

6.1 *Gothenburg Culture Festival*

In order to understand the challenges surrounding this kind of act, I briefly provide details of the space; the Gothenburg Culture Festival, and where suriashi arrived in this. On August 17, 2016, I was invited by the choreographer/curator Benedikte Esperri to perform suriashi with a group of dance practitioner- and art student-participants at the Gothenburg Culture Festival. I chose my act to explore how suriashi might collectively address ‘the political’, regarding space and independent dance in Gothenburg. Gothenburg, founded in 1621, is the second-largest city in Sweden, fifth largest in the Nordic countries. It has a population of approximately 570,000 in the city proper and about 1 million inhabitants in the metropolitan area. Through slow suriashi marching we were offering critique of the low funding support of the local dance scene.

Local artists have long been critical of how the city’s politicians allocated the money to sport and entertainment events, and their reluctance to instead support and put forward the city’s art scene. This became even more evident at the start of Gothenburg Culture Festival, which at its inauguration in 1991 bore the name Gothenburg Festival (without the word culture). Gothenburg’s local newspaper reminded how the politicians discovered that there was less drunkenness and less fighting (and less police intervention) when the festival was filled with culture (Holmgren, 2015).

6.2 *Radical Walking for a Critique of Real Estate Speculations*

The starting point was the gallery space ‘A~venue’ and finishing point inside a newly built fountain facing Götaplatsen. Before the performance, we met at gallery ‘A~venue’, a space offered for free to the Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts at the University of Gothenburg by Wallenstam AB, one of Sweden’s largest in the real estate industry. Wallenstam AB stated that they wanted to ‘contribute to more culture and interesting elements on Gothenburg’s parade street ‘Avenyen’ (Wallenstam AB, 2015). A~venue immediately became a successful gallery space because it brought the different artistic disciplines of the faculty together, while attracting new audiences thanks to its central location. However, despite the huge success with A~venue, the gallery shut down in 2017. The space was empty for three years, but in July 2020, an exclusive Chinese-Swedish car brand opened, announcing pride to be surrounded by art spaces. However the story told by Wallenstam AB about the parade street hereafter was not about artistic elements, but how to sell out the street itself, announcing that the estimated purchasing power of Avenyen would be 13 billion Swedish crowns in 2020 (Wallenstam AB, 2017). The art spaces were then long gone. These ‘true stories’ from real life showed the failure to think politically and democratically about shared spaces. We unconsciously agreed to loose these spaces to real estate speculations.

6.3 *Radical Walking for a Confirmation of Ephemeral Lineage*

We were going to walk in suriashi from the gallery A~venue, while honouring Gothenburg's first postmodern dance ensemble Rubicon, established by Eva Ingemarsson, Gun Lund and Gunilla Witt. They were the female precursors for establishing a local dance scene in Gothenburg in 1987. They also established subsidized professional dance training, performed on streets in the city, and opened two theatres. Primarily, they also worked a lifetime to bring open the doors for dance in higher education. Here, the art of walking was ever so important as a tool for radical modification and for performing a historical lineage. Rubicon's choreographers have explained how their dance practise had to change after they had encountered the art of Pina Bausch in 1984. They originally had classical ballet as their basic training form, now they engaged with everyday walking as a protest to elitisms. The walking sessions created a new Point Zero for their work. Art historian Astrid von Rosen described how this was a most difficult and demanding task to undertake, which showed that the aim for new walking techniques was a real endeavour. "Not only did such walking instigate change, it manifestly and persistently implemented it in the individual dancers' bodies and in the collective body politic" (von Rosen et al., 2018).

For a full year, they practiced only walking as a new radical way to explore movements. They did not practise the usual 'ballet walk', with pointed toes and hips turned out, instead they engaged with everyday walking as a protest to elitisms. The choreographers were pioneers, 'and, arguably, founding Rubicon was a powerful feminist political strategy, centred on women joining forces in collaborative structures' (von Rosen et al., 2018). Rubicon used pedestrian walking to formulate their new artistic practice for dance. For a full year they practiced only walking as a new radical way to explore movements (von Rosen, 2016). Rubicon received funding and started the project *the City Dancers* and began performing new choreography in urban spaces.

