' from outside the beatings of the heart of such and such a person (the speaker), one would learn much about the exact meaning of his words. (...) The heart remains hidden, like other organs, each of which, we know, has its rhythm.

Gestes cannot be attributed to nature. Proof: they change according to societies, eras. (...) These gestures, these manners, are acquired, are learned. The representation of the natural falsifies situations. Something passes as natural precisely when it conforms perfectly and without apparent effort to

*accepted models, to the habits valorized by a tradition (sometimes recent, but in force).*²¹

To paraphrase the above: the expression “natural behavior” signifies the exact opposites in biological and in cultural terms. While in biological terms, it means sometimes hidden, consciously uncontrolled somatic activity, the same expression in socio-cultural terms stands for a smooth and conformed, consensual behavior that is, due to being drilled to perfection, believed to appear as being “natural”.

Mauss and Lefebvre are pointing towards forces of culture that are shaping everyday bodily movement into modalities that are to a certain extent transparent. They articulate a body that is not only immersed in, but also populated, or even contaminated with culture. As both Mauss and Lefebvre speak of a single culture, class or gender that governs a body, we know today that the situation is more complex, and that we cannot anymore speak of a single culture, class or gender, that populates a single body. Therefore following their line of thinking, the bodily presence that announces itself through movement is pointing towards a body as a vessel, a host where multiple cultures, genders, classes and nationalities reside. One could say that this multitude of external forces governing body from within constitutes a body as a public space.

Rhythmed body

Returning to the installation at stake, stepping into it and hearing the rhythms of steps as originating from remote stepping bodies, listening to them for longer periods of time, one can start discerning temporal assemblages of stepping bodies that are appearing and disappearing. Densities of rhythms of steps in terms of time and population vary over different periods of day, week and month. Some are regularly recurring while others are not. These temporal patterns of densities and qualities of rhythms of steps might be signaling the presence of stepping bodies that are being rhythmed. Bodies that sometimes walk together and sometimes alone, that gather and disperse, that appear at certain times of the day or the week more or less regularly, while other times they are absent.

In the given situation we cannot know the identities of these bodies, their interpersonal relations, and the contexts they are originating from. However, we can always contemplate the underlying forces and contexts that might rhythm the individual stepping bodies, pushing them towards forming assemblages. In this sense, the tapping of remote rhythms of steps might be heard as pointing towards a body that is rhythmized by urban constellations, public schedules, social relations, living conditions, work, money, family relations and obligations, etc. The body that is entangled in “*The anarchy of the chiaroscuro of the everyday.*”(Lukacs).²² This rhythmizing of the body differs from the cultural inscription as described above in that it is not internalized, but it influences and defines body through external interaction.

The process of the body being rhythmized might be enacted from the position of governance, as well as through *a practice of everyday life* that originates from the inevitable necessity and condition of inhabiting and living socially. Lefebvre writes:

*Political power knows how to utilise and manipulate time, dates, time-tables. It combines the unfurlings [deployments] of those that it employs (individuals, groups, entire societies), and rhythms them.*²³

Superimposed upon natural cosmic temporality that manifests as cycles of days, years etc., is the organization of time that schedules production time, time for consumption, free time, “quality” time, leisure time, etc. This temporal structuring of activities rhythms the passing of everyday life, including daily schedules of movement between dwelling places, places of work and consumption places, this resulting in fluctuations of densities of movement, including pedestrian movement. (Morning rush, lunch break, afternoon rush hour, Sunday calm, Xmas shopping spree, are some obvious examples of this). Furthermore, the way the streets and cities are planned, built, destroyed and re-built, the way buildings, their functions, their appearances, locations and symbolic significations attract or repel the bodies, influences and rhythms the bodies into motion and displacement. There are places of passing, there are places of staying, there are accessible and inaccessible places. Places where power is concentrated and places where knowledge is shared. Open places and places that are closed.

All these spatio-temporal situations act as agents that rhythm bodies into motion, directing them from one place to another at certain times, by fulfilling their needs, evoking desires, giving them refuge, or by force. The degree of the movement of human bodies they steer, in return validates and empowers a hidden topography of socio-political power relations that is continuously being inscribed in the urban tissue. (For this relation between the socio-political and economical power as a hidden inscription in the urban tissue and the strategies of uncovering and resisting the manifestation of this power, look further in the practices of Dada movement and its practice of Anti-walk, Surrealist Deambulation and Situationist *dérive*).

As the stepping bodies are rhythmized into this larger temporal regime, they also make use of the structures that are rhythmizing them, as they are in constant negotiation with them. They use, abuse, misuse and bend the constellations and schedules of control, appropriating them so that they can somehow co-exist with and within them – as the double and the shadow, yet inhabiting them. Enacting something that de Certeau calls “*spatial practices*”. The practices that appropriate space of habitation that is at the same time the space of control. As de Certeau writes:

The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. It inserts its multitudinous references and citations into them (social models, cultural mores, personal factors). Within them it is itself the effect of successive encounters and occasions that constantly alter it and make it the other's blazon (...).²⁴

One could say that what takes place here is that the stepping body extends its interacting not only with other bodies, but also with the material and immaterial structures that are rhythmizing the body. What emerges from this relation is not only “*the long poem of walking*”, but also a syncopated ongoing dance where, through appropriation the external governing rhythms transform into the groove for the bodies to dance into presence their illegible singular becomings, and furthermore congregate into unintended assemblages.

III. Body as rhythm

The above notions of how rhythm might manifest bodily presence point towards a concomitance of forces that are participating in such process. This complicates notions of fixity, singularity and identity of a body as they appear in the given context, opening the way towards manifestations of bodily presence as ongoing relational processes between various internal and external forces.

In the following paragraphs I will contemplate some possibilities of how this concomitance of sometimes excluding and contradictory forces might constitute a body.

Body as a site of passing, body as passing.

Thinking about the body in terms of Rhythmanalysis, Lefebvre and Régulier hint towards this concomitance through the following imagination of multiple rhythms that are coexisting in a living body:

(...)[T]he living body can and must consider itself as an interaction of organs situated inside it, where each organ has its own rhythm but is subject to a spatial-temporal whole [globalite]. Furthermore, this human body is the site and place of interaction between the biological, the physiological (nature) and the social (often called the cultural), where each of these levels, each of these dimensions, has its own specificity, therefore its space-time: its rhythm. Whence the inevitable shocks (stresses), disruptions and disturbances in this ensemble whose stability is absolutely never guaranteed.²⁵

In this short paragraph Lefebvre and Régulier identify the plurality of forces affecting and effecting the living body, each of them possessing and manifesting as singular rhythm. They also introduce the ambiguity of a body stemming from the notion of a “body(...) as an interaction” and a body as “the site and the place of interaction”, which is illuminating in the gesture of unfixing the notion of body as being one-dimensional. However, when they refer to the interaction between the internal

rhythms (that are forming the body), and the external rhythms (that are passing through the body), they evaluate this interaction as generating “*inevitable shocks, disruptions and disturbances*”, as opposed to the “*normal*” stability of the ensemble of these rhythms.

Considering this evaluation, I would like to propose on the contrary to Lefebvre’s and Régulier’s conclusion, that what they rightly call “*inevitable shocks (stresses), disruptions and disturbances*” are actually central in establishing a *body as an interaction* and a *body as a place of interaction* simultaneously. This claim proposes that what establishes body is not only harmonious coexistence between related rhythms, but also, and mainly frictions between incompatibilities of internal and external rhythms that are not only asynchronous, but belong to different dimensions and functionalities. Perhaps what makes body is a continuity of disruptions, shocks and disturbances that destabilize it into ambiguity, making it not so much a place of interaction, but rather a place of interference and interference itself. Where does this locate a body?

A body as (a site of) interference.

In order to bring to the fore the notion of body as interference, I would like to introduce a short passage from a film *Éloge de l'amour (In Praise of Love)* by Jean-Luc Godard, where a dialogue between two characters takes place. One is a film director and the other a young actress auditioning for a film role:

Director: So what will you play?

Actress: I think I'll play the young girl.

*Director: I'm thinking of something.
His name is Perceval.
And her name will be Eglantine.*

Actress: I'm Eglantine.

*Director: Do you understand it's not Eglantine's story, but a moment in history...
History moving through Eglantine?
The moment of youth.²⁶*

One could read this dialogue, in particular the last three sentences, as a poetical unraveling of an intricate interdependency between anonymous flow of history and intimate and lived subjectivity that through their interference establish a body. Disowning Eglantine of the singularity and uniqueness of her “*moment of youth*” and instead characterizing her as a medium for that moment to manifest, is a strong gesture. It creates tension between the overwhelmingly intense lived experience of youth, and its de-subjectivization through understanding it as a flow that exists independently, outside of subjectivity, as an underlying external flux. However, this external flux can only be realized through being embodied and lived as Eglantine’s very own. This interdependency perhaps presents itself as an opportunity to overcome the duality between the notions of interior and exterior forces, and to rather understand a body as an interference between them. (Including frictions, syntonies, resonances, conflicts...).

