

The Body of the Audience

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I won't forget a science fair my parents took me once to. It was in Rio de Janeiro, back in the 1980's. I was probably seven years old. I can't recall its name. The venue was a warehouse which no longer exists. At the entrance there was a sign which asked:

“Please Touch Everything”

Even with my little experience at exhibitions at that age, I felt there was something extraordinary about that message. Finally the public could *do* something!

“We human beings live in conversations, and all that we do as such we do it in conversations as networks of consensual braiding of emotions and coordinations of coordinations of consensual behaviors. In these circumstances, a culture is a closed network of conversations which is learned as well as conserved by the children that live in it. Accordingly, the worlds that we live as human beings arise through our living in conversations as particular domains of consensual coordinations of coordinations of consensual behaviors and emotions, and whatever configuration of conversations that begins to be conserved in our living, becomes henceforth the world that we live, or one of the world that we live.”

-- Humberto Maturana, *Metadesign*, 1997

“In the early museums of the eighteenth century, visitors often handled the artefacts on display. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, such tactile practices were no longer allowed within public museums. Thus, in 1844 the art writer Anna Jameson observed that, while people now behaved themselves within collection settings, everyone could remember the days when gallery-goers strutted about “touching the ornaments - and even the pictures!”

- Classen & Howes, 2011, after Jameson (1844) *Hands on Museum*

Introduction

This thesis investigates how artworks deal with the presence of the audience and ultimately incorporate their bodies as a medium. We will address the aesthetic and social aspects involved in the artistic experience. The intrinsic relations of art and public will be analyzed and encouraged. This motivation appeals to artists as well to exhibition spaces to re-evaluate the potentials *inside* the public.

I'm interested in questioning how artists approach their audience. Why is there a break, sometimes a hierarchy, or even a dictatorial aspect at the moment the public encounters the artwork? What is art without the public? How is such a distinction constructed? I will restrict the discussion to the current scenario, the *contemporary* as the offspring of the 20th century practices - rather than tracing it longer back in history.

The frequent question '*is that art?*' could be a symptom of the *exclusion* of the audience, as if their perception was a secondary value in the work. The artist as the creator of a *context*, functions as a *master*, creating a world to be lived by the others. In his or her effort for seeking expression (which is the act of art making), the artist sometimes ignores that each individual in the public brings their own background, concerns and sensitivities.

On the other hand, the public is conditioned to a *polite* submission within mainstream art spaces; a behaviour which might contribute to the loss of engagement. They have accepted their passive role, often feeling alienated or even disregarded by artist. Therefore I propose a balance could be pursued if artists consider the audience to be a part of the experiences they aim to create.

Finally, could we imagine an art of physical engagement? How much of the audience's thoughts, emotions and movements could be involved? Participation is one side of it. However my concern is how art encounters the body, for I believe in a sensorial subjectivity within each individual in the audience. Could we imagine the ethical implications of this new relationship between public and art? In the following pages we will examine possible dialogues that contribute to meaningful exchanges between art and the public.

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Personal considerations

I grew up in Rio de Janeiro, a city of five million inhabitants back in the 1980's. My family's first home was a 100 m² apartment on the 10th floor of a building, with two-storey parking garage, a play-ground with a small football field and two swimming pools. And so lived most of my friends at school. Children of a big city, with lots of recreation to distract them from social and political issues. Brought up in a family supporting the socialist party for two generations, as a child I was taught the sense of social equality, even though that was definitely not the average mentality among the people.

Brazilian society is rather unequal. Even the idea of "mingling with the people" sounds uncomfortable to many. We accept that possibility only perhaps, during certain festivities, and remarkably during Carnival, when the heat of the celebrations exceeds our social and economical discrepancies. Indeed the pounding of the drums, along with a crowd singing and dancing in unison is rather captivating. However, in my view, many of those social events conceal an aspect of mass manipulation. Distracted in our *happiness*, we praise naivety, and allow populist agendas to proliferate.

After some oscillations I entered Architecture school in 1999. I had just come from my first trip to Europe, when I discovered the interconnectedness of cities through the extensive railways. I got fascinated by the old and the new train stations and realized urban design made a great difference in people's lives.

Meanwhile Brazilian judicial and educational systems have always mirrored European models. Besides we speak a Latin language and follow the Christian calendar. So it is logical for us that we belong to the Western World. It was only when I came to The Netherlands to my surprise that I understood that we, Brazilians, were seen as exotic, as much as our first European visitors must have seen us, 500 years ago. South America was not the West.

Living within the mighty nature, indeed we are a mix of peoples, with African, European and Native American roots. We are a young culture too, shaped in less than five centuries of Portuguese colonisation, which left us, among many scars, the Catholic morality and the doomed slavery inheritance.

To a large extent, distribution of wealth in Brazil is utopian. For some years I dreamed of redesigning the public transport system of megacities such as Rio and São Paulo. By and large, I wanted to promote a social revolution, one that would allow people to gain more time and dignity, travelling faster and more comfortable. As I got closer to graduation, I was losing interest in designing cities or planning people's traveling routine. I felt that Brazil was already full of architects and lacking solutions. On top of that, I became skeptical of our humongous national structure, run by mischievous administrations added to our tragic slavery history. As a designer I felt I would be more likely frustrated trying to tackle those old constructs, instead of actually changing the conjuncture of Brazilian society.

On the other hand I realized I was more interested in the phenomenological experience of architecture, motivated by questions that were more related to an artistic practice. I noticed that art had the immediacy that I searched for, a direct effect on the public sphere - the *pathos*, the capacity of transformation. Art would make no concessions to politicians or corporations. Art is for the public and yet it's not an instrument of obscure agendas. At least I want to believe so.

When I came to the Netherlands to study at the Artscience Interfaculty (KABK/Koncon, in The Hague), a school founded by Frans Evers, an experimental psychologist and others artists, I was coming to develop my own language, combining my fascinations for film, dance, physics and biology. Very soon I started to create performances where I directed groups of people functioning as a whole. I researched ways of *moving together*, focused on bodily articulations and at the same time, on ordinary actions - preferably done by non-performers. They would move and evolve in relation to each other.

I wanted to involve the audience too, making them feel as if they were part of the work. I tried it in different ways, raising awareness of cooperation, and constantly looking for playfulness.

I see my approach like that of a choreographer, although I wouldn't call my work 'dance' - at least not in its strict sense. I look for patterns and rhythm, laying in the everyday life. In doing so I hope to be triggering new communication channels, enhancing our living together.

For this thesis I had to make critical choices and bypass aspects which could only be discussed in a broader scope. References from neurology and biology or to ancient rituals, and Art History could not be thoroughly treated here, in order to center our interest on the contemporary approach of art to incorporate the audience, and discuss up-to-date installations, live acts, dance and music. We will discuss how contemporary practices have given rise to, and established *what art appreciation is*, and how may artists might catalyse new processes.

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Embodying the Public

Participation, interaction and collaboration with the public were methods vastly explored by artists since the 1950's and 60's. Throughout this period the role of the audience has evolved from *observer, visitor, spectator* to *receiver, participant, co-creator* and even *performer*. (I use the italicized form because these terms vary according to each artist's discourse), however the public's embodied knowledge has rarely been approached.

In 'Participation' (Documents of Contemporary Art, 2006) Claire Bishop affirms that Walter Benjamin was one of the first authors who claimed participation of the public, in a text from 1934, 'The Author as Producer': *The work of art should actively intervene in and provide a model for allowing viewers to be involved in the process of production; consumers turned into producers – that is: more readers or spectators into collaborators.*

Also according to Bishop, Antonin Artaud in the late 1930's introduced a paradigm of physical involvement in the Theatre of Cruelty, aiming to reduce the distance between actors and spectators. He used the term *cruelty* for a ritualistic drama that was intended to express emotions and desensitise the audience, through technical methods (using sound, light and gestures), allowing them to confront themselves.

“The Dada performances during the Sturm Soirees were presented as coups de theatre, where scenery was placed in the midst of the audience, using the subtle invention of blowing wind produced by electrical fans to clear the air both literally and symbolically. The sounds of the Sturm Soirees were intended to free the mind of the search for meaning in a world in which the air was poisoned by mustard gas and to express disgust toward the poisoning language used by war apologists. Not knowing that twenty-five years later an even stronger type of gas would be systematically used to destroy Jews, gypsies and homosexuals alike, even further removing the concept of meaning from life, the Dada artists gathered in the Cabaret Voltaire, etc. There they expressed their joy and luck to have remained outside of the horrors of World War I. By using parts of the artistic mind connected to infants and primitive people they created their elementary sound poetry, musical rhythms, and bizarre outfits.”

- Frans Evers [*Synaesthetics in Art, c. 2004-2009*]

The engagement of the public gained special attention in the practices of the 1960's and 70's, with artists attempting to bring art closer to everyday life and questioning materialistic culture - the Happenings, the Situationism, the Viennese Actionism, Fluxus and Joseph Beuys' Social Sculptures, to name a few.

Interactivity and immersion are notions more recently developed, notably in the 1990's, along with the growth of new media. Virtual and Augmented Reality, Net Art and the hybrids offered some level of playfulness, despite their high subordination on the media available then.

Yet we can trace aspects of interactivity and/or immersion implicit in much earlier events in Art History, such as in the Dada performances, or in installations as the *Merzbau* by Kurt Schwitters (started in 1923), in *The Dream of Venus*, by Salvador Dalí at the New York Fair (1939), or to a certain extent in the Philips Pavilion (Brussels, 1958). Each of those installations was an exploration of full body sensations by means of new, unusual techniques, leading the public through a physical journey.

The Surrealists demanded a new attitude from their public by conceiving and designing their exhibition spaces themselves. In 'Displaying the Marvellous', Lewis Kachur applied the term 'ideological spaces' in regard to the surrealist exhibitions:

"Of course every exhibition is on some level ideological, projected as it is in a particular public sphere. I have in mind however the abandonment of a seemingly straightforward or neutral presentation in favor of a relatively subjective format. (...) Indeed these exhibitions offered startled viewers an early version of installation art, before there was such a phrase for this form (...) Each exhibition had its own art world drama, both among the changing cast of participants as well as vis-a-vis sponsors, critics, and other interested parties. (...) Duchamp specialized in various forms of frustration or annoyance of the spectator, a problematizing of viewing which calls into question the definition of the work of art, and a certain ironic wit. Dali adds the dérèglement of the senses as well as a focus on the actual third dimension, in the Surrealist object and architecture." [Kachur, 2001]

In his thesis, Kachur demonstrates how Surrealism evolved from a literary movement to one of painting, and later, installations. *"To evoke the marvellous in the physical and practical realm of exhibition design was one of the paradoxes that those who shaped these installations wrestled with."* [Kachur,

Preface, 2001]. The Surrealists tendency of designing their own spaces reveal a multilayered approach towards the how art should be experienced. A tendency which pointed to the notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk* - the total artwork - another multisensory concept much diffused by Richard Wagner, around 1849.