6.4 *Walking Is Dancing*

To argue that walking is dancing connected Rubicon with other postmodern artists, for example the New York City-based Yvonne Rainer with her *Trio A* and Steve Paxton with his *Satisfyin Lover*, who with their peers at Judson Church famously took the pedestrian and made it revolutionary (Banes, 1977). Of all the walking practices in dance, the postmodern walking was the most radical in its refusal of 'high aesthetics'. When Rubicon created their choreographies specifically for the city, there was no discussion on what might be political in this shift of embodiment as we discuss it today. However, many dancers and choreographers embraced the new embodied technology of walking, which held an 'anti-elitist ideology', sometimes framed as 'natural', and which for many Gothenburg citizens was a bit shocking.

After this change of practice, Rubicon received funding and started the project *Dancers of the City* and began performing new choreography based on the everyday in urban spaces. In 1986, their landmark piece *Götaplatsens Trappor* was premiered, performed outdoors at Götaplatsen on the stairs leading up to the Art Museum. I was nineteen years old when I saw the piece. It forever changed my notion of what dance could be and do, and how I perceived my hometown Gothenburg.

Götaplatsen, built in 1923, is a typical modernist space, holding grand institutions: The City Library, The City Theatre, The Art Museum, The Art Hall and The Concert Hall. These institutions represented all art forms except for dance. Looking back, Rubicon's choice of space for their 1986 choreography manifested precisely what was lacking at Götaplatsen: dancing bodies, dancers, and choreographers. Rubicon's everyday movements revealed how the space was not only a power centre of art institutions—it was also a space of struggle for equal treatment of artists and artforms. When they moved there, they created 'mortal' or 'intangible monuments', monuments not built by steel or concrete, but by bodies. Thirty years later, my own 2016 performative reply through *Suriashi Intervention*, while offering critique of the low funding support of the local dance scene, also acknowledged these intangible monuments created by Rubicon.

6.5 *Suriashi Walking Begins*

Our *Suriashi Intervention* began at the gallery space 'A~venue' and finished inside a newly built fountain facing Rubicon's original stage. In the following section, I retell the personal experience of *Suriashi Intervention* performed at Gothenburg Culture Festival on August 17, 2016.

We had a 'dance permit' (danstillstånd), since this is required for public dance events in Sweden per the law of order since the 1930s. It was difficult to anticipate whether our act was perceived as dancing, and whether anyone noticed that many of us were dancers. Twelve walkers left the gallery, took the 'feminine' suriashi position and began the ninety minutes/three-hundred-meter journey on the parade street Avenyen. Walking, breathing, sensing, remembering. Once afoot, we noticed that our slow suriashi walking had an immediate effect on the space we were moving in. We received comments from people at outdoor seating, which showed the visibility of our slow act. People made jokes about which one of us would reach the goal first. Some mocked us, since we were not that entertaining.

Scenes like this were simultaneously juxtaposed with the sound of audiences, passers-by, narratives of gentrification with its closed and opened cinemas, cafés, kiosks, bars, and an increasing number of expensive shops. The city's spatial proposal of what Avenyen represented today - an easily controllable space consisting of buying, selling, eating, and drinking - was confined and restricted. We instead wanted to show that the street should also be a space for artistic interventions, for dance practice and artistic experiences.

Children were curious and wanted to join the slow walk. Two boys followed us for a long time; giggled and planned to jump into the group and scream: 'Allahu Akbar!' They left after a while. I was content that we met, and that the boys desired to make an intervention to our intervention. There were other stories than shopping and eating told on this street today, which had evoked their curiosity: Twelve grownups in slow silence.

Suriashi had augmented our sense of reality to the point that we could hear a needle fall. We had listened to and sensed the city from a particular, embodied tempo and structure.

I experienced how our floating across Avenyen in suriashi was as an exclamation mark of its own, and how we were moving in a different world on our own bridgeway through the real world.

However, as we approached the fountain, there was extremely loud music and roaring sounds from a motorcyclist performing his acts on Götaplatsen to a sexist song by Teddybears Sthlm.