The external anonymous flow of history passing through the body that is manifesting and being lived as a subjective and intimate life, which it is, but, at the same time it remains as something that precedes and exceeds human expression. This external flow is plural and it can exist outside of a body only as a possibility. There, it is anonymous in plurality of its possibilities of which only one can flow through a certain body and is by that being realized into actuality. Reciprocally, that body can only become itself as being a host/channel/medium for this particular anonymous flow. In the case of Godard’s movie, this is the interference constituting a body in the moment of youth.

Taking in consideration body as interference enables us to imagine a body as processual multitude – a body as crossing, membrane, public space, mass, passing, social, relational. The interference somehow accommodates all these appearances simultaneously, as well as it suggests their temporality, in that it doesn’t understand body as a definite, fixed entity, but as changing through time.

Body as intra-action

Perhaps this contemplation about what might constitute a body is evoking a notion that Karen Barad has termed and defined as intra-action. Below is a condensed explanation of the term:

The usual notion of interaction assumes that there are individual independently existing entities or agents that preexist their acting upon one another. By contrast, the notion of “intra-action” queers the familiar sense of causality (...), and more generally unsettles the metaphysics of individualism (...). “[I]ndividuals” do not preexist as such but rather materialize in intra-action. That is, intra-action goes to the question of the making of differences, of “individuals,” rather than assuming their independent or prior existence. “Individuals” do not not exist, but are not individually determinate. Rather, “individuals” only exist within phenomena (particular materialized/materializing relations) in their ongoing iteratively intra-active reconfiguring.²⁷

What Barad points out is that the individuals (be)come into being through the intra-activity of forces, and are not only active or only passive agents, but both. Their activity, relationality and their passivity is exactly what makes them, as they are interfering with the world. With Barad, the metaphor of body as a vessel and body as a flux is overcome in that she understands “vessel” as being constituted by flux and vice versa – “*there is no prior existence*” – the existence is always in making, in contingent becoming. With Barad the opposition between the individuality and the flux is overcome through introducing a temporality, contextuality, and situatedness of the individual into the forming of an individual. This making individual, both a site and a process that defines, and that is defined through iterative processes of circulation, interference, relation and inner desire.

To summarize the contemplation on the body, triggered by the question “How do the rhythms of steps through their appearance constitute bodily presence? And what might the body that is radiating this presence be?” one could say the following;

The tapping rhythms beneath the floor are evoking presence of remote stepping bodies that are being formed as ongoing intra-actions, interferences, resonances and frictions between their variants of being, which are constantly constituting and reconstituting. These processes are setting the bodies in motion, their interactions with environment and other bodies contributing in forming the relational situations.

As much as these bodies are radiating their presences, they are appearing at the same time opaque, irrepresentable, illegible and evasive in their abstracted and opaque invisibility.

Perhaps the very mode of presence through which they manifest in this situation – through beating rhythms - are amplifying the bodies themselves as a vibrating and alternating between public, intimate, legible and illegible. These alternations entangling the bodies in yet another hidden rhythm that contributes to their presence. Always in becoming and always present in their contingency.

Contemplating the rhythms of steps as constituting bodily presence, I would now like to turn my attention to what these rhythms might be conveying as an “expressive” bodily function.

IV. Rhythms of steps as a hidden involuntary somatic utterances of body in motion

Hearing the rhythms of everyday steps as they are moving across the floor in the installation, one is listening to usually hidden temporal qualities of purposeful, non-performative everyday infra-ordinary activity that is being captured, transduced and re-articulated. The relation between the initial non-performativity of the rhythms of steps and their staging that is suggesting the opposite, is amplifying this already existing inherent tension, generating expectation in terms of what they might convey. As this expectation might be directing our listening to the rhythms of steps as somatic utterances, it is simultaneously amplifying the opacity of this utterance, which is further complicating its position and role in relation to the bodily self-expression, articulation of self-presence and meaning. In the following paragraphs I will investigate these intricate relationships, trying to situate rhythms of steps in relation to somatic, voluntary, involuntary, conscious, purposeful, meaningful and meaningless bodily expressions and utterances as well as investigating the possibilities of rhythms

of steps that might be expressing bodily presence which is inexpressible through language.

As I have already noted, the rhythms of steps are marking the moments of contact between the body and the ground. As such they are temporal manifestation of touch between these two entities. In this sense the rhythms of steps originate from continuous negotiation between the body and the space. Understanding the body itself as being a complex plurality of intra-actions between the forces originating from within and from exteriority, one could say that the rhythms of steps manifest as interference between the two synchronous processes of negotiations, between plurality of interiors and exteriors: one that is forming the body and the other that is situating this body in space. These two processes are unfolding at various speeds, in different material and immaterial dimensions, temporal scales and contexts, and are each forming their own intensities, resonances, frictions, durations and appearances. (From biological to cultural, individual, socio-political, psychological, physical, practical, etc.) As they are unfurling in parallel, they are by no means linear, and the relation between the two is by no means dialectical. They coincide with or oppose each other, amplify or annihilate one another's doing, encompass or are encompassed by one another as they flow separately or as one flux in continuous process of becoming.

Nevertheless, throughout all these motions and possibilities, with each step, they bounce in synchrony. The moment of touch between the foot and the ground marks the concrete moment of grounding. A point in time when all the acting forces and processes, no matter how diverse, or belonging to different dimensions, temporalities or origins, touch a margin as they bounce against it – shaking the inside and the outside. Each of these acting forces is subjected to own gravitational pull, as it bounces off a margin that is specific to it. I would like to suggest that these synchronous moments of touch therefore outline and materialize the margins, the boundaries of a stepping body as a *be-in in-between*.

As we can not grasp, understand or know entirely the plurality and relational complexity of all the interfering processes and forces as they are forming body, subjecthood and subjectivity, we can sense and perceive the pace of their becomings through the rhythms of steps as a sonic figure. In other words, one could say that the rhythms of steps are somatic utterances signaling the contingent process of becoming

of subjecthood and subjectivity, while not signifying, representing or showing this subjectivity. In this sense such utterance is incomprehensible and illegible in that it does not convey any meaning, while it signals presence. It is the perceivable but irrepresentable, untranslatable utterance of irreducible bodily presence with all its complexities.

Perhaps through staging this tension between ungraspability/illegibility and signaling of presence (between silence and noise), the rhythms of steps as somatic utterance articulate exactly the impossibility of the representation of irreducible and illegible bodily presence in space, while they are pronouncing its existence besides, below, outside, before and after signification and representation. They are bypassing signification while signaling the presence of illegible meanings in becoming.

In doing so, they are neither meaningful nor meaningless, they are “*neither silence nor speech*”.²⁸

Scream

In an attempt to write more about this vague and inaccessible manifestation of bodily presence that exists outside of signification and representation, and that the rhythms of steps might be evoking in the setting of the installation at stake, I would like to visit a part of an investigation Cristof Migone conducts in his book *Sonic Somatic: Performances of The Unsound Body*, by reading through a passages where Migone examines the voice as somatic utterance. Migone writes:

*When fully somatized, the voice is unassimilable and unnamable. The inevitable entwining of the sacred and the profane generates the noise of the mouth and the viscosity of screams. As Allen S. Weiss postulates: “The scream is the desublimation of speech into the body, in opposition to the sublimation of the body into meaningful speech.” The scream epitomizes the somatic voice, its drama is that it unfurls the body onto the soundscape, it exteriorizes the viscera (...)*²⁹

What transforms the voice from meaningful into somatic utterance is the scream. Through the effort of screaming, the body is activated into intense physical activity,

which amplifies its self-experience of being a body. At the same time the scream affects the body through vibration, resonance, intensity and the loudness of one's own scream, as it is self-heard from within (through the bone conduction) and from exteriority (through the ears). The extremeness of the scream amplifies the situatedness of the body as a margin between the inside and the outside.

The liminality of the voice as being a medium for communication and for somatic utterance evolves as a continuous friction, a tension between the two, which makes voice a highly contested phenomenon and site, always negotiating between its meaningfulness and its somatic utterance.

For a voice to become somatic, the scream has to erupt as an extraordinary intensity. A scream is in this sense either ecstatic or traumatic. A destabilizing rupture, a disorder, always shouted, heard and experienced as transgressive in relation to speech and its assertive promise of articulating meaning. A scream therefore appears as a transitory moment of exception that eventually fades out into normality of speech-voice. It comes in uncontrollable flashes, bursting/surfacing in extreme moments of crisis or of ecstasy. If somatic, what kind of bodily presence is it uttering?