In the 1960's, audience participation became a strategy for artists who had a social and political agenda. As explained by Claire Bishop, an *art of participation* tends to be allied to one or all of the following agendas:

“1. One concerned with the desire to create ***an active subject***, one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation. The hope is that the newly emancipated subjects of participation will find themselves able to determine their own social and political reality. *An aesthetic of participation therefore derives legitimacy from a (desired) causal relationship between the experience of a work of art and individual/collective agency.*

2. The second is ***related to authorship***. The gesture of ceding some or all authorial control is conventionally regarded as more egalitarian and democratic than the creation of a work by a single artist, while shared production is also seen to entail the aesthetic benefits of greater risk and unpredictability.

3. The third possible agenda involves a perceived ***crisis in community and collective responsibility***. *This concern has become more acute since the fall of Communism, although it takes its lead from a tradition of Marxist thought that indicts the alienating and isolating effects of Capitalism. One of the main impetuses behind participatory art has been a restoration of the social bond through a collective elaboration of meaning.”* (Bishop, 2006)

Later manifestations aimed to implement audience engagement: Relational Aesthetics, Community Art, Flashmobs among others. The notion of public domain has drastically changed also with the breakthrough of Internet, which contributed to the expansion of the idea of *the public* towards a worldwide, constantly, interconnected community, collectively generating information. In this new scenario the relationship between spectator and content evolved into one of co-production.

Choreographing the audience

A recent approach on actually *moving* the audience occurred in 2010, with the exhibition entitled *Move: Choreographing You* (first presented in the Hayward Gallery, London, 2010 and later in the Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2011). The show posed a new role for the audience, that of the actor. Installations, objects and videos were distributed throughout the space, to be explored by the hands and the feet, and only sometimes to be guided by gallery assistants. Playing within the intersection between dance and art, in this exhibition the public was literally demanded to *react* to the artworks, and by doing so, to perform.

The artists selected for *Move: Choreographing You* (Trisha Brown, William Forsythe, Lygia Clark, Allan Kaprow, Mike Kelley, Yvonne Rainer, Xavier Le Roy, Robert Morris, among others) coming from various disciplines, were shown together for the first time. As curator Stephanie Rosenthal explained: “We are choreographed and manipulated every minute in life because we are in spaces which are artificially built”.

Initially cautious, the audience of *Move: Choreographing You* felt at ease and responded to most pieces with great engagement. Some of the objects were deliberately displayed without instructions, leading the visitors to use them on their own will. The unfolding of the interactions were captured by cameras, only for the record of the exhibition.

According to William Forsythe, once one enters those works, *the visitor has an entire different perception of him or herself*. He or she must devise what to do and how to do it, alone and free. *Move: Choreographing You* cemented an innovative mentality within the cultural institutions that wish to provoke the public towards a more active role. Since then more and more museums are incrementing their programs with dance related shows.

The Body of the Artist

While the body of the audience has rarely been observed by art historians, the artists, on the other hand, have long offered their bodies as medium for expression and experimentation. Singing or dancing is as old as mankind and although the function and meaning of art has changed throughout history, we can say that modern performance art is per se a body-based medium.

The public knows the artist's body quite well. Musicians, actors and dancers simultaneously use their physical and mental capacities in their shows. Tracey Warr and Amelia Jones in *The Artist's Body* show how much of the creator's or performer's body has been used as object as well as subject for the exploration of human matters. "Artists have investigated the temporality, contingency and instability of the body (...) they have explored the notion of consciousness, reaching to express the self that is invisible, formless, and liminal. They have addressed issues of risk, fear, death and sexuality, at times when the body has been most threatened by these things." [Warr and Jones, 2000]

By presenting themselves as material for the performance, artists can trigger empathy, as a sub channel of dialogue with the public. Piero Manzoni's own faeces, Rebecca Horn's instruments, Valie Export's sexuality, Dennis Oppenheim's positions, Marina Abramovic's self-exposures and Chris Burden's *shoot* have shown the potential and fragility of human condition.

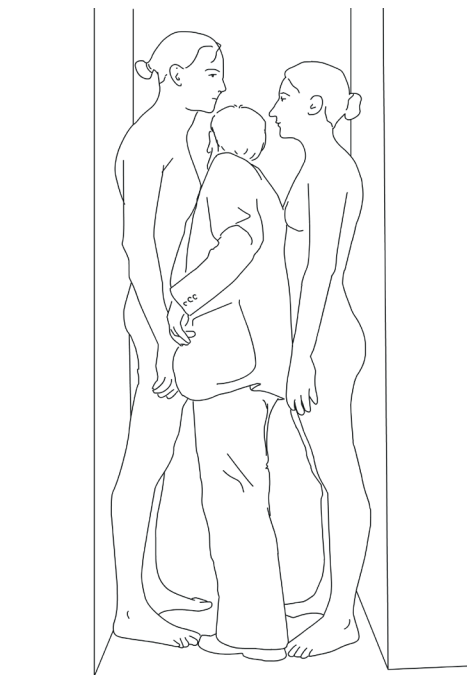
Marina Abramovic's work is widely known, paving the way for performance art itself. She has put her body in the center of radical experiments, sometimes challenging the public to join her in her pieces. In 1974, Abramovic proposed a terrifying experiment. During an exhibition in Belgrade, she laid out 75 objects on a table and sat on a nearby chair, inviting the audience to use the objects as they pleased. The items included some olive oil, roses, a knife, a loaded pistol, among other things. The episode, which ended six hours later, with Marina walking away dripping with blood and tears, brought to light the extensions of human nature.

With *Imponderabilia* (1977), Abramovic and partner Ulay forced the public to squeeze in between their naked bodies in order to enter an art gallery. Each passer-by had to choose one side to pass through and be face-to-face to either naked performer. Meanwhile, Marina and Ulay stared at each other for 90 minutes.

Once inside the museum, people had accomplished the imponderable challenge, the obstacle of the nudity, as a symbolic gate in which by passing, vulnerable before the others' bodies, the participants recovered their own body awareness.

Abramovic went on with devoted passion for endurance and drama throughout the years. In 2010, invited by the MoMa (New York's Museum of Modern Art) for a large retrospective exhibition of her works, Abramovic created the most visited and her longest performance of all time. *The Artist is Present*, in which she would be permanently sitting during the opening hours of the museum, and for three months, inviting one person at a time to sit in silence across from her, and to gaze at each other's eyes for a duration of their choosing. The piece attracted thousands of people, curious to meet the notorious performer and to accomplish that simple action together. The simplicity of eye gazing between two people challenges both to contemplate, to concentrate in the moment - an act that contrasts with the noisy, agitated state of mind in modern living.

Essentially the strength of *The Artist is Present* was exactly to provoke those unique encounters between strangers. The piece drew attention to the multitude of individuals in the audience, creating a stage so to speak, for those who are unknown (with full-time footage and photos from each one of them) at the center of the space, sitting with the artist. Furthermore, the exhibition provoked new, spontaneous dialogues at the long waiting queue - according to those who were later interviewed - where people would be standing, sitting, witnessing and projecting their emotions on to the individuals on the symbolic stage.



At the moment Marina Abramovic is in the process of founding and building an institute for art and science, entirely dedicated to the audience's first-hand experience, with technical support from a number of scientists.

Another approach of interaction between the artist and his or her surroundings can be observed in the practice of Kenzo Kusuda, a Japanese dancer and performer, living and working independently in The Netherlands since 1999. Kusuda often performs solo, in silence and in slow motion. Gradually revealing his hands, feet and eyes, his actions develop a relation with the others - the space, the audience, the acoustics and, according to him, the circulating air that is shared by all present in that moment. I met him for a conversation and learned about his 'collaboration' with the audience.

In Kenzo's words, the performer functions as a "fountain of attention", a medium for something collectively constructed. He introduces himself in the space and so the space is introduced to himself, gradually, building up to the action. By means of eye contact and discreet touch, he generates subtle sensations to the audience. Until all the members of the audience, one by one, become aware of their 'interconnectedness'. During the performance Kusuda imagines 'becoming invisible and dissolving into the room', as if he could become spectator of his own crowd.

While preparing for a piece Kusuda researched the "character of the space" where he will perform in. He establishes a dialogue with every object, a chair, a staircase, giving them a differentiated quality. Moreover the artist pays attention to the acoustics that permeate him or which sounds are generated in that situation. During this process, nothing is taken for granted, all sounds and forces are meaningfully chained and so they have a place in the 'logic' of the piece. The performer - according to Kusuda - simply opens a channel for those events to emerge, inviting the audience to perceive that very process. Kenzo 'tunes his senses to each individual in the audience', a technique he developed by years of dance and performance experience, combining his intuition and trust on the public.

Parangolés & Objetos Relacionais

In Brazil two remarkable artists contributed to the history of sensorial and participatory art in the 1960's and 70's. Despite their great legacy, their names are much unknown abroad: Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica. During their respective artistic trajectories (which coincide with Tropicalism, a movement mixing ideas from Brazilian modernism, Pop Culture and Psychedelia), they both evolved from the Fine Arts towards a performative, hybrid form, which radically embraced the public. Oiticica addressed the external world, while Clark addressed interior psychological states. Throughout their careers, they found different directions and kept an intense dialogue through letters which are widely published today.

Helio Oiticica's (1937-1980) life story doesn't fit in a few pages. He was a man of monumental energy, who died relatively young. Oiticica was home-schooled, established his practice in Fine Arts, and received much acclaim from critics and public alike during the 1950's. It was after this period that he started developing sensorial installations, which were to be dwelled upon by the audience, the "*Penetráveis*" (Penetrables). In these works, atmospheres were forged with raw materials (wood, earth, stones), colorful, industrialized fabrics and plastics. A blend of favela house and abstract sculpture. The visitors could spend as long as they wanted, laying or playing inside. People were invited to walk barefoot on sand, water ponds, while surrounded by colorful surfaces and smells, complementing a synaesthetic space.