These scenes brought substance to slow walking in urban spaces—a relational and connected one. Slow walking with a group of people was perceived as both peaceful and provocative. Our intervention opened for both aesthetic experiences and a critical discussion on what we could do together in space, passing on Henri Lefebvre's question on 'the right to the city' (Lefebvre et al., 1996). For this act we needed each other for support through the durational walking, which was strenuous for both body and mind. Walking slowly, we were also affected by our own bodies shaped in artificial positions, and by sensing the space and each other. Hearing the roaring sounds of Götaplatsen worked like a wakeup alarm, announcing what was made real in that space where slow, silent walking was juxtaposed with a motorcyclist flirting with death. It was a dissonant, ear-splitting experience; the rhythm hammered overwhelmingly through our bodies like a message from the city itself about spatial priorities, and where the real money was invested, which added to the dystopian encounter.

6.6 A Public Fountain as a Manifestation of What Is Not There

We were programmed right after the motorcycle act. As agreed, the water jets were shut down just before we entered. We stopped and positioned ourselves inside the fountain, emptied our water bottles, and I raised the megaphone to give a speech. In the following section, I give an account of my speech and the arguments that I made for suriashi as a politically positioning artform and tool for activism.

I wanted to investigate suriashi's potential as a political march with a cause and added 'a speech with megaphone', since such speeches are often integrated with political marches. The purpose of my speech was to show that our slow suriashi walk held a political cause related to space, gender, economy and the art of dance. The fountain was positioned in the middle of a junction. A megaphone was needed for my speech to be heard. The speech, combining archival and political aspects, occurred in the middle of the newly inaugurated, much-criticized public fountain that faces Götaplatsen, thirty years after the premiere of Rubicon's piece. I claimed that the fountain occupied a space that belonged to the dancers of the city. The fountain, dangerously squeezed in between two bus stops in the middle of the heavily trafficked Avenyen, consisted of a large refuge with dark stone slabs, spraying water at different heights and with coloured light from below. It was built to be looked at

from the distance, however children wanted to run through it, and it became the city's biggest traffic hazard, even in need of guards to prevent accident. The fountain was poorly planned. Ninety-two water jets that perform a multi-coloured water show, generating dislike and nicknames like 'Götaspash', 'Bus-Shower', the 'Pisseria'. My proposed nickname was 'Fontana di Danza'. I thought that the fountain placed on a refuge in the middle of a junction and bus stops worked very well as a stage with walls of glass and a bit of distance from the audiences. I am also certain that the fountain never would have been built had more careful city planning been performed beforehand.

The suriashi pilgrimage in combination with the speech in a megaphone became a meta-performance and discussion on how political issues could be processed through artistic research. My speech amplified by the megaphone began by acknowledging Rubicon and their artistic acts in the city. I then proposed that the new public fountain with its ninety-two water jets represented the immaterial archives of the city; dancers—female working bodies demanding recognition and payment for a hundred years of unpaid work. I compared Gothenburg's female dance workers with Gothenburg's male metal and shipyard workers, where I quoted dance scholar Priya Srinivasan who stated that although the dancing body is often seen only in aesthetic terms, it is also a working body (Srinivasan, 2011). Dance is hard physical work and should be recognized. Our bodies also build lasting monuments like the houses surrounding us, the statues, and city fountains. I argued that our bodies represent a not yet recognized form of work. I also proposed that since the new fountain cost thirty million Swedish crowns to build, another thirty million should be paid to compensate for the unpaid labour of female dancers. I revisit my process journal to add to the recollection of this event:

The use of the megaphone made my Suriashi Intervention more confrontational than the acts by Rubicon. However, I was not prepared for just how confrontational. Suddenly, in the middle of my speech, a musical conductor ran down from the festival's main stage at Götaplatsen. He walked straight into the fountain and tried to silence me. He was worried that my talk would interfere with his concert that would begin in forty-five minutes. I was in the middle of my speech and was too shocked to reply. The megaphone was very empowering in that moment. If it hadn't been for the megaphone; I would have stopped by fear. The conductor walked into the fountain and tried to talk to the other participants. He seemed not aware that he walked straight into our performance, as justified and programmed by Gothenburg Culture Festival as his own. Since no one answered, he finally left. (Dahlstedt 2014–2019)