Following Migone's investigation into situating origins of somatic voice through listening to the screams of Hélène Cixous, Antonin Artaud and Martin Kersels, one encounters articulations of and about the scream as uttering

*the I in its barest conception (...) naked, prior to subjecthood (...)*³⁰, *“the scream (that) is always already beyond understanding”, the “articulation of the inarticulate”*³¹, *the “outside of thought”, “(resisting) any move which subsumes excess and noise into a system or dictionary”, the “series of faults and fissures”, the “indigestibility of the scream(...)in rational discourse.”*³²

These articulations perhaps echo bodily presence of the ungraspable body that we have been hearing through the rhythms of the steps. The ungraspable body as a be-in in-between.

However, even though the scream erupts from this body, as uncontrolled rupture, fissure, devoid of meaning, I would like to propose that the drama it embodies and performs through its intensity does not articulate the presence of this body that exists outside of meaning, from the *naked “I”, prior to subjecthood, outside*

of thought. I would like to suggest that the scream is not somatic utterance originating from this ungraspable body. Rather, the scream is the collapse of rhythm.

I would like to argue that the dramatic intensity that is inherent and explicit in the utterance of a scream originates from the inner tension of the contested voice itself - from the friction between the forces that want to signify, communicate and make sense, and the forces that desire to be a somatic utterance, pronouncing the ungraspable body as be-in in-between, as the “*I*” that is prior to subjecthood and that is *outside of thought*. This scream can be heard as articulating the drama of the voice, that is convulsing as these forces are pulling it apart, in the moment when they all want to speak through it simultaneously. The intensity of this friction in the voice, manifesting as a scream is thus overpowering the articulation of meaningful speech and the ungraspable utterance of the body that exists outside of signification, as they are both struggling to manifest themselves simultaneously. Since the scream appears as the opposite to meaningful articulation, it is often perceived as somatic utterance expressing this body, this ““*I*” that is prior to subjecthood”, while I would like to suggest that it actually expresses the drama of the territoriality of the voice as a site itself. It embodies the energy, the burst, the conflict of this struggle of the voice to undo its meaningfulness. I would like to take this claim further and suggest that the scream actually silences the somatic utterance of the ungraspable body, while amplifying the noise of the territorial struggle that is taking place within the voice itself.

The attempt of somatic utterance through voice is therefore dramatic, heroic and futile act, since it is taking place within the territory of the voice that is dominated by the promise and the expectation of meaningfulness, signification and communication. In this sense, the ungraspable body can not manifest its somatic presence that exists *outside of thought* through voice directly. It can do so only through the evidence of being silenced by the dramatic scream, pointing towards the presence of this opaque and ungraspable body, wanting to express itself in the territory that is dominated by meaning. Perhaps Artaud is sensing this when he writes:

*A man possesses himself in flashes, and even when he possesses himself, he does not reach himself completely.*³³

Lowering the point of attention and heightening sensibility, after being exposed to the drama of the scream, I would like to return to the rhythms of steps as somatic utterance, to examine how they appear and what their utterance might convey through their physicality, ungraspability and semantic silence.

Rhythms of steps as somatic utterance of the body as the be-in in-between.

From down below, between the foot and the ground this utterance is not contested by the fierce combat between the meaning and non-meaning, between sense and non-sense as I have suggested is the case with voice. This somatic utterance of bodily presence exists besides the discourse, subjecthood and subjectivity. Bypassing meaning, it is non-dramatic and non-heroic compared to the voice in its attempt of becoming somatic. It is ongoing, uneventful and ubiquitous utterance.

If there is any tension and friction in the rhythms of steps as somatic utterance it is between its purposefulness and its unintended expressiveness that might radiate through it – manifesting purposefulness, but through it, expressing the non-performative self. Originating from the relation between the body and the ground, this utterance is always ambiguous regarding to its origin – does it come from a body that is willfully and intentionally taking steps in certain direction with certain pace, or does it come from a body that is being rhythmmed, pushed and pulled by internal and external forces and environment?

The impossibility of answering this question situates this somatic utterance on the margin between intentionality and noise, activity and passivity, always being liminal and in-between. One could characterize it as that which sounds, but has no voice, or as that which is *"sonic but speechless"*³⁴, or to borrow a sentence from Karen Barad *"(..)a speaking silence that is neither silence nor speech, but the conditions of im/possibility for non/existence."*³⁵

In other words, one could say that this ubiquitous and inexpressive somatic utterance is:

The noise that one can hear in silence, and the silence that one can sense in noise.

The noise that one can hear in speech and the speech that one can hear in noise.

It is that which spills out of the body, while it remains contained within.

It is the inner bodily noise and the external murmur of the ambiance.

It is the meaningless element that resides in the inner self and in the exteriority.

It is the utterance that is shared between the body and the exterior.

It is the impersonal within the personal and the personal within the impersonal.

It is the public within the intimate and the intimate within the public.

It is the din of the other that we all are and that we all share.

Perhaps, the rhythms of steps are uttering ‘*elemental life that is experienced as inhuman*’ suggested by Karen Barad in the following paragraphs as she quotes Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, from her book *The Murmuring Deep*:

*[T]he murmur is the message: the background hum of life – desolate, excessive, neither language nor silence – is what links us to one another. What can be shared, for example, with the dying? (...) [R]ather than transmitting clear meanings, the encounter rests on an acknowledgement of an elemental otherness that is related to our own (...)*³⁶

In their noisy silence, rhythms of steps are uttering our bodily and spatial situatedness in the world, while pacing the presence of this irrepresentable, ungraspable, in-between body in passing. They are uttering movement, circulation, temporality, irrepresentability, ungraspability, transiency, pacing, weight, touch, encounter.

Perhaps, what they are tapping is the omnipresent ungraspability of the fragmentary existence in passing. Perhaps, these rhythms can be heard as another mode of embodiment of what Allen Ginsberg realized in his short poem that he wrote after learning that the bus he had just missed has later crashed, leaving no survivors.

He wrote: “*Get used to your body, forget you were born. Suddenly, you've got to get out!*”³⁷

An utterance that doesn't know itself. An utterance that forgets itself.

In their omnipresent and ongoing low intensity, rhythms of steps are so ubiquitous that they operate below the threshold of being experienced and being remembered. They are “irrememberable”. They are enacted, uttered, endured, yet on the margin of being experienced or lived. They are instantly and constantly falling into oblivion,

like the fading of the sound they are making. As they are tapping these rhythms of their un-lived self-oblivion, they are uttering the constant passing of the present.

Perhaps this utterance is echoing something that Agamben points towards when he writes:

*The present is nothing other than this un-lived element in everything that is lived. That which impedes access to the present is precisely the mass of what for some reason (its traumatic character, its excessive nearness) we have not managed to live. The attention to this "un-lived" is the life of the contemporary. And to be contemporary means in this sense to return to a present where we have never been.*³⁸

If we follow the line of Agamben's thought we could say that the rhythms of steps are the un-lived element in everything that is lived. The non-experience and constant amnesia of the rhythms of steps impede access for them to be lived, yet, the same non-experience and amnesia actually enable the rhythms of steps to utter the constant "passing of the present". This constant "passing of the present" can not be experienced and can not be remembered in its transient presentness. The contradictory duality of non-experience and oblivion is the element of the contemporary that the rhythms of steps utter. In this sense, they announce the contemporary as exactly the impossibility "to return to a present where we have never been". They utter the contemporary as the attention towards the impossibility of experience and towards the continuous oblivion of "the passing of the present" that we can never return to, not because we have never been there, but because this "passing of the present" is not a place – it is not a "there". It is rather something that is passing through.

The tone with which the rhythms of steps as somatic utterance express this condition is un-dramatic, un-heroic, infra-ordinary and impersonal – imperceptibly in the foreground, impermanent, uneven, oblivious, weak, unfixed, transient, unstable, ungraspable and invisible. The tone of the infra-ordinary.

Perhaps the "constant passing of the present" that the rhythms of steps are uttering is something that precedes and exceeds subjecthood and subjectivity, it is something that exists outside of meaning and outside of experience. It is the other that resides within the self.

II. Key area - SPACE

In this section I will write about the workings of the distributed body of the installation and how it creates particular space.

I will unfold how by using technologies of connectivity and remote transduction while resisting localability, a notion of disjunctive-connective space comes into being.

I will then relate such spatiality to the theoretical proposition of Unsightly Aesthetics.

I will continue by proposing that the established space acts as a site where the phenomenon of passing by remotely occurs. I will further explore the possibilities of this occurrence in terms of reconsidering the relations between the lived and the unlived passing of the present time as problematized by Giorgio Agamben.

