

Hello welcome

Before I will tell you about my work current research, I would like to ask you to perform a task for me. The outcome of this task I will use to develop my work and I will be part of the research outcome, this will get clear a bit later.

On your seat there is a piece of paper and a pen. Everybody has this?

I would like you to look at these objects on the table

I made some close ups so you can also see them from different sides

The title of the work is called EYE-BALLS

Now please - as an art professional you are (artist, philosopher, art critic etc.)-

shortly write down anything that comes to mind on the piece of paper I gave you.

If you have finished just fold it together in any way you like and sit on it.

To start I would like to introduce myself – my name,

Slide: name

Background in theatre/scenography. After so many years got frustrated about the fact that how we started to use technology for communication –early 2006 -, the participation of the audience and the impact of technology not reflected in the work that was made. Went to Dasarts.

During the last ten years (2006-2016), I created interactive, performative installations positioning themselves on the cross roads of scenography, visual arts and performance/theatre. These works mainly explored what it means to live in a technology driven, networked world and its impact on the body. They all started from my personal fascination with technological mediated communication and the works invited an audience to experience and ‘dissect’ their own interaction with technology.

Slide: book

I used technology to communicate via avatars, traveling through space and time

Slide: Aki Anne

to oscillate between the inside and outside of my body, making ‘the invisible visible’, giving digital shape to memories

Slide: Series Patchmaker

To expand the participants’ sensorial capacities,

Slide: PPI’s

And physical capacities

Duplicating their bodies with digital versions, traveling through time and space.

Slide: Duetten

On-the-way I experienced the consequences of these mediated forms of communication; the impact on my feeling of 'wholeness', the interference with my personal life as a result of concealed power relations executed by tech companies and political structures, the accompanying privacy issues etcetera. As a response to these feelings of confusion and disconnectedness, the works I created re-directed the focus towards the body

Slide: Cylinder_RollingStairs_

and emphasized the importance of human-centered staging and creation strategies.

Slide: Chair Jump Chute

As I look back, it's interesting to see how times have changed. It seems we got used to our fluid, fragmented bodies that seamlessly incorporate analogue and digital communication possibilities, interacting with mobile devices, game consoles, keyboards, touch screens throughout the days. I realized that touching these devices with the complete digital worlds they had to offer was no longer magical but just mundane. How we touch these devices is just functional, straightforward. We seem to accept that the unique reciprocal nature of touching is increasingly becoming instrumental, its meaning highly influenced by our repeated interactions with haptic technologies (like the mobile phone), that are constraining and disciplining our bodies based on commercial protocols. This one directional approach is even more apparent in remote touching; as we can now touch other places and beings over the Internet, our touch is returned to us as (visual) data. Socially, we just seem to be puzzled about the reciprocal nature of touch(ing) while cultural and political norms for touch(ing) each other are varying and create a lot of uncertainty (#MeToo). As a result we touch less and by limiting ourselves to eyes and ears belittle our complex perceptive faculties.

Looking at my works, I realised that Although the touch(ing) of (living and nonliving) bodies and spaces, mostly via sensors, has been quite prominent in many of these works, I had not been critical in how I invited the audience to use their agency in the interaction, to explore their sensation of the encounter. My former installations had strong visual and auditory components, overshadowing the tactile properties with its experiential 'meaning'. Moreover the visitor/participant was not invited to explore the reciprocal nature of touching. She just had to apprehend how to 'touch' the sensors in the 'right' manner in order for the communication with the 'other' to develop. As a result the visitor/participant was able to compose an audiovisual narrative, a musical score or movement composition. Though the making of these works and the reaction of the audience I understood the potential of tactile interaction

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in how I invited the audience to use their agency in the interaction, expanding instead of directing their tactile experience and I have not researched the affective, relational and material potential of touching itself for creating a sensorial, poetic and imaginative experience.

This realisation led to a radicalization of my work, and to the following artistic research proposal.

My artistic research inquires into artistic strategies that activate touch(ing) as prominent component within the aesthetic process that locates itself on the crossroad of performance, scenography and visual arts.

Through my artistic practice I explore how the sensation of touch can be enabled and critically explored within the production and reception of artworks.

The project aims to assemble a contemporary vocabulary and expanded aesthetics of tactile processes that occur within the arts. The collection will be translated into the foundation of a living (an)archive¹, consisting of a series of tactile relational artworks, accompanied with textual instructions and / or performative interventions, that enables an audience (art professionals and students) to explore and experience what roles and places tactility could occupy within contemporary aesthetic processes.

To sketch the field I am operating in and from – hoping to expand it later on.

Within the tradition of modern arts², the sense of touch is only modestly addressed. It's the visual sense that is given priority, pushing the other senses to the periphery.

This has a long history as the general, optical museum clearly shows; objects are neatly put behind glass or the audience is asked to keep at safe distance from the objects on display³.

Its interesting to know that in the late 17th and 18th centuries it was normal to touch the objects in museums. This was seen as acts of manual investigation and was taken as impolite if you not touched them. Nowadays in museums it is taken for granted that collections are not for touching. It goes a bit to far to really go deeper into how did this shift came about but in short in the beginning of 19th century the museums went from private to public and the main general idea became that the uncultured masses needed to be controlled in order for them to be educated.