The musical conductor's presence in our artwork could almost be perceived as curated, as if his performed interruption was there to stress the asymmetrical and gendered contracts performers from different artistic fields have with public space. Suriashi walking became the investigative probe that revealed the gaps on this demarcated surface. It made an impact and did not elapse unnoticed. People were curious by the slow walking. They stopped and listened to my speech, and afterwards they wanted to know more about it. When they understood that the suriashi performance sought to activate discussions on dance, economy and the fountain, they smiled and expressed: 'We hate the fountain too!' The suriashi walking in combination with the



Fig. 3 The author gives a speech inside a fountain, when a musical conductor tries to interrupt her.
Photo Palle Dahlstedt © Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt

speech in a megaphone became a radical meta-performance and discussion on how political issues can be choreographed collaboratively. Slow suriashi walking opened space for new embodied discussions. The artistic experience revealed a certain kind of vulnerability and gave us a new corporeal understanding of the position of a body in a space, like Götaplatsen or elsewhere. However, through suriashi we could activate spatial memories, guarded and secured through our bodies as valuable records for the future. Therefore, I propose more interventions in urban spaces like these—performed alone, with students, amateurs or professionals—to continue a philosophical discussion about space. The archive is alive, and historic acts live through our body, which yet again resonated with Nishikawa Senrei's request to always perform with your ancestors (Fig. 3).

7 Example #2: Suriashi as Protest at Yuen Long Station, 2019

This second example concerns an event in which I was entrusted to disseminate suriashi practice for political purposes in Hong Kong. It showed a situation where walking served as a radical strategy for protest. In Beijing 2018 at the 24th World Congress of Philosophy [WCP], scholar Ching-yuen Cheung became intrigued by my presentation on how feminine suriashi could work as a feminist activism. He was then a lecturer at the Department of Japanese Studies at Chinese University of Hong Kong and one of the founding members of International Association for Japanese Philosophy (IAJP). Cheung explained that my presentation of suriashi as a feminist

outdoor practice at the [WCP] conference as a discussion on gendered asymmetries had offered him a new strategy. His own first experience of suriashi came from Kendo (Japanese swordsmanship). However, in Kendo practice, the suriashi steps were the prelude of attacks (Cheung, 2019b). This showed how some practices dominated the discourse regarding suriashi as practice—it was a step for regaining balance in battles. Suriashi as practised in Iaidō, Kendo, Sumo and Karate were more familiar than the ‘feminine’ suriashi used in Nishikawa Senrei’s studio and my own research.

Cheung’s own research concerned the philosophy of pilgrimage in Japan, and therefore he recognized connections between suriashi, walking and pilgrimage. Originally, pilgrimage represented a religious journey by foot. However, Cheung argued for a different representation of pilgrimage, where the pilgrimage was not made for religious reasons. He argued for a shift where pilgrimage could be something you can perform close to your home, which left less ecological footprints, and it could be related to everyday practice and to social work (Cheung, 2018).

7.1 *Be Water—A Constructed Daoist Concept*

Cheung’s interest in feminine suriashi weaved further threads between suriashi, new strategies for radical walking, and peaceful protest. My teacher Nishikawa Senrei often used ‘be water’ as an instruction for practicing suriashi in the dance studio. Sociologist Tin-yuet Ting showed how the concept ‘be water’ supported pragmatic actions to confront riot police in Hong Kong (Ting, 2020). ‘Be water’ historically came from the *Daodejing*, believed to be the earliest Daoist text. Here, water was used as a metaphor for submissiveness and nonassertiveness, which has been interpreted as the Daoist concept of the feminine (Lai, 2000). As such, it has been pointed out as something in contrast to masculine notions of strength, achievement, and power. Philosopher Karyn Lai suggested that ‘the Daoist notion of complementarity of pairs of opposites provides interesting insights into how femininity (and masculinity) might be construed’ (Lai, 2000). I think that the Daoist concept ‘Be water’ collaborates well with a discussion on artistic interventions in urban spaces, as well as activism and micro-activism.