Hearing the distributed body of the installation between some-there and over-here

While each knock below the floor in the exhibition space might be perceived as signaling the presence of anonymous stepping body at an unknown location, the same knock can also be heard as manifesting presence of another body that is invisibly yet concretely populating both places of the installation. This is a distributed body of the installation, consisting of floor surfaces, sensors, wires, electronic circuits, computers, network connections and mechanical knockers. The body that is establishing relation between the two remote places.

It is a body that is some-there, over-here and in-between.

It is a body that senses and a body that touches.

It is a hidden and invisible body.

It is a mechanical body.

It is a body that doesn't entirely know where it is.

It is a surface body that hosts, that accommodates, that supports, that carries.

It is an infra-structural body.

It is a blind body.

It is a body that is populated and the body that is populating.

It is a composite, heterogeneous body.

It is a body that does not so much signal its own presence, as it establishes particular connective-disjunctive space. This space comes into being through several procedures that the distributed body of the installation engages.

The way this body operates is as follows; the steps at the undisclosed location are sensed as a change of capacitance of the sensor surface layed beneath the floor in the moment of a contact between the capacitance of the sensor and that of a foot. The spatio-temporal information of this change is digitally captured and transferred through electronic circuits via network to a computer controlled grid of knockers (solenoid actuators) that is installed under the floor surface in the exhibition space. There, a corresponding knocker (solenoid actuator) is actuated (its position and time correspondng to those detected by the sensor surface), hitting the floor surface from below. This is resulting in the event of a knock. The described process that is taking place is a process of remote transduction where one type of energy (change of capacitance) is transformed into another (kinetic energy). This is resulting in transduction of tactility.

Point of sensing

The hidden sensor at the undisclosed location is sensing bodily presence in space solely through the tactility of steps. Related to human perception, this point of sensing is lowered to the floor level, decentralized from a single point of subjective perception, as it is spread into two dimensional plane of sensitive surface. By sensing only through touch, it is devoid of any kind of depth of perception.

The place where this is taking place remains undetected and unexperienced. Capturing the rhythms of non-performative everyday steps, it does not announce its presence. Therefore the stepping bodies whose rhythms of steps are remotely sensed and transduced are unknowingly (over)stepping into a performative and public sphere unfolding in the exhibition space. There, the rhythms of their steps are transformed into something that appears as an invisible choreography.

Through this procedure the connective-disjunctive space of the installation establishes a suspended relation between the two places as a point of blind contact, affording the possibility for the visitors to the installation to be in touch with a fragment of infra-ordinary rhythmical occurrences of everyday life that otherwise

remain hidden. Something that de Certeau articulates as “*chorus of idle footsteps*”³⁹ that is “*below the thresholds at which visibility begins*”⁴⁰, and is therefore “*escaping the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye*”⁴¹, as it is unfurling beyond “*the shores of legibility*”.⁴²

Resisting localability

While the distributed body of the installation is engaged in remote sensing and transduction of tactility from one place to another, it keeps silent about the location and the characteristics of the space it is sensing. Resisting localability acts as a rupture that makes it impossible for the transduced rhythms of steps to act as representations of the stepping bodies and of the place of their origin, while the transduction of tactility is enhancing and encouraging attention towards the unfurling of the illegible anonymous and contingent actuality that is evolving there. As such, this space is not a place of representation, but a space that invites listening and attention, and is indefinitely postponing recognition and identification.

While these synchronous operations establish a concrete place where contradictory relation between remoteness and proximity coexists, they also produce an ambiguous sense of distance. Being in the exhibition space and not knowing where the location of the other place is, creates a distance that is more intense in its remoteness than a known physical distance to an unknown place would be. This distance, however, is still less intense than the “non-distance” or “beyond-distance” that is unperceived by the unaware stepping bodies whose steps are being sensed.

Not fulfilling the usual expectations of purposeful connectivity and bypassing the economy of usership, this space does not act as instrumental, but rather as an active and asymmetrical space of ambiguity and resistance that is suspended somewhere in-between the process of transmission.

Unsitely Aestheticisc

I would like to propose that this established connective disruptive spatiality strongly resonates with the ideas being put forward by Maria Miranda in her project of Unsitely Aesthetics, where she sets out to examine the art practice that is addressing the situation of dispersed spatiality, which comes into being within networked culture. Based on the understanding of digital network as a “*junction and disjunction of here and there, you and I, social and individuated*”⁴³ that “*functions as the crucial operand in dispersing and contouring perception, art practice and aesthetics.*”⁴⁴, Miranda defines the focus of Unsitely Aesthetics as follows: “*The focus of unsitely aesthetics is on the paradoxical situatedness and multi-sitedness of artwork as well as the restored significance of place in general.*”⁴⁵

Being attentive to the intricate and complex relations between virtual, mediated, dispersed and physical places in the context of networked culture she proposes:

*Rather than thinking of networked culture as creating a condition of “placelessness” with people existing in a “space of flows” with an “authentic” sense of place being lost in the process, I think it would be more productive to remind ourselves of the complex understandings of place already in place.*⁴⁶

This leads her towards outlining the possibility of the *unsitely* space as follows:

*In the new networked world that we now inhabit it is not only our relations to people that are affected but also our sense of place and especially being in one place at one time that is disrupted. Although site suggests a fixed place and fixed temporality, I am using unsitely to unhinge this fixity and to suggest a troubling and opening of not only the place of the work of art but the “place” of the audience’s aesthetic experience as well. Hence unsitely evokes a space of tension, ambiguity and potential for both artwork and audience.*⁴⁷

I would like to propose that such an understanding of unsitely spatiality can serve as a conceptual framework for situating the space that is produced by the installation at stake.

Passing by remotely

As the network space through connectivity transmits presence, enables contact and communication, it similarly and simultaneously establishes shared zones of absence, passivity and non-contact, perhaps mediating indifference. Facilitating active communication and intentional transmission of information, it also pushes places and people into mediated proximity that is not intentional on their parts. One could say that in the latter case, the network space instigates a situation where one is being connected involuntarily and unknowingly, sometimes randomly. One's presence displaced and put in proximity with another's presence, passing by each other and occasionally forming involuntary temporary assemblages.

I would like to claim that such a situation is enacted in the installation at stake. As the stepping bodies simultaneously traverse the two places of the installation, the distributed body of the installation pushes them into mediated proximity that is not intentional on their parts. One could say that the space of the installation instigates a situation where these bodies are remotely passing by each other. I would like to propose that an uncanny relation takes place between these bodies, perhaps a relation of non-relation. Stepping on the floor of the installation, the visitor to the exhibition is being touched by the connective-disruptive body of the installation. Sensing the presence of the anonymous bodies at the unknown place, she (the visitor to the exhibition) is somehow being present and in proximity to the stepping bodies at the other end, as the invisible witness. Yet, she can be present there only imperceptibly, not knowing herself where it is that her presence looms imperceptible. There, she is anonymous, hidden and invisible.

I would like to propose that this acts as a kind of sharing and doubling of the unawareness between the bodies stepping through the two remote places, both being unaware of each other in different ways that are not reciprocal. As the sensed bodies do not know that they are being sensed and that they are being influential, the listening bodies do not know where and who they are listening to. Nevertheless, they

are all pushed into mediated proximity, “brushing” against each other. If there is something that these bodies are sharing besides being in the remote proximity, it is the condition of them being unaware of each other as they are remotely passing by. Therefore it can be said that, as they engage in the non-event of passing by remotely, they enter in a relation of non-relation.

At this point I would like to revisit Agamben’s formulation regarding the notion of “*What is Contemporary?*”

*That which impedes access to the present is precisely the mass of what for some reason (...) we have not managed to live. The attention to this "unlived" is the life of the contemporary. And to be contemporary means in this sense to return to a present where we have never been.*⁴⁸

This in order to propose that in the context of Agamben’s argument, the established situation of passing by remotely might present itself as an opportunity for the relations between the lived and unlived passing of the present, experience and individuality, to be reconsidered in the process of spatial displacement and re-situating. This process suggesting a possibility of unaware sharing of one’s own unlived present with strangers that one has never met and will perhaps never meet.

Othering self

As the visitor to the installation is exposed to the rhythms and paths of the anonymous steps, one partly experiences the passing of the present of the other, that the other can not *manage to live*. In so doing, she is partly *living* the *unlived* present of the other and through that partly becoming a remote consciousness for that *unlived* of the other. Not by making sense, not through knowing, not through understanding, but solely through proximity of being experientially exposed to that which is inaccessible to the other who enacts it. This process of “othering self” might present as the possibility of realization that the *unlived* element in everything that is lived might be the familiar and ungraspable otherness that we all share. Pre-personal and existing outside of culture, it is always already there. As it appears inaccessible through the procedures of self-awareness, identification, knowledge and representation, it seems to be accessible to

a body that suspends its subjectivity, individuality, the desire for knowing, interpretation and meaning. A body that is too close to see and too far to know. A body that moves and a body that is moved. A body that allows being touched. A body that is ready to ‘dance’ with the other, as the other.