Oiticica was then exploring Rio's popular festivities. Within an elitist society, where Carnival was seen as low culture, he discovered traditional dances deeply rooted in African rhythms, and started collaborating with the carnival troupe of Mangueira. This prolific period, when Oiticica refused the extreme intellectualization of art, culminated in the *Parangolé* (term not translatable: a slang for "small talk"; "chatter") in 1964. The work was made of colourful textiles, loosely worn as a cape, through which people were incited to explore by moving, dancing, collectively, in a context close to a trance. They were presented as sensorial pieces, free of any conceptualisation; that should simply provide the tactile and proprioceptive inputs for the user, catalysing a ritualistic act in the public space. After playing, the user should feel free to discard it, like a disposable costume. There was no *sacred aura* of the art object; there was no reason to keep it. Further in his career, Oiticica would produce instructions on how to make them.

It is a shame to see the *Parangolés* hanging on the walls of museums today. Even when the exhibition allows the visitors to wear them and “play”, the concept is displaced, there is a certain reverence which breaks spontaneity, and that is precisely what contradicts the idea of the *Parangolés*.

“Before anything else I need to clarify my interest in dance, in rhythm, which in my case came from a vital necessity for de-intellectualization. Such intellectual disinhibition, a necessary free expression, was required since I felt threatened by an excessively intellectual expression. This was the definite step towards the search for myth, for a reappraisal of this myth and a new foundation in my art (...) it was the beginning of a definite social experience.

‘Dionysian’ dance, born out of the interior rhythm of the collective, exteriorizes itself as a character of the popular groupings, nations, etc. It is as if an immersion into rhythm takes place, a flux where the intellect remains obscured by an internal mythical force that operates at an individual and collective level (in fact, in this instance one cannot establish a distinction between the collective and the individual). The images are mobile, rapid, inapprehensible - they are the opposite of the static icon that is characteristic of the so-called fine arts.”

- Oiticica, Dance in My Experience (diary entries 1965-66)



Oiticica was deeply concerned with the role of the public. He didn't always see them as a warm-hearted, innocent presence, but rather as consumers, creatures eager to devour the artwork. In a letter to Lygia Clark, from 1968, he reflected on the mind of the participant:

“This business of participation is really terrible because it is what is actually inconceivable, that manifests in each person, at each moment, as if taking possession.

Like you, I also felt this necessity of killing the spectator or participator, which is a good thing, since it creates an interior dynamic with regard to the relation. Contrary to what has been happening a lot lately, it shows that there is no aestheticization of participation: the majority creates an academicism of the relation or of the idea of spectator’s participation, to such an extent that it has left me with doubts about the idea itself. (...)

Sometimes what appears to be participation is a mere detail of it, because the artist cannot in fact measure this participation, since each person experiences it differently. This is why there is this unbearable experience [vivência] of ours, of being deflowered, of possession, as if he, the spectator would say: ‘Who are you? What do I care if you created this or not? Well, I am here to modify everything, this unbearable shit that proposes dull experiences, or good ones, libidinous, fuck you, and all of this because I devour you, and then I shit you out; what is of interest only I can experience and you will never evaluate what I feel and think, the lust that devours me.’

And the artist comes out of it in tatters. But it is good, it is not as one could imagine a question of masochism, it’s just the true nature of the business.”

[Clark/Oiticica//Letters 1968-69; in Bishop, 2006]

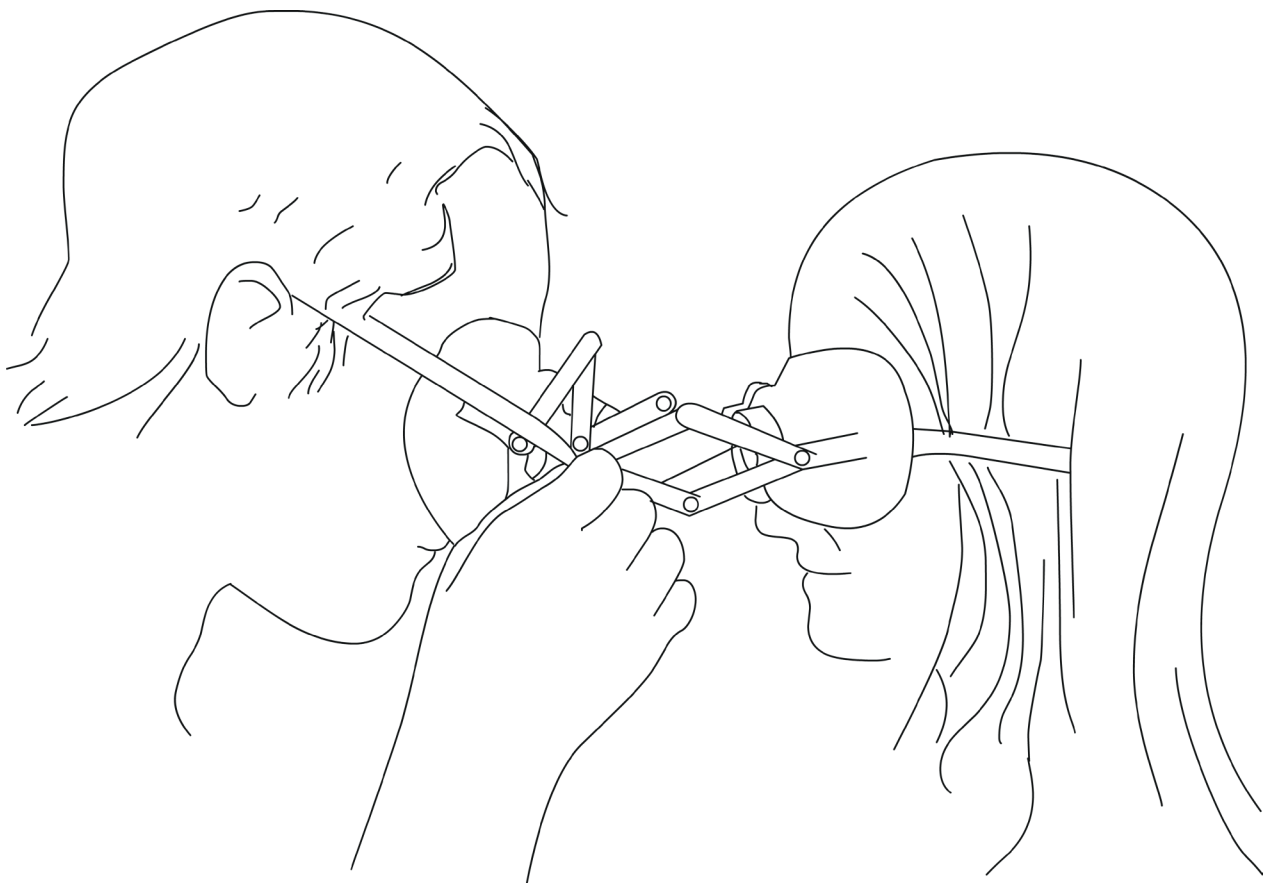
Lygia Clark (1920-1988) examined relations between art and society, anticipating the notion of the body of the audience. Clark began as a painter in the 1950's, moved on to sculpture, and then became involved with the Neo-Concrete movement in Rio de Janeiro. The Neo-Concretes aimed to introduce subjectivity to abstract art. It was a manifested reaction to the radical Abstractionism going on in Sao Paulo, where the Concrete group was dominant. Neo-Concrete artists started including the public in their works: emphasising relations between art and life, rejecting the notion of artwork as "machine" or "object" (as the Concretes did) and highlighted the role of intuition. The public should touch, interact, use their pieces.

In the '60's Clark's research took an ephemeral, soft, performative form. She developed sensorial works to be shared within a group, something she called "a ritual without a myth", culminating in her own psychotherapeutic healing style. Later in her trajectory, Clark defined herself as "non artist". What she was doing should never be placed alongside the Fine Arts.

With the series *Objetos Relacionais*, Lygia Clark explored our ability of connecting to others, by devices she designed especially for this purpose. Each piece was made to engage the audience in a sensual process. *Bichos* ("Beasts"); *Trepantes* ("Climbers"); *Eu e Tu* ("I and You"); *Diálogo Óculos* ("Goggles Dialogue"), 1968; *Arquiteturas biológicas* ("Biologic Architectures"), *Nascimento* ("Birth") 1969, *Ovo* ("Egg"), 1969; *Canibalismo* ("Cannibalism"), 1973; *Rede de Elástico* ("Elastic Net", 1974); *Túnel* ("Tunnel"); *Corpo Coletivo* ("Collective body"); *Baba Antropofágica* ("Anthropophagic Drool"); *Cabeça Coletiva* ("Collective Head", 1975). By wearing and/or entering those instrument-environments, participants would engage in a sensual ritual, orchestrated by the artist.

As Guy Brett wrote on Lygia Clark, the artist produces a representation - a compressed sign - of some form of physical fact, life experience or spiritual energy which is encoded in the work of art; this is then decoded and read by the spectator, and to some extent relived by him or her. Suppose, instead, that the artist's production was not her own encoded expressivity directed toward the other person as spectator but provided means for that other person to become conscious of his/her own expressivity in the role of participant. The roles of "artist", "spectator" and "mediating object" would all change."

For Clark, who began as painter and ended up practicing a form of psychotherapy, this was not a change in her career but rather a continuum in which, through her experiments, she also questioned the meaning of “being an artist”. Pursuing a language of the body, not performed or watched by an audience but actually lived by the *participants* (as she herself referred to the public).



Be Kind to the Audience

How do artworks engage and act upon the audience? What are the expectations from the public's point of view? What elements or qualities lead one to appreciate an art piece?

At early age, most of us learned to be quiet or to *behave* in public. No touching exhibited items, no talking during a performance, and today mobiles must be switched off. We follow implicit laws of correction for every exhibition space, theatre and the like. Often these institutions invest a few minutes in instructing the public. The moment a piece will be shown or executed must be *solemn*. No one disturbs.