When clashes between police and protesters grew increasingly violent in Hong Kong, the political powers interpreted the protesting crowds as terror and not as democratic demonstrations, just as Borch discussed: a group of people protesting is a force to fear, an embodiment of danger (Borch, 2012). Cheung became frustrated and wanted to show different strategies for his students. Cheung therefore decided to make a political act by himself based on the suriashi I had taught him in the conference. Cheung found support both in constructed feminine suriashi as well as constructed Daoist concepts of femininity. On July 27th, 2019, when almost 300,000 people were marching in protest at the earlier mob attacks, and in protest of Hong Kong’s extradition bill, Cheung walked in suriashi as a peaceful act at Yuen Long Station. I coached him from Sweden, feeling very nervous and responsible that something bad might happen to him. I used my knowledge as dance educator with

a long practice of teaching dance, walks and movements. This time, I was teaching Cheung a walking body for peace, vulnerable and open for silent communication, which was not necessarily a feminine structure. However, I did guide him through the ‘feminine’ body posture and reminded him of his ancestral spiritual engagement, intrinsic for suriashi. If he directed his eyes to the horizon, people would understand that he walked in peace, and it would protect him from bullying and angry comments. I reminded Cheung to breathe with each step: Breathe out when you slowly slide your right foot forward (count to four), breathe in when the feet meet in the middle (count to four), breathe out when you slide your left foot forward. The breathing techniques, a focus on the horizon, and meditating on ancestral support guided the body through the space, even as the space becomes unruly.

7.2 Cheung Walks at Yuen Long Station as a DIY Micro-activism

As Cheung arrived at Yuen Long Station at 3 p.m., 27 July 2019, he sent photos and videos, which allowed me to participate and support the walk from Sweden (see Fig. 4). He searched carefully for a place to practice suriashi without blocking others’ way. He found a place near one of the entrances to the main hall of the station on the first floor. He walked in suriashi for two hours and filmed the process by himself. He remembered that someone took a picture of him, but he did not care. Nobody talked to him. I asked if the posture gave him peace and courage or if he felt terrified.

Cheung replied: “Of course, I was very peaceful and calm. In fact, I learnt from your talk in World Congress of Philosophy [WCP], that suriashi is not a march or confrontation in any sense. I was not worried inside the station, as you were not worried on the London bridge or in the Tiananmen Square”. After he noticed that there were too many people inside and outside the station, he left by train (Cheung, 2020). He met his postgraduate students right after his suriashi walk. It was an important act for him to do; to show students that peaceful protests were possible. Cheung had planned to do a suriashi four months later at the university after the police fired thousands of tear gas on the HK2 Bridge inside the campus on Nov 12, 2019 (Cheung, 2020). However, the campus was soon occupied and barricaded. Later, the university announced that the semester was over, and the bridge was still monitored by security nowadays (Cheung, 2020). This inhibited any further interaction in that space.

When Cheung performed suriashi as a radical walking act, it became an example of what political scientist Jose Marichal defined as ‘micro-activism’ (Marichal, 2013). The goal had not been to mobilize one big cause, but to create a smaller activity to show a non-violent resistance in a difficult situation. Both my own and Cheung’s activities were posted on social media, and we had an interested audience following. Even though the actions were done at a smaller scale, it did not invalidate their political purpose. Cheung’s suriashi act was indeed part of the bigger Hong Kong



Fig. 4 Suriashi walk at Yuen Long Station, July 27th, 2019, Hong Kong. *Photo Ching-Yuen Cheung*
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movement, a pro-democracy movement which demanded protests not to be characterised as a “riot”, but a defence for freedom of expression (Cheung, 2019b). The situation in Hong Kong became worse, and the Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor finally urged the hundreds of protesters of the Hong Kong Movement to give up since the inevitable risk of the Beijing government to intervene militarily. This forced Ching-Yuen Cheung to flee his country and seek a new position elsewhere. He now works at University of Tokyo. However, Cheung has continued to present suriashi as a nonviolent, feminist protest, arguing that authorities could never label suriashi as a riot, hence its advantage over other protesting walks (Cheung, 2019b).