3. Key Area - TEMPORALITY

*We live in the present; we comprehend in the perfect.*⁴⁹

Erwin Straus

In the final section of this reflection I will contemplate on how the above procedures of the distributed body of the installation situate the work in regards to temporality.

I will propose that the site of the installation in the exhibition space acts as an intervention into the performative temporality of that space by operating within the non-performative temporality of becoming. Referring to George Perec’s investigation into (im)possibility of classification and Karen Barad’s proposition of *Agential Realism*, I will situate a temporality of becoming in relation to the processes of representation. I will conclude with speculations on how the visitors and the distributed body of an installation engage in intra-action and through that engagement interfere with each other’s temporalities of becoming.

Crossing of the passings of the present times

In the beginning of this text I have noted that the installation in the exhibition space “does not act as the central place of representation, but rather as the crossing and interference between sites, bodies, presences and absences that are appearing and disappearing without comprehensible order or a compositional structure, but that are all sharing a temporal unity that comes into being through the synchronicity of a shared event of a step that touches, sounds, echoes, resonates, vibrates and re-sounds across all these sites simultaneously”.

Later on, I argued that the rhythms of steps utter the passing of the present that eludes being ‘lived’ due to its continuous and transitory presentness and immemorability. I have suggested that the installation at stake offers itself as a place

where this passing of the present can be lived through the process of "othering self"; by being experientially exposed to the un-lived rhythms of steps of the unknown other.

I would like to further investigate the temporal situatedness of the installation by proposing that through the workings of the distributed body of the installation, the setting in the exhibition space acts as a crossing of the passings of the present times – those of the anonymous stepping bodies at unknown location and those of the visitors in the exhibition space. As they surface in the exhibition space, they are intercepted fragments of the unknown and contingent lifelong durations that they are. In this sense, the temporalities of these fragments are not composed nor structured in any way. They are not dramaturgically shaped nor compressed into narratives that would encompass durations longer or shorter than the durations of their passings, such as is the case with most of music, theatre, literature, movies and time-based fine arts, as well as with images and objects, that all establish their own temporalities, usually compressing, cutting and editing the passing of the real-time into a narrative of perceptually manageable durations that are complete, repeatable and reproducible. Contrary to such procedures that constitute performative temporalities of representation, the two intercepted temporalities at stake are both staying with the unstructured passing of the present and are in this sense non-performative. As such, this installation acts as an intervention into the temporality of the exhibition space by foregrounding non-performative temporality in the space that is operating within the framework of performative temporality.

Temporality of becoming

I would like to propose that such non-performative temporalities of the passing of the present that are being materialized and signaled by the rhythms of everyday steps, embody temporalities of becoming that are preceding and exceeding temporalities of classification, signification and representation. In order to situate temporalities of becoming I will examine Georges Perec's short paragraph titled "*How I classify*" from the book '*Think/Classify*'.

As the text below might be perceived solely as literary musing, I would like to suggest that it is encompassing significant realizations in pointing towards connections between the temporality, process of signification, and notion of situated

knowledge, that I perceive as pertinent to the discussion about the installation at stake.

Perec confesses:

My problem with classifications is that they don't last; hardly have I finished putting things into an order before that order is obsolete. Like everyone else, I presume, I am sometimes seized by a mania for arranging things. The sheer number of the things needing to be arranged and the near-impossibility of distributing them accordingly to any truly satisfactory criteria mean that I never finally manage it, that the arguments I end up with are temporary and vague, and hardly any more effective than the original anarchy.

The outcome of all this leads to truly strange categories. A folder full of miscellaneous papers, for example, on which is written 'To be classified'; or a drawer labeled 'Urgent 1' with nothing in it (in the drawer 'Urgent 2' there are a few old photographs, in 'Urgent 3' some new exercise-books). In short, I muddle along.⁵⁰

If we read these paragraphs carefully, we can recognize that Perec presents the 'problem with classification' as a temporal problem – he notes that classifications 'don't last', that they are 'temporary' and therefore 'never finally manageable'. This realization makes it impossible for Perec to classify, particularly something that he finds of immediate importance and urgency. In terms of his drawer system, this leaves his drawer classified as 'Urgent 1' always empty.

I propose to read this emptiness of the drawer as a realization that the instances that are really urgent are happening and changing too fast to be classified (and stored in the drawer). They are resisting classification and further signification, while they are demanding immediate attention and action. Musicians, acrobats, dancers, fighters and pilots know this. Curiously enough, the drawer 'Urgent 2' contains photographs – frozen moments evoking past time, while drawer 'Urgent 3' contains future oriented exercise-books. The potential miscellaneous present urgencies remain unclassified in the folder 'To be classified'. This is keeping Perec in constant attention, requiring his continuous activity of endless classifying and re-classifying. A process that does not result in obtaining an overview and stable order of things, but that is rather confronting Perec with his own changing position in relation

to that which he feels the urge to classify. I would like to propose that what Perec is describing here is exactly the contingent temporality of becoming.

As noted above, this temporality is resisting classification, signification and representation. This, however, is not due to the instability of *'things'* that are *'to be classified'*, but is rather due to fluid and temporally unstable nature of the relation between the one who is classifying and the *'things to be classified'*. Such realization rests on the understanding that the process of classification is not an objective process, but on the contrary, singular and subjective and as such time sensitive. Therefore any classification that is leading to later signification and representation depends on the identity, desire, objective and situatedness of the one that is classifying as much as it depends on that which is being classified. Perec is very clearly hinting towards this relational interdependence, noting this in the title of the paragraph *"How I classify"*, suggesting that there is always an *"I"* that classifies, which implies that this *"I"* is therefore a part of that which is being classified and which at the same time prevents any definite classification. With other words, one could say that the temporality of becoming is a temporality of a continuous present of forming and re-forming relations between the *"I"* and the *"things to be classified"*. Within this temporality the *"I"* and the *"things to be classified"* are therefore deeply entangled as the agencies of becoming a phenomenon that is specific to the intra-action between the two.

In order to further investigate the qualitative nature of this temporality of becoming that is operating through the installation at stake, I would like to relate Perec's realizations to Karen Barad's proposition of *Agential Realism* as she proposes it in her essay *"Meeting the Universe Halfway"*. I would like to suggest that the above instances articulated by Perec are pointing towards the notions of *"embodied knowledge"* and temporary and relational nature of classification – the ideas that strongly correspond with the thought of Karen Barad as she is proposing that any separation between observing subject and observed object, or what she calls *"agencies of observation"* and an object, that makes observation initially possible, is a *"constructed cut"* and not a preexisting given factuality. Such an arbitrary *"constructed cut"* is therefore only temporarily, partially and contextually defining the observed phenomenon as a *"non-dualistic whole"* in that it encompasses the relation between the *"agencies of observation"* and the observed object as both being

a part of one whole. Referring to the process of scientific measurement, Barad points out:

(...) [A]lthough no inherent distinction [between an “object” and the “agencies of observation”] exists, every measurement involves a particular choice of apparatus, providing the condition necessary to give definition to a particular set of classical variables, at the exclusion of other essential variables, and thereby placing a particular constructed cut delineating the “object” from the “agencies of observation”. This particular construct resolves ambiguities only for a given context; it marks off and is part of a particular instance of wholeness, that is, a particular phenomenon. (...) Therefore, the measurement of unambiguously defined quantities is possible through the introduction of a constructed cut which serves to define “object and agencies of observation” in a particular context.⁵¹

Further on Barad expands on the observed notions of the process of scientific measurement to set the footing for ontology of *Agential Realism*:

The nature-culture and object-subject dualisms are constructed cuts passed off as inherent and fixed in the service of this [Enlightenment] legacy. Agential realism makes other moves: shifting and destabilizing boundaries. Here knowledge comes from the “between” of nature-culture, object-subject, matter-meaning. The Cartesian split between the agencies of observation and the object is a classical illusion. Agency cannot be designated as residing in one or the other in isolation. The observer does not have total agency over passive matter – not any representation of reality will do – since not any result one can think of is possible: the worlds “kicks back”.⁵²

This “kick” (that Perceval so clearly realizes), leads Barad to conclude that therefore:

Meaning and matter are more like interacting excitations of non-linear fields – a dynamic, shifting dance we call science.⁵³

Returning to the notion of a temporality of becoming in the context of the installation at stake, Barad's dancing proposition might prove helpful in trying to articulate the possible poetic act that comes into being through the workings of the installation.