Audience conduct can reach extremes of submission, where they can act or be treated as a *herd*, waiting or obeying to any gestures of the artist. Such situations may have two implications. One: the audience permits deliberate abuses simply out of respect towards the artist. And two: there's a degree of subservience, in which the audience may enjoy 'being used'. The latter is a delicate turn which all individuals involved should be aware of. Artists sometimes might feel in the rights of using their public, in the name of audience participation. Their position may give the impression that they have the privilege to do so, sometimes liberating a narcissistic behavior. In this case the public should recover common sense and take their position at the other side of the stage. However, many individuals are not that conscious.

It is in the presence and the interaction with the audience, rather than the artist, that legitimates the ritual and the quality of an artwork. It is the *witnessed*, the shared ceremony, which shifts a mere object or situation to another level. That includes social, psychological and physiological phenomena, a multilayered process in the contact with the artwork. People allow themselves to be captured, tricked, to travel. Offering their concentration and sensations - they open themselves to the artwork.

As per any public situation, a deal between the parties involved is established. The artist requires the presence of the public. In turn the public must be acknowledged for its attention. By being generous to each other, a consciousness rises from the mutual reliance.

Hate the Audience, Hate the Artist

The encounter between public and art is a contingency, an event which must not be taken for granted. The audience, eager or not for art, forms a unit: 'the public', which is per se a generalization. It gathers a constellation of moods, backgrounds, expectations and preconceptions. Now and then this 'unit' or some of its members, may *steal the show*, whether by lack of affinity, of information, or worse - spiced up by the phenomenon of group formation - they take over, they *misbehave*. Audience can also be rude, vile, terrifying.

In 1968, during a music contest in Brazil (the 3rd International Song-writing Festival), composer Caetano Veloso accompanied by avant-garde band *Os Mutantes* stepped on to the stage playing electric guitars, singing their new tune: *É Proibido Proibir* ('It is Forbidden to Forbid'). All of a sudden, the monumental crowd in the packed arena started to 'boo'. They could not accept electric guitars been played in such a festival. That was a *betrayal* to national culture and to Brazilian music. That was also the darkest year of a military dictatorship which lasted for two decades (1964-1984). Arrests and torture became more and more frequent. The weight of a rough, intolerant regime, supported by the United States, provoked rejection towards any American symbols (in this case the electric guitar). Music was then the way of subtly and creatively criticising the state. Although Caetano and the *Mutantes* had a brilliant new song, for many people they were using the enemy's instrument.

The massive disapproval was followed by a gesture of hundreds of young people turning their backs to the stage. To which the musicians responded turning their backs to the audience, in a rebellious reaction which must have been one of the biggest divorces between artists and audience in history. For a dogmatic crowd, fuelled by political dissatisfaction, the artists didn't represent them. Caetano Veloso then started a furious speech towards the young public, who according to him, were not there for art, but to police the artists. Indeed there were no conditions for experimentation or novelty. The following year Caetano and the *Mutantes* headed to London for years of political asylum.

Sometimes it's said that a piece is "ahead of its time". It occurs that the public is not prepared, either by lack of information, education or other cultural circumstances. In other cases, the piece may not be fully contextualized within the space or in the cultural sphere where it is shown, so it fails to communicate

with the public. Sometimes the information needed for the appreciation of a piece is too lengthy - one needs to follow texts, listen to extensive explanations in order to grasp the philosophical references and finally recognize the concept. The artistic experience, which artists are trying to deliver, becomes rather rationalized, instead of directly appealing to the emotions and the senses of the public. Cases like these have become quite common in the contemporary art system, obscuring the experience and exhausting audiences.

In fact there can be innumerable situations: the public feels lost, deceived, underestimated, and disengaged. Audiences search for information, squeezed in multitudes, standing or sitting for hours, waiting, or watching an act as if it were to be lauded. Audiences are exposed to unbearable scenes and yet most of people rarely dare to react. Repudiating or leaving a live performance, as one feels outraged, is a legitimate reaction. One can decide for him or herself what to do. Being underestimated by artists is rather upsetting. And bad artworks can be excruciating to attend.

Since there is no judge who will reinforce the value of those present, it's the public's responsibility to step away from passivity and reclaim awareness and association. Artist and audience should not see their relation as an opposite and rigid distinction, but rather realize that from that moment they meet, they are in the same boat.

Play as a Social Function

Though contemporary artworks can involve intellectual and historical elements - sometimes extremely overwhelming to the audience's cognition - there is an intuitive dimension, one that we look forward to, when experiencing art. This dimension which is ludic by nature, must not be underestimated when studying the encounter between the public and the artwork or performance. There is a sense of make believe, the fact that art triggers the imaginary. When the public arrives to see or to listen, they are prepared for invention, for artifices that only exist through art. From the moment the experience starts, we disconnect from ordinary reality and depart to a temporary new one: a played dimension.

Gert Storms, in *Handbook of Music Games*, points out three qualities of games that convey the core notion of playing: 1. Playing is taking a break from daily reality; 2. Playing is reacting out of total involvement in the situation; 3. Playing is thinking, feeling and acting at the same time.

“In our daily life we are rarely required to think, feel act simultaneously. It is precisely this co-ordination of intellectual, emotional and motory powers which typifies the game. We usually make a somewhat lop-sided demand on our thought processes in study and work situations; our action is often motory (lacking any appreciable intellectual or emotional involvement) and automatic during our numerous everyday functions like cycling, driving a car, cleaning etc. Feeling comes to the fore in a more or less one-sided manner in passive recreational activities such as watching television, listening to music, attending sports matches etc. Playing differs from all these kinds of activities in that a game demands total coordination of our functions: thinking, feeling and acting coincide. It is this aspect in particular that makes games so appealing.” [Storms, 1979]

In *Homo Ludens* Johan Huizinga affirms that playing is in the basis of any cultural manifestation. As we became civilized, we made up roles: we constructed games that help us communicate and solve issues; oscillating between the real and the played. Games lead us through history, defining important social and political events. In the courtroom, the judge wears the gown and a wig. All the participants in that courtroom ritual follow a script, and obey the judge's orders. The formalities of everyday life are brimming with made up rules, followed by anyone, almost without awareness.

Roles are also implicitly established in traditional art displays. The artist functions as an agent, a leader or a mediator. The audience usually takes the role of observer, participating only on designated occasions. By becoming part of an artwork we surpass our individual experience, calling attention to the social aspect of being in the audience. Art offers the conditions for that. Additionally a played situation can provide humour and lightness to situations otherwise heavy or too hard in real life.

Jeremy Deller's reenactment of a battle

On June 18th, 1984 a tragic conflict between policemen and miners took place in Yorkshire, England, during a workers strike. A day which was to be remembered as '*The Battle of the Orgreave*'. In 2001, after a careful research, artist Jeremy Deller proposed the people in the same town to re-enact that day, adding a few more actors as participants. Choosing the roles they wanted, former miners became policemen and former policemen became miners, for a day. The result was a day of exertion but also relief, documented in a film with the same title of the original event (available on the artist's website: jeremydeller.org)

“Finally, around teatime, the police won, as inevitably in 2001 as in 1984 - 4,000 to 5,000 unprepared miners had no chance against 4,000 to 8,000 trained and co-ordinated police assembled from constabularies all over Britain. When it was all over, everyone paraded back through the battlefield to the sound of a brass band, dads in uniform or 1980's denim played with their kids, 'miners' hugged 'police' and both sides joined the rest of us from Orgreave and London for a few pints of Stones down the local Treeton Miners' Welfare.”

-- Farquharson, Alex, 'Jeremy Deller', Frieze Magazine, september 2001
[http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/jeremy_deller.
Last access: 01/01/2014]

Through the Body

An artwork is comprised of many layers: form, content, cultural context, zeitgeist. It is these layers that communicate with the audience, who experiences them unfolding within their whole bodies. Some information is cognitively interpreted, depending on the intellectual and cultural characteristics of the receiver. There is also the domain of form, a phenomenological process, which approaches a subconscious level. The perception of rhythm, light, volume, weight, movement, and so on, generate meaning that is felt by the body and interpreted by the brain. Neuroscience has recently provided numerous insights about our brain's characteristics. It is impossible to discuss here all the physical and psychological phenomena which happen throughout our body, as each of us is unique and the literature is almost infinite.

Some people are aesthetically educated, others may not have had that chance. There are also synaesthetes, whose senses are triggered into making peculiar connections, associating music with colors, or words with taste, and so on and so forth. In any case all sensorial inputs are constantly affecting our bodies. How much and in what ways these stimuli affect us, depends upon the training, or maturing of *sensing*, a process which can particularly be developed by artistic experience.

Objectivity x Proximity

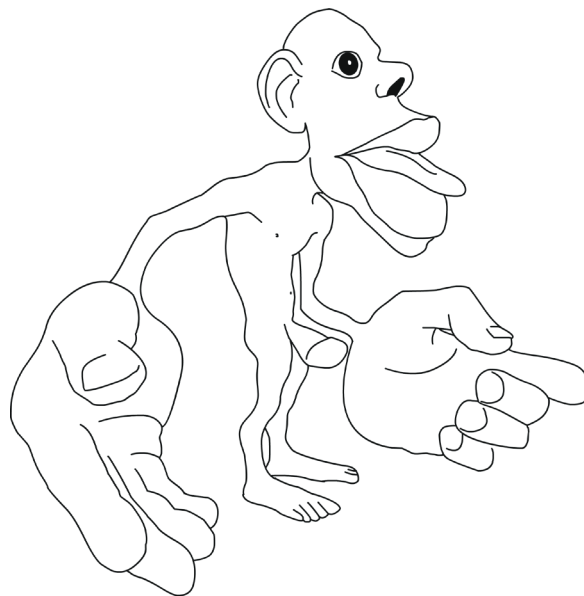
It is commonly said that we humans are equipped with five senses, each one acting within a distinct sphere. Traditionally in Western philosophy, sight and hearing were treated as *the higher senses*, the most noble of our perceptive apparatus. Evolutionarily they helped us to notice predators from safe distances. We can also *see* ourselves seeing, and therefore take distance, to reflect upon ourselves, having an objective point of view.