8 Example #3: Suriashi with Master Students at University of Gothenburg

8.1 *Performative Walking as New Methodology in Higher Education*

I am concluding my chapter on suriashi walking as a radical act, by discussing how Suriashi Intervention performed at Götaplatsen led to a new artistic research methodology course for master students of contemporary performative arts at University of Gothenburg. Coming from a background of performing, choreographing as well as teaching for theatrical purposes, my research and performance on suriashi walking and the urban spaces changed how I wanted to organize my future teaching. There was so much learning through suriashi walking, and so much embodied understanding of the city/the local space processed. I was confident the Master students would get something out of it, even though it meant moving the seminars to the streets. Following my lecture, workshop and actual collaborative suriashi, I found in the subsequent discussions how much support the practice could offer the students. Suriashi engendered questions about performative arts and city-planning in urban spaces, just by relocating from the university space into the streets and society. The Master students were able to investigate how professional dance- and actor-training also could engage with societal engagement. They evaluated how suriashi enabled artists to critically reflect and discuss their profession in a societal context, as well as how artistic practices could offer change by presenting different ways of being in the world together. We reflected on the purpose of performer training and the place of performing arts in society; as well as on how and in which formats knowledge in Artistic Research could be disseminated.

After my lecture, and detailed workshop, the students and I walked out in suriashi for the city of Gothenburg. We brought the slow studio practice with us as a slow interventionist group in society. We worked for three hours, following Avenyen and stopped along the way for shared reflections. The initial question of what suriashi walking could activate in space was in itself a clarification that it was not about performing perfect suriashi. However, some students expressed how the rigidity of the body construction offered a support in itself. They meant that the keeping of ones' hands on one's thighs created a clarity for passers-by showing that this was most probably art performed with a predetermined expression with a specific intention. Suriashi also became a method of reflecting on the proximity to their audience, who the audience members might be and how to coexist in space.

After hours of practicing together as a group, the students walked out in pairs. I asked them to search for spaces they thought were in need of suriashi. They walked in pairs for support and for documentation. We then met in the classroom to discuss their experiences and to watch the documentations. What unified the students' experiences was that suriashi challenged them; first as a difficult physical balancing act, an endurance test and then also as a new relationship with the public space and the

passing audience. The city evolved to represent more than a resource, something for the artist to extract or use. The city was instead neither seen as a background nor a backdrop to their performative acts. They reflected on the division of common, public, private and owned spaces. In our slow *suriashi*, the question of land ownership became quite acute—who can commission—or evict—performative art for the urban space? How has consumer culture affected spaces for public art? The students raised the important question on the artist's requirement to be visually consumed by audiences. They even asked if their artistic training had made them less sensitive to space. This enabled a discussion on sustainable artistic training, education, and how performers are trained to act in space. The students began to plan for smaller gestures instead of big busking acts. They realized that slow walking in itself was interesting and radical enough to find out things about space. They made small adjustments to create safe spaces for their performative acts—their choices revealed an inherent concern for other people—their audience. We concluded that public art practices should always begin with a deep concern for space and other people in order to create more sustainable interactions for both performers as well as audiences.

9 Discussion

The *Suriashi Intervention* on Avenyen at Gothenburg Culture Festival processed spatial disagreements, while activating the immaterial archives of dance in the city of Gothenburg. Through *Suriashi Intervention*, an embodied critique was offered to the city officials who had failed to value work by female dance artists (Rubicon), and at the same time spend their budget on poorly planned and unsafe monuments. Ching-Yuen Cheung's 'invisible' performance in Hong Kong aimed to show his students how non-violent protests might be performed in violent situations for the sake of democracy. Finally, the methodological course for Master students at University of Gothenburg opened up for a critical discussion about site-specific art practices, as well as the purpose of professional, elitist performer training.

Sociologist Doreen Massey argued that simple movements in space have tremendous effect on people sharing the same space (Massey, 2005). The kind of qualities expressed in movement include a much wider and more nuanced range with more attention on the emotional and affective meaning than what is usually addressed in the social sciences (Massey, 2011). By walking slowly in *suriashi* towards Götaplatsen, at Yuen Long Station in Hong Kong, on Avenyen, an alternative approach to space was proposed, confirmed through our bodies. Through *suriashi* walking, we sought to change the generalised assumptions of protesting bodies in space, forward-steaming, fists raised. *Suriashi Intervention* performed critique of the unequal distribution of power and economy in Gothenburg. Audiences engaged both with the walking practice, the situation with unpaid female artists and the irrational building of an expensive fountain. As my speech was interrupted by a male conductor intruding on the space, this event also showed how space is always gendered. Cheung's act, which he