Becoming of the audience through the act of intra-action

Evolving in real-time and through the various described procedures, the distributed body of the installation is not identifying, signifying and representing actual bodily presences of anonymous and remote stepping bodies, but it is rather signaling the process of their becoming as be-ins in-between. Materializing as rhythms and paths of steps, these manifestations strongly relate to and resonate with the bodily presence and spatial situatedness of the visitors to the exhibition space. A resonance and relation that result in the address that is not symbolic, conceptual nor representational, but rather bodily, temporal, spatial and territorial.

Recalling the notion that body is both, a site and a process of becoming, the installation in the exhibition space is establishing a place of interference between the two contingent processes and temporalities of becoming that are interfering with one another, prior and posterior to them being established as a situated subject – the visitor, and as performative signifying object – the artistic work, respectively. This is implying that the interference that the installation accommodates is not posterior to the processes of their individual becomings/configurings, but is rather inserting itself as an integral intra-active agency in the processes and temporalities of their becoming. A proposition that is recalling Barad's notion of intra-action, where:

[I]ndividuals" do not preexist as such but rather materialize in intra-action. That is, (...) "individuals" only exist within phenomena (particular materialized/materializing relations) in their ongoing iteratively intra-active reconfiguring.⁵⁴

Staying within this framework of thinking, I would like to suggest that the specific setting of the installation in the exhibition space therefore acts as a "constructed cut" that undoes preconceived and expected subject-object relation between the visitor and the artistic work. This intervention allowing for the visitors and the distributed body

of the installation to engage in the intra-action as the agencies that are mutually formative to their becoming subjective individualities and performative signifiers, as they are materializing each-other “*in their ongoing iteratively intra-active reconfiguring*”, which is evolving within the temporality of becoming.

Therefore the agencies of the distributed body of the installation are configuring the visitor as an attentive stepping body of weight that is sensing, listening, thinking, guessing, imagining and contemplating. A displaced body in passing. An anonymous body that is touching and that is being touched, but through this touch nevertheless not being addressed. Perhaps this continuous intra-action is pushing the visitor into the state of being the illegible “*I*” that exists outside of subjectivity, evoking Hélène Cixous’s “*I in its barest conception (...) [that is] naked, prior to subjecthood*”⁵⁵, Nancy’s *illegible body of weight*, and Perec’s “*I*” that can not classify, and is therefore *muddling along through an anarchy of things to be classified*.

What I would like to propose is that through the process of continuous intra-action between the distributed body of the installation and the visitor, the visitor’s subjectivity is destabilized. It is being pushed in the state that is prior and posterior to subjecthood, where its rhythms and paths of steps interfere and mix with the remotely transduced rhythms and paths of the anonymous steps, blurring the border between presence and absence, between the inner self-presence and external noise of the unknown other. This suggesting that the inner rhythms of self-presence and the external rhythms of the unknown other’s presence are both part of the otherness that we all share.

At the same instance, this process of intra-action situates the visitor as the locus where signification, representation, classification and interpretation of the distributed body of the installation is continuously evolving. This is configuring the visitor as a body that is not inscribed, but as a body that is always *excribing* and therefore through the asymmetrical processes of intra-action configuring the distributed body of the installation from a singular and situated “*point of being*”⁵⁶. “*Kicking back*” as a body that is being a part of the world that is a “*non-dualistic whole*”, and through a singular “*constructed cut*” materializing the distributed body of the installation and what it is evoking, as singular possible actuality out of plurality

of potentialities that it might be. The body that is *excribing* and therefore signifying, assigning meaning to this body of installation.

Since the installation is suspended in the continuous temporality of becoming that never resolves into a temporality of representation, the situated materializations and configurations are in continuous flux, as the relation between the intra-acting agencies is by no means a relation between the well-defined and stable entities, but rather between entities in flux.

Stemming from a plurality of visitors and by that “*constructed cuts*”, this renders plurality of situated and embodied representations that are signifying the distributed body of the installation into artistic work. As such this setting does not offer one of these possible configurations as an accomplished representation to be read, interpreted, translated, and related to. It rather establishes a place and time for being with and for passing by (remotely) the ongoing temporality of becoming of the other, as the other.

It acts as a place of be-in(g) in-between the making of sense of ongoing temporality of becoming the other that is passing by.

CLOSING STATEMENT

Closing statement

Looking back to the process of my research project, there are many topics that emerged and developments that took place. Trying to identify “the event” of the project is difficult, but perhaps I could specify it in the most general term as a shift of attention. This through the realization that what I was and still am engaged with is the act of listening to something very familiar from an unfamiliar point. In the following short paragraph I attempt to suggest the significance of such shift of attention.

Artistic research project *Rhythms Of Presence* is focusing its attention on listening to the unfamiliar within the familiar, to the opaque within the visible, to the hidden in plain sight and to the inaudible within the audible, as it is focusing on human bodily presence that manifests besides and outside of subjectivity, sociality, identity and meaning, as a rhythmical expression.

In so doing, the project engages in listening to human bodily presence from a non-human point of listening. Through such procedure this research project uncovers the otherness that is embedded and hidden within the self, and articulates it as series of rhythmical, sonic and spatial situations. These situations are embodying the otherness that we all share, as a possibility for reconfiguring the relations between the self, the other and the world that are not being defined by the processes of classification, signification and representation of the other, but that are rather acted out as relations of ‘being with’ and of ‘passing by’ the other, as the other.

APPENDIX

Appendix

The appendix consists of short descriptions and visual documentations of the artistic works that are part of this artistic research project, but have not been addressed in the preceding reflections. This is followed by two commissioned texts that were written by invited writers Salomé Voegelin and Vladimir Vidmar for the occasion of the exhibition that took place in ŠKUC Gallery in Ljubljana, in November 2016.

WORKS

With a Passerby



With a Passerby – installation view, detail. Thetis Garden, Venice. May 2017.
Photo: Karolina Sobel



With a Passerby – installation view. Thetis Garden, Venice. May 2017.
Photo: Karolina Sobel

With a Passerby (2016)

Two crosswalk loudspeakers, sound.

Variable dimensions.

Duration 18:20 min (loop).

Sound documentation: <https://soundcloud.com/user-624592705/withapasserby>

In the installation *With a Passerby* two crosswalk loudspeakers are sounding rhythms that I have recorded during a walk in a city. One speaker is playing back the rhythms of my footsteps and the other one is playing back the rhythms of steps of people passing by, that I was observing, marking them with his voice and recording. The installation brings to the fore the hidden rhythmical relation of the steps of two strangers walking by each other on a street in an urban environment, articulating and highlighting this moment of encounter without contact as a rhythmical non-event.

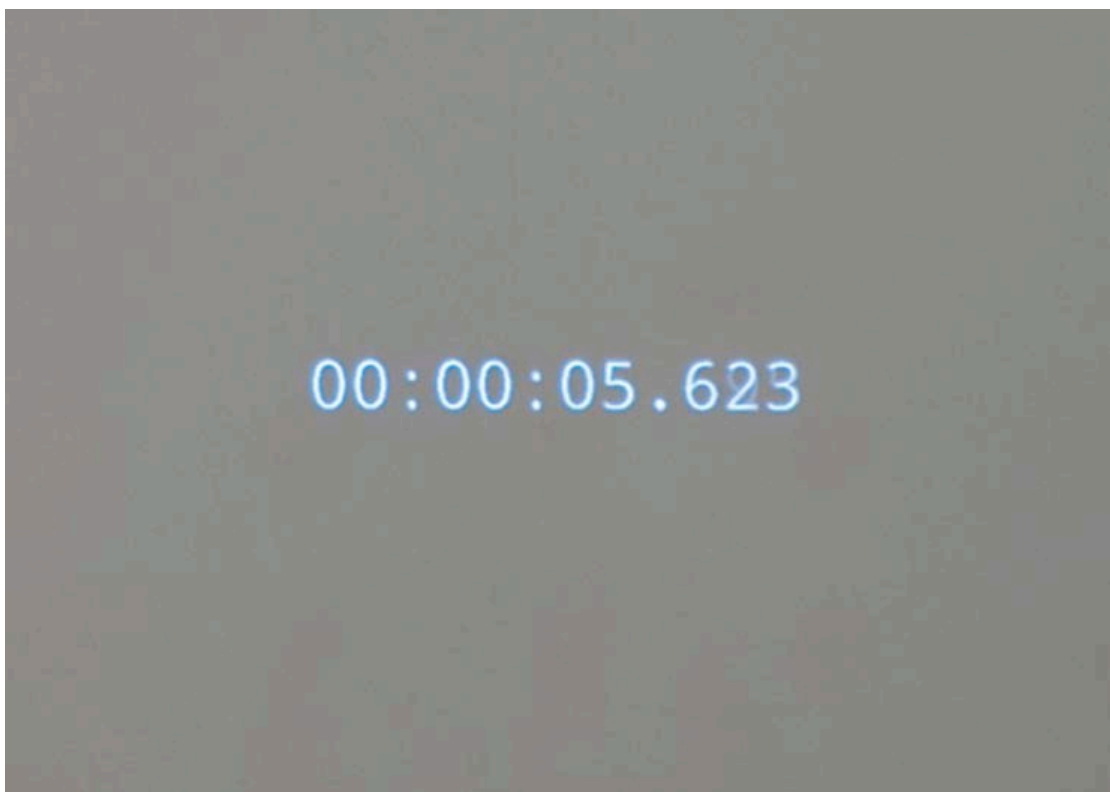
Combining the elements of aimless walking, observing strangers and random encounters, this project alludes to the figure of flaneur as it is epitomized in the poem by Charles Baudelaire “*To a Passerby*”. Here the poet describes an emotion of falling in love with a passerby that he will never see again. A dramatized and affective random encounter that Walter Benjamin describes as “*love – not at first sight, but at last sight*”⁵⁷. Contrary to this fascination, the present project does not seek emotional investment and relation towards a random passerby, but is rather focusing on listening to the hidden rhythms that occur during usually unnoticed and unexperienced encounters that are taking place in everyday situations on the street. Sounding these uncoordinated rhythms the installation is amplifying the moments of passing by as occurrences of non-contact, non-attention, non-communication and non-synchronization.