Contrarily, smell, taste and touch imply *proximity*. They were considered to be *the other senses*, the 'lower', or even 'primitive', closer to animal experience. This traditional view of the five senses has had support from Art History ever since. We are so conditioned as audio-visual beings, thanks to mass media, that we may forget that we are equipped with more sensors than the eyes and the ears only.

Architect Juhani Pallasmaa affirms that the culture of being visually oriented has resulted in a loss of plasticity and meaning to our existence. He advocates the *collaboration of the senses*, and so that tactile experience must be recovered in contemporary design - and overcome the dominant aesthetics of reflection and transparency, much diffused by construction techniques of today. (*The Eyes of the Skin*, 2005).

Recently, however, the *other senses* have gained more attention within collaborations between artists and scientists. Studies have recognized that the *other senses* carry information and therefore they can convey knowledge. However these *other senses* require new strategies. When explored in art, the proximal senses bring up new relations. If seeing and hearing define an objective relationship, with a clear distinction between artwork and public, the proximal senses may offer access to one's body, and consequently provide interaction, the artwork acting *inside* the receiver.

Still, public demonstrations of smelling, tasting and touching, can be taken as *embarrassing, threatening, or even inappropriate* for urban Western standards. As a result, to address the proximal senses is encouraging a new paradigm, it subverts the public code of conduct and challenges audiences to step beyond the comfort zone.



The widely known model of the sensory homunculus shows what a man's body would look like if each body part grew in proportion to the area of the cortex of the brain concerned with its sensory perception. Such proportions suggest a hyper-sensual figure hidden in our tactile structure, but they also reveal how much our skin informs us of the external world.

Smell and taste, particularly, must penetrate our bodies in order to act. Once perceived, we cannot get rid of them. Touching specially is ambivalent, it's mutual, one touches and is touched. Touching relates as well to taking possession of something or someone. The 'other senses' present a certain risk, hence they demand trust and intimacy.

Laura C. Marks, professor and curator of film and Media Art events, claims that a multisensory education, in which the proximal senses are *eminently teachable*:

Witness the cultivation of sense knowledge across cultures, as well as in the life of an individual learning archery, auto mechanics, Thai cooking, perfumery, or another multisensory skill. This educability of the sense extends to the level of neural plasticity. The educability of the proximal (indeed all) senses indicates that they can be means of communication, and thus of knowledge and aesthetics.

[Marks, Thinking Multisensory Culture]

In fact it seems narrow to adhere to only *five* and individual senses. Perhaps they are rather a simplification of our total perceptive potential. The deaf can feel air vibrations through their skin and bones. The sense of taste is intimately connected to smell and so on.

The Twenty Senses

A study by the MarcLab, at the University of Utah, proposed that we actually developed 20 primary senses throughout Evolution. In a lecture of 2009, Dr. Robert E. Marc demonstrated 21 senses found in living beings, and which of those were found in the vertebrates for example. Some of them, geoeception (the sense of space and balance), pressoeception (sense of pressure) and thermoception (the sense of temperature) are generally mingled in the sense of touch. Moreover, according to Marc, there are senses which humans do not experience, like photoception and chronoception, which are more developed in other species.

No matter how many senses we may be equipped with, our perception must be thought as an integrated system, a powerful knowledge that is *embodied*. The collaboration of vision with hearing, with touching, smelling and tasting is

actually constant and fluent. While one sees, *he touches with the eyes*. While eating, we feel the texture of food. While working with the hands, one smells the materials and/or chemical reactions.

A wider notion of perception in the vertebrates, proposed by Robert E. Marc (MarcLab, Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences, University of Utah, USA):

Vision - sight

Photoception - measures of the flow of solar time, the angle of the sun, binding life to the seasons

Chronoception - flow of daily time, “setting the body clock to the pulse of life”

Olfaction - tracking plumes of airy and watery smokes

Gustation - taste (measuring the quality of our prey)

Eroception - molecular identity of friends, mates and aliens, which also shapes our mood

Audition - hearing

Geoception - sense of balance (tracking the Earth’s core and keeping the head or dorsal fin erect)

Rheoception - the sense of flow by which aquatic beasts gauge water and swimming speed (feeling of “water shape”)

Electroception - sense of the electric aura in fish and amphibian

Tangiception - the tonic sense of fine touch, recognising materials

Pressoception - the transient sense of pressure (having the right grip to hold on without crushing)

Vibroception - captures Earth and sky tremors

Whisking - captures the shape of the underworld (tunnels and burrows) providing a map for the limbs to traverse

Nociception - pain

Thermoception - measurement of the heat flow (without touch)

Proprioception - sense of self in the environment, measuring motion

Infravision - heat-sight (in cold blooded, snakes mostly)

Baroception - senses atmospheric pressure (as birds calibrate their altitudes)

Magnoception - sensing the magnetic North (in many mobile birds)

As per MarcLab’s study, 11 senses are shared by all organisms. Humans have 12 senses. While 3 senses (Infravision, Baroception, Magnetoception) are unique to a few classes of animals.

Source: <http://prometheus.med.utah.edu/~marclab/gallery2.html>

Frans Evers, spoke on the “the unity of the senses” in *Synaesthetics in Art*, Bachelard on the “polyphony of the senses” in *The Poetics of Reverie* and Pallasmaa on the “multisensory experience” (*The Eyes of the Skin*).

According to science today *we're wired to learn*, embedded of this capacity that extends throughout our entire body. After learning a certain skill, the hands and feet seem to know exactly what to do, without any deliberation, as if they had their own will. Our knowledge seems limitless, for under certain conditions, our body can learn any new skills.

Collective Bodies

The ability to understand and to share the feelings of another being is proven to be more than a human value. Scientific research has shown that we emulate each other's feelings thanks to a mirroring system in the brain. Mirror neurones recreate an external sensation inside oneself. When seeing somebody yawning or laughing, we tend to reproduce the same gestures. When witnessing an accident or observing somebody's pain, often we touch our correspondent body parts. After watching a dance piece, one experiences swaying, as if he or she had just learned the choreography. How many of us have played imaginary instruments, tapping on a table or in the air, simulating the musician's hands? Scientists affirm that we are constantly reflecting each others facial expressions. What are the consequences of empathy within our organism is still a question to be investigated.

Analogously, artists can *feel* the public. During a performance they are aware of the audience's gaze, position and talking. Artists expect and react to their presence, as a feedback system. The presence of the public provides material to the artist's work. When John Cage composed *4'33* in 1952, he was exploring that tension built by the presence of the public. It was about silence, and its relations, which was then enhanced by the small sounds of ordinary gestures and glitches of a full audience at the opera house. And yet nothing was played. He expressed the virtual energy of hundreds of people together in the brink of a concert; making them become aware of each other, listening to otherwise irrelevant sounds.

Neuroscience has shown that our brains are able to adapt, to make new connections which allow us to learn a new skill, recover a lost one, or learn a movement, through neuroplasticity. Throughout the past decades we have seen artists engaging with scientific research, for Science has broadened so dramatically our understanding over biological and chemical processes occurring not only within our bodies, but also in the Universe. Indeed the limits of our sensitive abilities are still unknown. By exploring our empathic abilities, it seems we could open novel possibilities of communication.



“I argue that proximal sense experience may be a vehicle of knowledge, beauty and even ethics.

Operating as a membrane between the sensible and the thinkable, the proximal senses have an affective dimension that permits an immanent epistemology.”

- Laura C. Marks

In public space, many aspects of our social coexistence are latent. Even if unaware, we are together. We carry the intrinsic element of empathy. Sharing most of moments throughout life is in the basis of our nature. Rituals, drills, education, and nowadays, the urban conglomerates, mark our collective living. And in many instances we operate as groups, clusters, and crowds.

The collective quality of sharing such situations might be undervalued by artists and also by the audience themselves. However that collective quality is something quite known for certain classes of professions, such as musicians and athletes. They make eye contact and deliberately address the public. That sort of communication can work like an elixir which draws the crowd to love and support the performer. The audience's participation during a football match is known to be contagious, it boosts the energy of the players and provoke great commotions. The crowd behaves as a whole.

Some of these collective experiences have been reportedly felt as physically and emotionally rewarding. When unison really occurs, we feel taken out of our individual state. In *Keeping Together in Time*, William H. McNeill introduces the notion of *muscular bonding* - rhythmic muscular movements. He explains how his experience with the drills in the US army in the mid 1940's turned into a trance like practice at his young serving years. While synchronizing steps, voice and breath with the others, he experienced a feeling of *group consciousness*. The author also noticed that social cohesion was enhanced after the apparently *pointless* practice of marching, and that increased fellowship, providing advantages in actual battles.

McNeill advocated more attention should be paid by psychologists and physicians in studying this phenomenon. Experiences such as dancing, practicing sports and marching, in his view, create the *muscular bonding*, which has been present in our Evolution, during incantations, hard labour, and festivities. Today, rituals and folk dances are fading. Totalitarian regimes and religious conflicts have traumatized societies worldwide, often causing a feeling of resistance to the idea of collectivity. Private life gains focus through social media, while public life loses meaning.

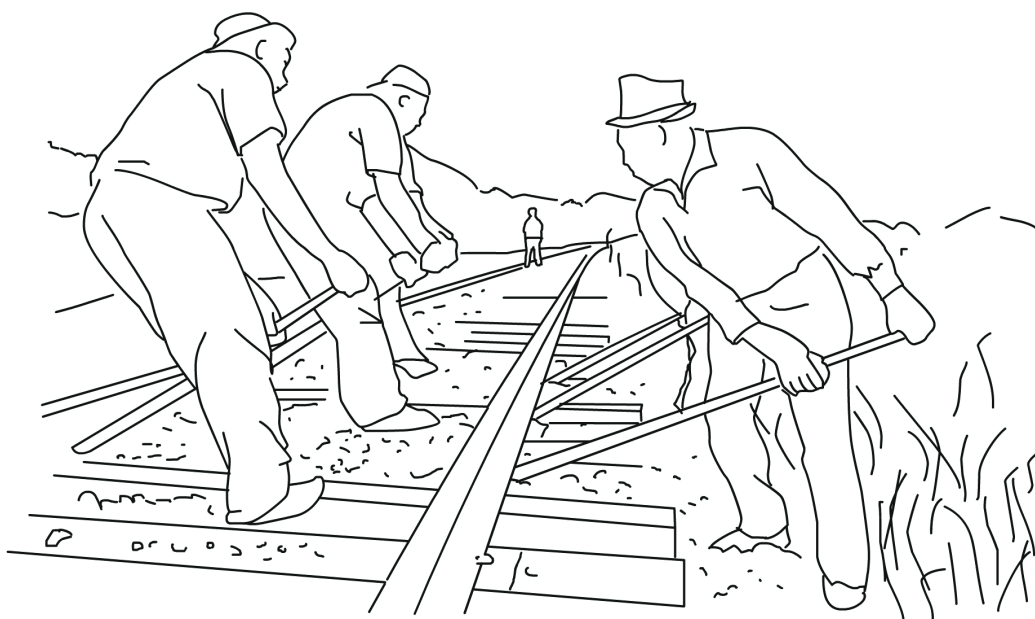
How to recover a sense of cooperation? According to Juhani Pallasmaa, the weakening of the experience of time in today's society has *devastating mental effects*, because *nothing gives man fuller satisfaction than participating in processes that supersede the span of individual life*. In my opinion, Art

sensitizes, it triggers situations for unusual experience, including the sense of collectiveness. Artistic experience can connect the members of an audience without suppressing their individuality. Perception is augmented and enhanced throughout the mob, by engaging in these collective activities.