Also the attitude changed towards the museum contents: the master pieces and treasures of museums needed to become inviolable, artefacts were symbolically positioned outside of time and space and thus removed from ordinary human interaction.

¹ An 'anarchive' is not a static collection of artefacts and information but needs to be revived based on triggers at the moment information is retrieved. The triggers are reactivatable, and their reactivation helps trigger a new event which continues the creative process from which they came, but in a new iteration.

<http://sensemab.ca/wp2/adventure-capital-doas-anarchiving/>

² Esp. influenced by Formalism that preferred the functionality of machines, only sight was appropriate within aesthetic processes as it had the most 'distance' from the body (according to the influential art critic Greenberg in: Sensorium, C.A. Jones, MIT Press, 2006)

³ Museums with multi-sensory exhibitions and tours for blind, partially-sighted or deaf visitors:

People were learnt three lessons in order for the taboo on touching in the museum to be effective and accepted.

1. they were less important than the exhibitions on display
2. to touch pieces was disrespectful, dirty and damaging
3. touch had no cognitive or aesthetic use and thus had no value in museums

The museum went from an intimate grand home to an untouchable state institution. In many ways, the museum as we know it today is a product of the sensory and social ideals of the 19th century, for this century was the heyday of museum building around the world. Today a lot has changed however untouchability is still the norm.

Moreover museums are more visually orientated than ever, seeing the enormous amount of photos that are taken – exhibits made to be instagrammed.

Then looking at the written discourse on art on tactile interaction. This written discourse either omits the description of tactile interaction or presents the recent cultural history of touch in association with irrationality and primitivism.

Although many artists are making interactive works now, it still seems like touch is not considered to be as influential as the other senses concerning the aesthetic process, and the impact of touch(ing) on our affective perception and emotions or its possibilities for (more inclusive) communication is seldom critically addressed or explored.

There is little theory that describes touch in relation to art, referring to the experience as well as to the objects and looking into the connections between artists, (the making of) art and beholders⁴. This absence of discourse and the still dominant code of art spaces ‘not to touch’ the art⁵ seems to withhold both maker and visitor to regard touching itself as potentially poetic, imaginative and meaningful within an aesthetic experience.

I feel touch(ing) needs to get attention while the revaluation of tactile interaction with the world around could lead us to ‘other ways of understanding’ while it lets us explore the relationship with oneself, with other (human and non-human) bodies, and with the environment. The artistic arenas (museums, theaters, cultural spaces) could be *the* locations to experiment with this sense and become explorative spaces, not aimed at resolution but at intuitive engagement, from sites of authority to sites of mutuality⁶.

HERE AND NOW

To explore and clarify what is at stake I looked at the biennale here in Venice. The biennale is clearly displaying a touch taboo– there are many ‘don’t touch’ signs everywhere.

I did some research exploring what is written about the artworks on the Venice Biennale, googling for tactile, tactility, touch, haptic, interactive works etc. There was just one that appears – although of course I haven’t seen the whole

⁴ Relational Sense: Towards A haptic Aesthetics, Jennifer Fisher, *PARACHUTE*, 1997

⁵ Touching art was the norm back in the day. The tactile experience of art was considered necessary to fully grasp the beauty of a piece. As Gottfried Herder, German philosopher, argued: “the only real way to appreciate a sculpture is by holding it, in order to feel the artist’s craftsmanship. Everything that has form is only known through the sense of touch, as sight reveals only visible surfaces.”
From: <https://narratively.com/please-touch-the-art/>

⁶ Editorial, Towards a museum of mutuality. *Stedelijke Studies*#8

exhibition so hopefully more will appear. The work of Saudi artist Zahrah Al Ghamdi made a work that the audience may touch.

Al Ghamdi represents Saudi Arabia. The work, *After Illusion*, consists of 52,000 leather creatures that Al Ghamdi made with two teams working 12 hours a day to dry, boil, bake, stitch, and stuff the leather objects.

This installation inspired me to make the EYEBALLS

You are supposed to touch the objects and then sounds will play recorded during the making process: water dropping, hammers knocking, material being shuffled around.

The compared the reviews and descriptions were very much alike: They speak about the different shapes and material the installation was made of : leather circles stitched together, some are stuffed with cotton wool while concentric designs are cut out in the tops of others. They talk about cliches concerning touching: talking about the making process, regaining trust through handicraft – referencing to togetherness, wool, female worksmanship, childhood, nature, sheepherding etc.

In that sense many critics talk about the piece that it is well chosen, while “Taking part in the Biennale is an obvious way for many countries ***to promote their cultural credentials to an international audience. These new*** merchants of Venice trade in soft power rather than shipping and spices; in the case of the Gulf countries, **defying perceptions that the region is only about oil and expensive cars.”**

The critics don’t speak about the actual experience of touching themselves. What the sensation is like. Hot, cold, rough , soft, smell, weight. How do the objects speak back to you. What amount of time it takes to get these objects to communicate etc. The sensation of touching itself doesn’t come to the conscious attention of the perceiver. It seems as if there are no words to describe this. Or critics are not trained to do so.

Because actually the objects are really hard.

So to finish this presentation I would like you to get into the actual experience of touching these objects yourself and try to find words for what is happening.