Unheard



Unheard – installation view. ŠKUC Gallery, Ljubljana. November 2016.

Photo: Dejan Habicht



Unheard – installation view, detail. ŠKUC Gallery, Ljubljana. November 2016.

Photo: Dejan Habicht

Unheard (2016)

Microphone, clock, software.

Variable dimensions

Video documentation: <https://vimeo.com/203477657>

<https://vimeo.com/204040907>

Installation *Unheard* consists of a microphone, a clock and a custom made software that resets the clock to zero every time it detects a sudden peak in loudness of the sonic ambiance of the place where it is installed. Listening to the ambient sound and displaying the passing of clocked time between occurring auditory events, the installation articulates the relation between the measured time and the time as it is being experienced. This setting invites the visitors to focus on listening along and to explore their own margins of audibility and attention, while it is suggesting a shadow temporality unfolding in the intertwining zone between the representation and the experience of the passing of time.

A zone so lucidly outlined by Giorgio Agamben in his essay *The Time That Is Left* (2000):

“(...) if we represent time as a straight line and its end as a last point on it, then we have something perfectly representable, but absolutely unthinkable. On the other hand, if we try to grasp our living experience of time, then we have something thinkable, but strictly non-representable.”⁵⁸

COMMISSIONED TEXTS

The Politics of Rhythm

Salomé Voegelin

“If it is through rhythm that we get the sense that we have to undo ourselves, as everything around us starts to undo itself, and if in approaching this sensation of the movement of everything we ourselves are a part of this movement, it is because rhythm renovates the meaning of things.”(Henri Meschonnic, A Rhythm Party Manifesto, November 2, 199)

Tao G. Vrhovec Sambolec’s works perform the invisible possibility of architecture, of text, and of a city, inviting us to experience the visible through its invisible and mobile temporality. The works are at once highly conceptual, providing outlines, ideas and a frame of presence rather than its experience, while inviting experience as an imaginary engagement in what presence might be.

The timing of this show forces upon its title *The Rhythms of Presence* and thus upon its work, inevitably and unavoidably a political dimension. This dimension is not literally the tapping sound of invisible feet or the count of a manipulated metronome, but is the imaginary capacity created by the rhythms of absence and presence, the heard and the unheard, and its reception within a concurrent political actuality of counting and dis-counting, and the consequent fear of not being able to make oneself count.

His works’ allusion to measure and meter appears like a magician’s trick, creating an illusion of the real as if I was equipped with a faulty ruler but asked to measure it still. And through this task I experience the chasm between what is measurable and what is possible, and I deny neither the meter nor possibility but come to question their divide.

Rhythm becomes a *Zeitgeist*, a poltergeist of a current political drift that encroaches upon the empty room that is Vrhovec Sambolec’s piece *The Rhythms of Presence* from which the show takes its name. This empty room, its surface and form, is animated and inhabited by the sounds of footsteps recorded elsewhere and transformed into temporal and spatial information played out here as taps and knocks to provide an invisible measure of a present circumstance.

The piece pursues the possibility of measure and measurement and confirms the transformative potential of incommensurability. However, in the current political context the incommensurable becomes forced into the presence of an immeasurable absolute: the empty room that invites the imagination of another is tied down to the vision of the only one that seems possible now; and the invisible mobility of sound sees its plural footsteps drowned in the singularity of a marching beat. What might have sounded as opportunity, as spaces opening up for new connections and a serendipitous, “postrhythmic” beat when the work was first shown in Berlin last year, is now directed by the amplification of political absolutes and the exclusion of other meters, triggering a re-reading of the work that invites the darkest expectations.⁵⁹

This Zeitgeist as the phantom of the homogeneity and divisiveness of a current political ideology is an invisible force that lingers also between the collective and compassionate humanity reverberating in Vrhovec Sambolec’s *With a Passerby*. The work, a sonic texture of private rhythms woven between the artist’s own footsteps and the movement of people passing by, performs the social encounters that produce a sense of communality and prepare the ground for its denunciation. Walking with a stranger tests the limits of community and holds the potential for the “fetishized figure” of an us, reduced to absolute homogeneity, to articulate the “idealized hatred” for the other, the unseen Passerby.⁶⁰ This political spectre answers the syncopation of plural footsteps with a mythical absolute that smothers possibility in the expectation of an unquestionable real that consolidates sentiments of marginalisation in slogans for a perversely exclusive belonging in a false past, where the stranger is not in the rhythm of my presence but absolutely absent.

Vrhovec Sambolec’s works make this present political reality tangible through incommensurable rhythms that force themselves into my imagination and make me sense how space is taken and the unheard silenced in the amplification of the dominant. However his works do not rest on this absolute singularity but persevere on the side of real possibility to expose the ghost of the Right and prepare the articulation of its rejection. It is through his rhythms that we get the sense of our own movement, and get to understand ‘that we have to undo ourselves, as everything around us starts to undo itself.’

Rhythms of Presence

Vladimir Vidmar

The four projects by Tao Sambolec, presented in the exhibition *Rhythms of Presence*, approach the visitor in their immediacy and closeness, although they raise a number of gnoseological questions that have been engaging us since the very beginnings of thinking about human condition. The projects use rhythm to consider how our lived experience is presented, that is, how it is experienced, and they open up these issues through an exploration of the space in-between (physical) presence and absence, the material and ephemeral, contact and trace. The fierce technological development of the past decades and the universal acceleration of human existence force us to pose these old questions from new perspectives. *Rhythms of Presence* proceed from the moment of transformation of the individual in his or her physical and mental existence as well as the society and the relations defining it. The diminishing of the distances between the extremes of the old metaphysical dichotomies through the triumph of technology seems to be experienced directly as the irreversible transformation of our perceptive and cognitive faculties as well as of the noumenal world. This transformative potential, which Sambolec considers in parallel in the fields of technology and art, is the actual subject of this exhibition.

The rhythms of the everyday, which Tao Sambolec uses as the entry point for his reflection on the present moment, especially the phenomenon of human movement, become the subject of translation into acoustic traces, rhythmic patterns, establishing a parallelism of separate spatial fields, while the distance between them is erased by the convergence of their temporalities, secured by technological mediation. The work *Rhythms of Presence*, which gives title to the show, is thus composed of two identical surfaces: the floor in an undisclosed public location registers human steps, which are then fed into the system of knockers beneath the gallery floor. The percussion conveys the human steps as rhythmic stomping emanating from beneath the gallery floor and establishing the invisible presence of passers-by. The work *Reading stanley brown* appears to reverse the process. Here, Sambolec uses as his starting point the art book by the Fluxus member stanley brown *my steps 12.12.2005 – 1.1.2006*, which comprises 21 pages each featuring the number of steps made by the artist on that day. Sambolec revives these “abstract” steps and he commits his

movement for 21 days to the concretisation of brouwn's work, that is, to the changing of the numbers back into live steps. In so doing, his body becomes a concretisation of the record, reflecting the relation between the everyday in its invisible ordinariness, and its capture (and signification) through mediation and record. The reflection on this problematic relation is the age-old preoccupation of art. How to establish a relation between immediate experience and its presentation, its capture, how to transpose the experience into meaning, without depriving it of its constitutive liveness? In this context, Sambolec's insistence on rhythm as a live, dynamic record, a phenomenon in-between the concrete and the abstract, becomes a new point of fixating of this tension: Sambolec's "making-present" of brouwn's steps is rhythmically ticked by the metronome. Temporality is the field that captures in the most ontological manner the issues of the relation between direct experience and its structuring; hence, it is the axis of Sambolec's explorations. *Unheard* attempts to bridge in a Sisyphean manner the non-coincidence of the registers of time flow and its presentation; in this work, the clock is reset every time the microphone registers a sudden change in the sound ambient. By trying to "measure" our experience of time, the clock points out to the impossible parallelism between the lived and the measured time in all its radicalness. The impossible symmetry of these "encounters" is summed up metaphorically by the work *With A Passer-By*, in which two loudspeakers juxtapose the rhythms of the artist's steps and the steps of the passers-by in a random composition described by the author himself as a "rhythmic non-event", a peculiar audio-landscape of social life.