We know that music has the property of changing our mood, influencing our attitude and provoking certain behaviors. Music is utterly so powerful that history is brimming with examples of working men at railroads (the *gandy dancers*), farms (the *field hollers*), fishing (*sea shanties*) and so on. Those men found way to propel massive loads, applying their force together through the use of chanting. During the hard work, group dynamics are needed in order to procure precise movements in series. Voice commands generate cadence which evolve into chants, providing the necessary coordination of actions in time.

Work songs are found in many cultures in every continent. When one listens to this kind of music today, as an outsider, he has little idea of the circumstances in which those songs were composed. The music was developed along years, moving thousands of limbs, coordinated to lift or push monumental loads.

Can we imagine the Egyptian pyramids being built without musical assistance?



Contemporary Practices

The following section features a number of artists and works that were selected for their particular approach towards the presence of the audience. All of them deliberately create a context for physical interaction, engaging the public in a process that involves their whole bodies. All of these artworks escape the conventional displays and norms that are usually seen in art spaces or concert halls. In other words they transform the context where they happen in an open, shared experience for those who are present.

In some cases the author participates and somehow coordinates the performance, for instance in Dan Deacon's concerts. In other cases, such as with William Forsythe's and Lawrence Malstaf's pieces, the artist provides a setting in which people will interact with. There could also be trained agents conducting a specific situation - such as in Tino Sehgal's *Constructed Situations* and Cocky Eek's inflatables - where the borders between artwork and audience are blurred.

Almost all works herewith mentioned I have experienced myself, during my years in The Netherlands, where I came to discover a new path for my own work. In one way or another these works have shaken the notion of artistic experience that I was familiar with, at the time I witnessed them. These works expand relations between art and audience. They are open to exchange with the public sphere. There are no passive individuals where these pieces are executed, we are all responsive and aware.

Tino Sehgal: *Constructed Situations*

Born in London (1976), raised in Dusseldorf, Tino Sehgal first studied Political Economy and later Dance. He then collaborated with experimental dance companies in France and Belgium. His works are hard to discuss without experiencing them, for the immateriality of his work, using only the presence of the public and some performers. Finding reliable sources about Sehgal's pieces can be equally difficult; as he forbids any sort of documentation in order to preserve the notion of 'the liveness of the live', and allowing little exposure to the press media. Instead he prefers to give talks and workshops (to which I attended during Sonic Acts Festival, Amsterdam, 2012).

His pieces can be seen as hybrids of choreography, live sculpture and studied conversations with the audience. Exhibited in big museums throughout the world, he makes sure to strip the rooms of every canon and unnecessary information. Even the titles are avoided. Sehgal shows nothing, but the public itself.

The vast, empty hallways of museums and galleries are the stage for what he calls 'constructed situations'. Trained people act in the space during a certain time frame. Often, the use of language (one or a few lines from a conversation proposed by the artist) is what triggers the interaction between his 'interpreters' and the audience. Usually his interpreters are not distinguishable from the public; they wear ordinary clothes or a uniform (provided by the local institution) and they walk through the crowd. One can't tell who is who. The work takes place unexpectedly. Sehgal aims at raising reflection within the audience's minds, while they are dazed by the shift of conventions in the exhibition space. What is registered rests only but in the memory of those who participated.

A report about Sehgal's piece in Documenta XIII, '*This Variation*' (2012), written by art historian Andrea Kirsh wrote for *The Art Blog*, states the following:

“I entered the Grand City Hotel Hessenland, a dilapidated, early nineteenth-century building, where the map indicated work by Theaster Gates and Tino Seghal. The Gates installation was easy to find, occupying much of the building’s interior, but I could see no trace of Seghal’s, not even a label (in an exhibition with copious text on display). The artist has always been unwilling to talk about his work, and surely enough, the documenta XIII guide book’s index lists page 438 for Seghal, but the book itself skips from page 437 to page 440. No help there. I was sitting in the building’s courtyard, thinking about what to do next, when I spied an unmarked, but conspicuously new door across the way.

Like Alice, I was lead by curiosity to open it, and found myself in a short corridor which lead to an entirely dark room. A relief from long wall labels, and from the sun on a hot day. It was quiet, so I stood next to a wall, waiting for my eyes adapt to dark. Once they had, I could make out others standing in the room, but not well enough to see what they were doing. A woman started to speak about something in her past, as if talking to the group, but broke off so quickly that her words made no sense. Then it started: the humming and chanting: words, clicks and various vocalizations. It became a call and response among what I now could make out as more than a dozen people. Then the movements: sudden and awkward, by participants who had positioned themselves close to the visitors, sometimes in uncomfortable proximity. They jerked and writhed in place — then began to walk — or dance in what was clearly a highly-coordinated flow of bodies, weaving among the spectators, if one can use that term for visitors who could hardly see.

By this point the performers were singing in unison, with the occasional call of the leader, but chanting in a repetitive tone that recalled Philip Glass, and circling the room, making spasmic movements that might have been choreographed by Catherine Sullivan. Viewers entered at random times, and groups of students usually broke into squeals in response to the moving bodies in the dark; they were so disruptive that once the performers stopped abruptly. The strangest moment was when the lights went on and the 15-20 performers (who themselves looked like students) began singing the Beach Boys’ *Good Vibrations* as they exited slowly by a side door.

I had a sense of being present at an unfamiliar ritual performed by an ecstatic sect. I found it transfixing. The proximity of the performers was intimate, yet the dark kept it impersonal and eliminated the awkwardness of one-to-one interactions with strangers, which occurred with Seghal’s Guggenheim Museum piece, *This is Progress* (2010).

I stayed quite a while, partially out of the rare pleasure of experiencing performance in the dark, which required listening, imagination, and a sort of bodily empathy rather than vision, which normally dominates our other senses. But I also stayed to try to understand the structure. What triggered the speaker to start and stop, the dancing and chanting to begin? Was it improvised or scripted; who lead the group, and how did the others follow in the dark? I could not figure it out. After leaving I found one of the performers in the courtyard and spoke with her briefly, but all that I learned was that *This Variation* is not entirely scripted, and the performers work in two-hour shifts.

I left with a head full of sounds and thoughts and some surprise at *This Variation* and my response to it. Sehgal's art has two audiences: the performers themselves, and the more conventional audience of observers. And they clearly have entirely different experiences, yet the sense of having participated in the work, rather than remaining outside it, clearly extends to us as well. I loved it! And I'm still thinking about why."

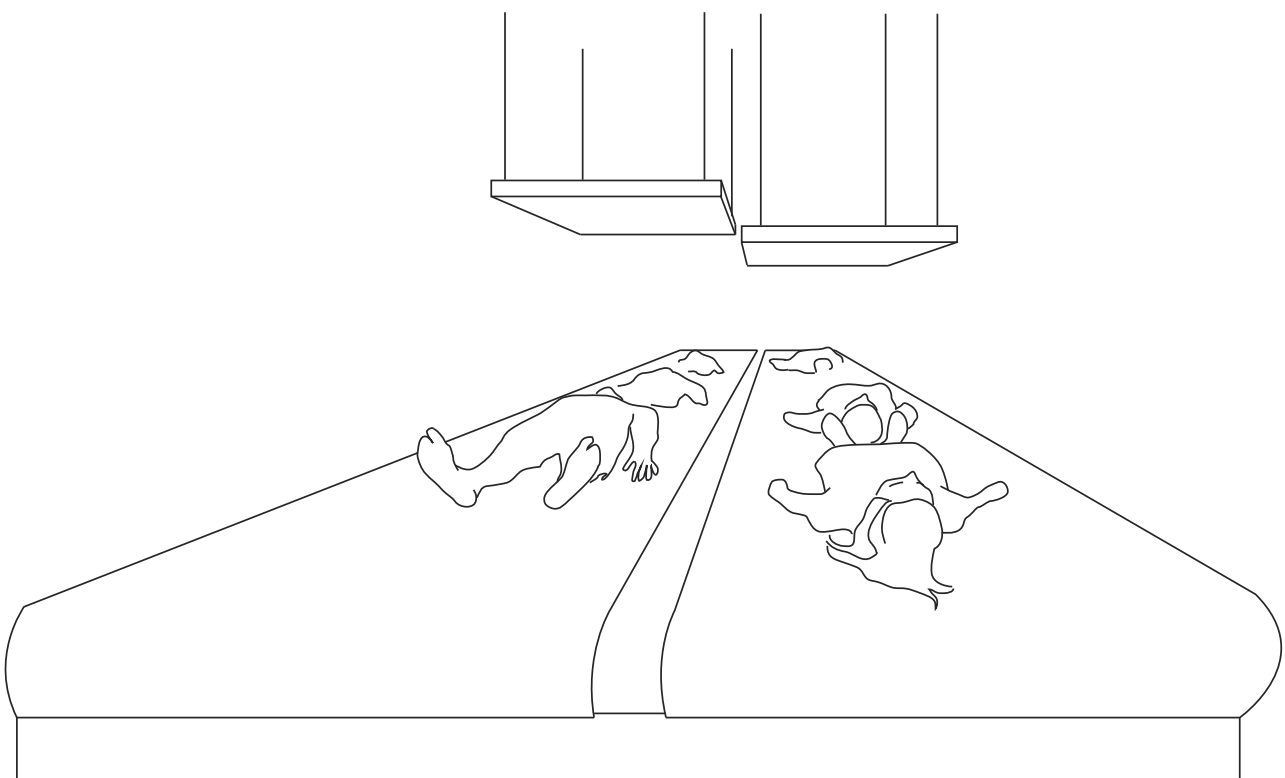
Andrea Kirsh, *Art in the Dark*, Part 1, Tino Sehgal's *This Variation*, at Documenta XIII, August 5th, 2012.