In the new conditions of the primacy of the mediatised, the exhibition *Rhythms of Presence* with renewed strength and from a different point of view formulates the question of the relation between formalisation, regularity, mastering, and the immediate, everyday experience. By rendering audible the unregistered everydayness of the flow of events, it creates a poetic heroicness of sorts, whose source is not a romantic neo-conceptual fascination with the spontaneity of life, but rather precisely our obsession with mediation. Tao Sambolec reformulates this as a question of how the lived reality can be experienced through a work of art. In parallel with the transformative effect of technology on humans, Sambolec also explores art can be transformative for this context. In this light, the metaphysical binaries of

present/absent, concrete/abstract, primary/secondary dissolve in Sambolec's reflection of the body as a point of their radically asymmetrical overlapping.

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Endnotes :

Abstract

¹ Artist stanley brouwn insisted that his name is spelled in lower case, therefore his name is spelled in lower case in this entire text, except in the quoted text (p. 29), where his name is spelled with upper case.

Introduction

² Geroges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 188.

³ Astra Taylor (dir.), *Examined Life* (Toronto: Sphinx Productions, 2008)

Works

Heredrum

⁴ Giorgio Agamben, “*What Is Contemporary?*” in *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 51-52.

⁵ Erwin Straus, *Forms of Spatiallity in Phenomenological Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1966), 29.

⁶ This is a quote from John Cage’s performance instructions for the percussionist for the piece *Ryoanji*. John Cage, *Ryoanji* (New York: Edition Peters, 1983-85).

⁷ Jean-Paul Thibaud, “*A Sonic Paradigm of Urban Ambiances?*”, *Journal of Sonic Studies*, volume 1, nr. 1 (October 2011).

<http://journal.sonicstudies.org/vol01/nr01/a02>

⁸ Michel de Certeau, *Walking in The City in The Practice of Everyday Life* (Los Angeles:University of California Press, 1984), 97.

⁹ Agamben, *What Is Contemporary?*, 51-52.

Reading stanley brouwn

¹⁰ stanely brouwn, *stanley brouwn my steps 12.12.2005 - 1.1.2006* (Milano: A&Mbookstore Edizioni, 2014).

¹¹ As accessed in August 2017 at <http://www.weserburg.de/index.php?id=237&L=1>

¹² Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus in The Birth to Presence*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 198.

Rhythms Of Presence

¹³ Nancy, *Corpus*, 197-198.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 199.

¹⁵ Christof Migone, *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body*, (Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2012), 54.

¹⁶ Marcel Mauss, (1973) *Techniques of the body*. In *Economy and Society*, 2:1, (London: Routledge, 1973), 85.

Access:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/030851473000000003>

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

²¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Dressage*. In *Rhythmanalysis – Space, Time and Everyday Life*, (London: Continuum, 2004), 38 – 39.

²² Michel de Certeau, *Indeterminate*. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 199.

²³ Henri Lefebvre, *Conclusions*. In *Rhythmanalysis – Space, Time and Everyday Life*, (London: Continuum, 2004), 68 – 69.

²⁴ Michel de Certeau, *Walking in The City*. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 101.

²⁵ Henri Lefebvre and Catherine Régulier, *The Rhythmanalytical Project*. In *Rhythmanalysis – Space, Time and Everyday Life*, (London: Continuum, 2004), 81.

²⁶ Jean-Luc Godard (dir.), *In Praise of Love*, 2001.

²⁷ Karen Barad, *Intra-actions*, Interview by Adam Kleinman, *Mousse Magazine* 34, (Milano: Mousse Publishing, 2012), 77.

²⁸ Karen Barad, *What Is the Measure of Nothingness? Infinity, Virtuality, Justice*. In *100 Notes - 100 Thoughts/ 100 Notizen - 100 Gedanken*, No.099 (Kassel: documenta und Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungs-GmbH, 2012), 12.

²⁹ Christof Migone, *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body*, (Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2012), 69.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

³² *Ibid.*, 72.

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- ³³ Antonin Artaud, *Correspondence with Jacques Rivière (1923 – 24)*. In Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings, (ed. Susan Sontag) (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 43.
- ³⁴ Migone, *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body*, 53.
- ³⁵ Karen Barad, *What Is the Measure of Nothingness? Infinity, Virtuality, Justice*, 12.
- ³⁶ Karen Barad, *On Touching – The Inhuman That Therefore I Am (V.I.1)*. In *Power of Material/Politics of Materiality*, Susanne Witzgall and Kerstin Stakemeier (eds.), (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2014), 163.
- ³⁷ As remembered from hearing Allen Ginsberg reciting the poem sometime between 1994-95 in Trondheim – Norway.
- ³⁸ Giorgio Agamben, “*What Is Contemporary?*”. In *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 51-52.
- ³⁹ de Certeau, *Walking in The City*, 97.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 97.
- ⁴³ Lisa Gye, Anna Munster, Ingrid Richardson (eds.), *Editorial*. In *Fibreculture Journal, Issue 7: Distributed Aesthetics*, 2005. Accessed In August 2017: <http://seven.fibreculturejournal.org/>
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ Maria Miranda, *Unsitely Aesthetics – Uncertain Practices in Contemporary Art*, (Berlin and Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, 2013), 43.
- ⁴⁶ Miranda, *Networked Culture and Mediated Public Space*. In *Unsitely Aesthetics – Uncertain Practices in Contemporary Art*, 51.
- ⁴⁷ Miranda, *Site of Unsitely*. In *Unsitely Aesthetics – Uncertain Practices in Contemporary Art*, 70.
- ⁴⁸ Agamben, “*What Is Contemporary?*”, 51-52.
- ⁴⁹ Erwin Straus, *Lived Movement*. In *Phenomenological Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1966), 57.
- ⁵⁰ Geroges Perec, *Think/Classify*. In *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 196.
- ⁵¹ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism without Contradiction*. In: Nelson L.H., Nelson J. (eds) *Feminism, Science, and the*

Philosophy of Science. Synthese Library (Studies in Epistemology, Logic, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science), vol 256. (Dordrecht: Springer, 1996), 171.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 188.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Barad, *Intra-actions*, 77.

⁵⁵ Migone, *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body*, 70.

⁵⁶ The “*point of being*” is a concept developed by Derrick De Kerckhove, where touch is rediscovered as significant within the advent of network culture. De Kerchove writes:

“The Point of Being (PB) describes a sensory relationship with the world and to others that is grounded in touch. PB is the feeling of one’s presence in one’s own life. It is a multisensory and predominantly tactile experience of the world, of self and of others.”(10)

“Today, because electricity in its digital evolution puts everything in touch with everything else, artists, scholars and psychologists are rediscovering the senses as a whole and in this process the sense of touch has an insidiously dominant role. Touch is directly connected to the configuration of self-in-the-world as it can be considered a tool for thinking “with” the body, allowing for the displacement of consciousness from brain to body and instructing people about what cannot be grasped by the eyes.”(14)

Derrick de Kerckhove: *The Point of Being*. In Derrick de Kerckhove and Cristina Miranda de Almeida (eds.): *The Point of Being*. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014). 10, 14.

Appendix

Works

⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyrical Poet In The Eara of High Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 124-25.

⁵⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That is Left*. In *Epoché*, Volume 7, Issue 1. (2002), 4.

Commissioned texts

The Politics of Rhythm

⁵⁹ The piece from which the show takes its title was first exhibited at Errant Bodies Space in Berlin, in November-December 2015.

⁶⁰ This interpretation is inspired by Étienne Balibar's public lectures at the Critical Theory Institute of the University of California in 1996 published as *Violence and Civility* by Columbia University Press, NY, 2015.