[<http://www.theartblog.org/2012/08/art-in-the-dark-part-1-tino-sehgals-this-variation-at-documenta-xiii>; Last access: 29/12/2013]

Lawrence Malstaf: *Metabolic Spaces*

Belgian artist Lawrence Malstaf (1972) creates objects and spaces for physical explorations. Moving architectures through which the visitor is involved in a certain theatricality. He deals with kinetic and tactile qualities, sometimes using technology with a dose of humour. Initially trained in Industrial Design, Malstaf started his career making theatre sets. Soon he developed his own installations which invite individuals to experience wind, heat, lack of orientation or of air. His performance *Shrink* is one of the most known; during which the performer is suspended in a huge plastic bag while the air inside is sucked by a vacuum system.

In *Transporter* (installation first shown in 2008), two conveyor belts of more than 10 meters in length are set up beside each other and run in opposite directions. People can lay down on them to be transported very slowly to the other side. Hidden under the surface of the belts, an invisible mechanism produces a subtle yet intense tactile experience for the spine. Halfway through the trajectory, the visitors are confronted with two horizontal mirrors moving up and down above them. While being lifted and massaged at the same time, people are confronted with the image of themselves, laying as if incapable of moving, delighted, as seen through the mirrors that slowly approaches the belt. *Transporter* offers a journey through one's own interior.



“Malstaf installations deceive the eye. The visitor is always part of the picture. The machine requires a direction of view. In front, underneath or right in the middle. Malstaf turns the visitor into the object, the submissive part. The machine forces you to take position and then undermines your contemplation. Your mirror image is shattered into a thousand pieces (“Mirror”, 2002). A renaissance portrait of a woman is sucked away by a vacuum pump, turning the mouth into an outlet pipe of a bath (Whirlpool, 1999). Everything around you starts to twirl like you are in the eye of the storm (Nemo Observatorium, 2000). Walls start to move and the room becomes a labyrinth (Nevel, 2003). All these tragic machines have their moment of rage, a kind of blindness that reflects the flaws in your own view. This is how they invite you to look inside.”

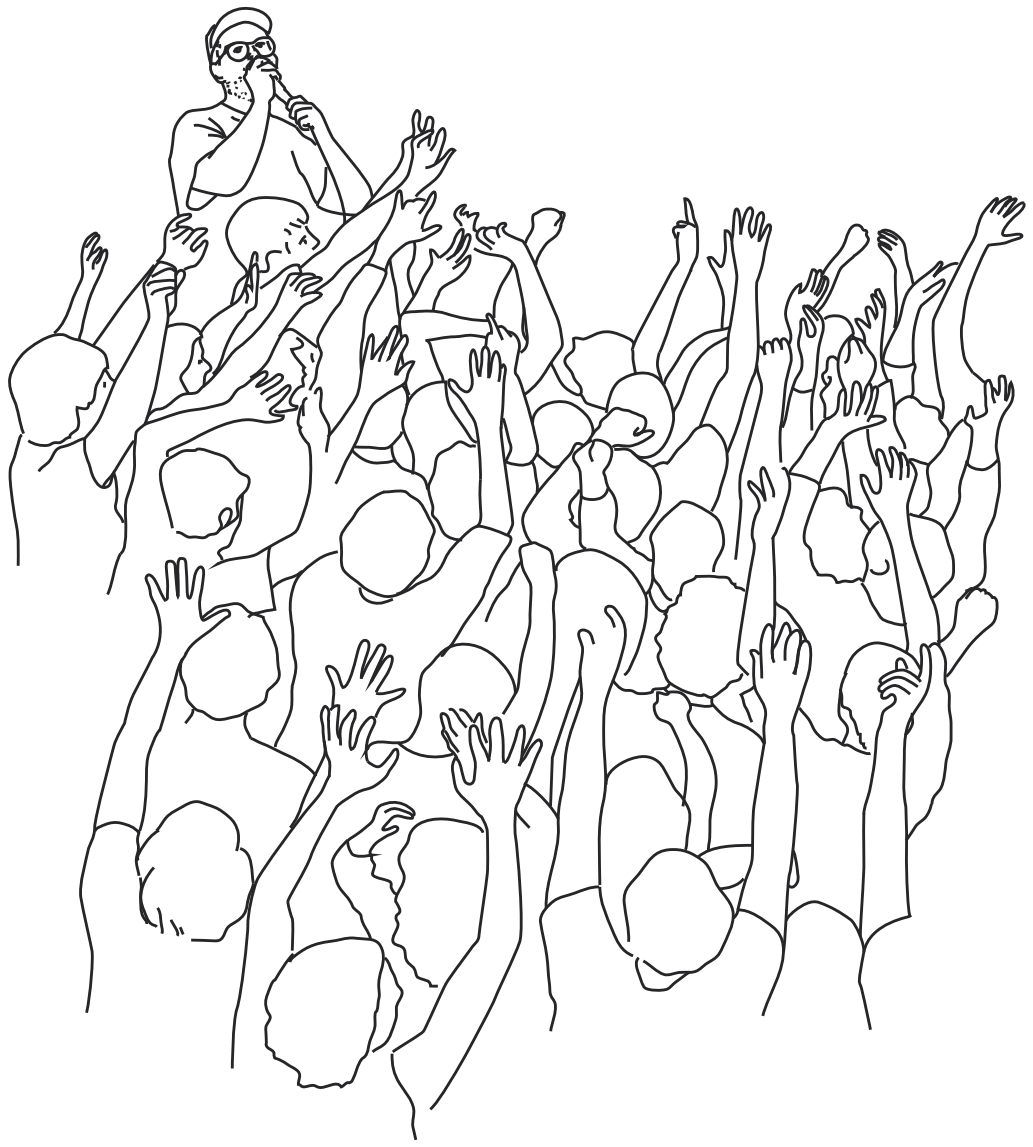
-- Luk van den Dries

Dan Deacon: *Crowd Games*

Dan Deacon (Baltimore, USA) is a pop music producer but in his events he works rather as a Master of Ceremony, congregating large numbers of people. Those who attend a Dan Deacon concert know that there will be interaction, games and dance contests. But any tension or embarrassment is eliminated very soon, for the artist introduces the evening with a cartoonish warm up. In his style, he never *tells* the audience what to do, instead he proposes situations which everybody, including himself, can perform *together*. By constantly addressing the public, Deacon conducts an unpretentious playfulness throughout the whole evening. I was fortunate to be at two of his performances, in which as usual he stepped off the stage and engaged the public in a series of actions.

All the games proposed must involve the whole crowd. For instance in the middle of the audience a circle is open. He asks the working lights to be switched on. The public is already more aware. A dance contest might be proposed, or the *human spiral* (one person starts running in circles, as fast as he/she can, pulling one new person with him/her each turn. The next person will add another one and so on, until the entire audience is whirling, holding hands, in one single spiral). As the level of excitement achieved by these actions is high, it might take a while before he finishes his talks, but the crowd is already at ease, integrated.

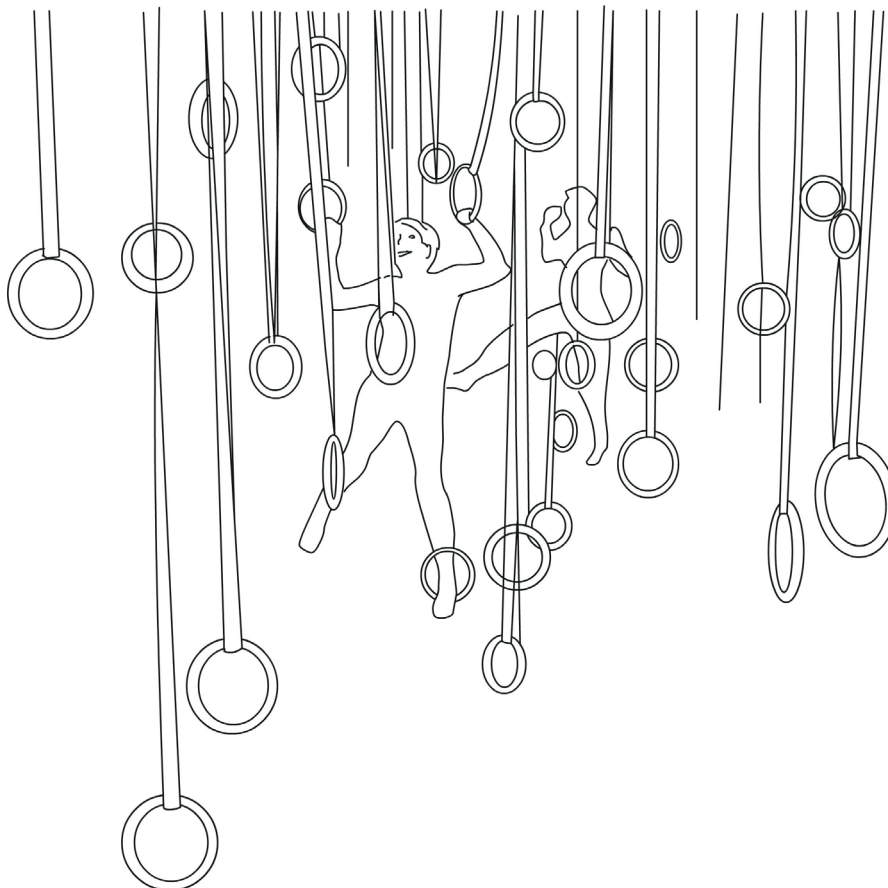
The second time I attended one of his concerts was in February 2013, at the Ekko Club, Utrecht. As usual the whole club was occupied by crowd games. This time we also performed a human tunnel which led outside the hall, crossed the café and ended back close to the stage, while people moved through. It was a choreography which reminded me of Brazilian folk dances. At the end of the show he was available to talk with everyone. I approached him to tell about my research and asked what it meant to him, to always gather the crowd. Deacon replied in a few words: *'The audience is the show.'*



William Forsythe: *The Fact of Matter*

At previously mentioned on the exhibition *Move: Choreographing You* (London, 2010), American choreographer William Forsythe presented an environment made of hanging strips with rings; a mix of jungle with gymnastic apparatuses to be *crossed through the air*. The characteristics of a playground and that of a physical struggle were presented at the same time. In Forsythe's words, "that installation was something which you can test your assumptions about your own body, about your strength and coordination." Indeed, only *seeing* the structure wouldn't provide all the challenge it actually represents. The effort of going through the hanging rings causes a deeper transformation.

Forsythe has long experimented outside the stage context, collaborating with other disciplines, addressing the aesthetics and the practice of dance. His studies on movement have been materialized in several works - installations, video, data visualization etc - that engage the public into a new understanding of their bodies. This is a remarkable approach - coming from a choreographer - because it provides experiences that are usually restricted to professional performers - thus contributing to a broader understanding of dance. He coined the terms *choreographic objects* for such installations in which the audience complements the piece, often improvising, in an open structure.



Dear sir/madam,

Please kindly consider my latest bachelor diploma as a proof of English proficiency. At the Artscience Interfaculty (in The Hague, Netherlands) all the courses were officially taught in English (total 271 ECTS). Moreover I studied English from early childhood and completed my studies in 1996. I have also studied French, Spanish and Dutch.

I have lived for almost eight years in the Netherlands. Today I frequently teach and write articles in English. I attach here as well my bachelor thesis, *The Body of Audience*, from 2013, graded as 8.0, and published by Lambert Academic Publishing, Germany, in 2015 (ISBN-10: 365978737X).

Your attention is much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Ludmila Souza Rodrigues
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Cocky Eek: Essays on Lightness

Cocky Eek is a Dutch artist based in Amsterdam, teaching at the Artscience Interfaculty, in The Hague, with whom I have studied and sometimes collaborated between 2009 and 2013. Cocky, after graduating in fashion design, began to research on light-weight materials that could be used for floating, to lift one's body in the air, shapes that gained life and movement through air.

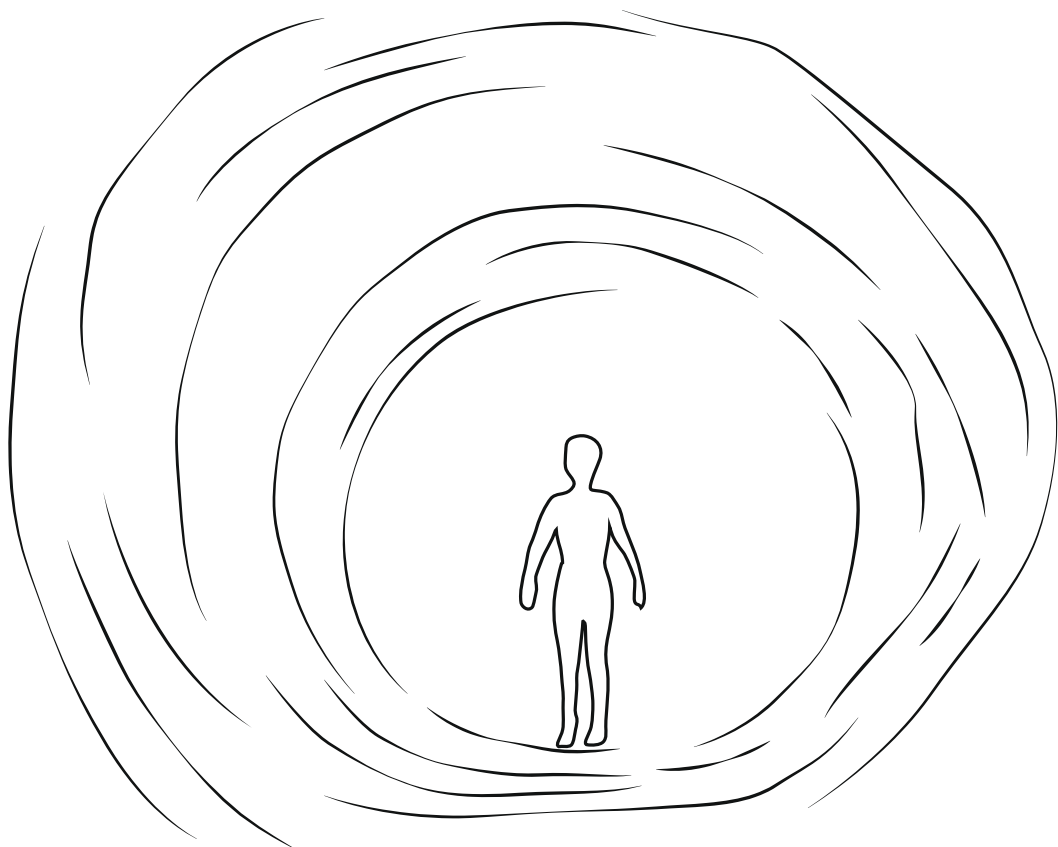
Throughout her career Cocky developed a body of work exploring inflatable architectures, that are often placed in public spaces, and more recently as well on stage. Inflatable, abstract forms that become a container for social experiences. In her many immersive domes and 'blobs', such as *Sphærae* (2013), a pavilion shown in Today's Art (2013), Ars Electronica (2013), in AxS (USA, 2014) and so on, Cocky welcomed other artists to perform, as well inviting the audience to enter and be comfortable inside. Since its first exhibition, *Sphærae* became a microcosmos for various experiments with lights, sounds, smells and movement, a white canvas, in three dimensions.

With *Blaas* (2013), and more recently *Curve* (2015), both works in collaboration with choreographer Boukje Schweigman, Cocky began a new approach in her installations, in which the audience must step in and explore, inhabit the work. In *Blaas*, staged as a dance piece, as theatre set, there is this undefined white form, gradually growing, inflating, gaining life before the audience.

One sees no performers, such is the skill which three dancers control the 'blob' from behind. It starts to wave and to move, growing towards the public, as a creature ready to devour them. There is a moment that it touches the audience, in a gentle approach, carefully occupying their entire field of vision. As it moves to and fro, finally someone from the audience gets swollen by the 'abstract beast' that moves in unpredictable manner. The 'blob' goes further, 'eating' one by one in the audience, until they will all find themselves inside its stomach. The performance transcends the theatrical experience, challenging one to go through a strange environment. From inside the 'blob', one must find his way out, ending up outside of the theatre.

In *Curve* (2015), as a sequel of the previous work, the experience took a radical direction, by providing only the space - where the public is compelled

to penetrate, one person at a time - an endless, spiralled tunnel. The solitary experience, starting from an absolute white walkway to a pitch black route, sometimes guided by delicate hands of invisible performers, becomes a heroic passage between light and darkness. While going through *Curve*, one learns to navigate via the tactile information under the feet, by the environmental sounds and smells, engaging all the senses to accomplish the journey.



The Function of Art

“Art is the most complex, vitalizing, and civilizing of human actions. Thus it is of biological necessity. Art sensitizes man to the best that is immanent in him through an intensified expression involving many layers of experience. Out of them art forms a unified manifestation, like dreams which are composed of the most diverse source material subconsciously crystallized. It tries to produce a balance of the social, intellectual and emotional existence; a synthesis of attitudes and opinions, fears and hopes.

Art has two faces, the biological and the social, the one toward the individual and the other toward the group. By expressing fundamental validities and common problems, art can produce a feeling of coherence. This is its social function which leads to a cultural synthesis as well as to a continuation of human civilization.”

-- Moholy-Nagy. *Vision in Motion*. Paul Theobald, Chicago, 1947

Conciliation through Mutual Reliance

We have gone inside the audience's body and speculated on the pleasures, struggles, expectations and effects of the artistic experience. We reviewed the historical model of senses hierarchy established mostly by Western culture, which diminishes the proximal senses, limiting our potential of experience to the surface of things. The predominant field of the visual arts is subjected to an intellectualised rhetoric that mystifies the artwork, and often repels a large parcel of the public from the possibility of directly enjoying a piece. Many people then become skeptical and regard contemporary Art as a system in itself, to be decoded only by specialists, evading an open discussion.

This thesis is in favour of the activation of the audience. The classic mode of the *seeing-sometimes-hearing-not-touching* relationship established by traditional exhibitions can and must be subverted. There is always an exchange - a cooperation of the public and the artwork. The engagement of the audience enables more awareness, responsibility and playfulness. In order to generate the artistic experience, one should take into account all aspects of the medium and provide conditions for a dynamic, intuitive relation with the public.

Art addresses embodied knowledge - free from cognitive and historical discourse - and still triggers ideas and concepts through the experience. By stimulating sensations and actions, artists create a complex encounter. My argument is that artists have the ability and responsibility of creating contexts for raising awareness and educating the senses through meaningful experiences. By stepping out of the so called comfort zone, the audience will be fully present, where a fresher and direct experience may take place.

I believe everything is multi-sensory. The experiential and the physical are inseparable; we cannot understand artistic experience as anything other than an aesthetic-physical or psychophysical phenomenon. In this sense, I emphasise an underlying interaction, the non-verbal dialogue established with the public, as a key factor for an artwork to communicate. Let the public be engulfed and become part of the piece.

Artists do not work and perform for themselves, instead they work with the public. They create something and they want to share it with the world. That is to say it is an act of giving, using a special language, an art form, to deliver a message. Artists are also vulnerable. In the encounter with the public, the experience oscillates between the individual and the collective. It is the presence of the audience which releases the process: they provide the necessary focus and imagination, so the artwork can happen inside of them. The audience is powerful, and sometimes it can become a disruptive crowd.

A deal between artist and audience is inescapable. The two parties establishing a pact of reliance. The artist, in his or her competence, has the social function of demonstrating a generous attitude, never underestimating the others, also not acting cynical. And the audience, offering its attention and imagination, is actively joining the process and being transformed.

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Revised in 2015.

Read more on: www.thebodyoftheaudience.com

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All illustrations produced by Ludmila Rodrigues.