

Embodying the unspeakable is possible through technological filters.

Introduction

I believe knowledge is hidden in the body. Not only as memories and ontological assumptions about the world around us, stalled because of the experiences we have had. Or the bodily knowledge connected to our physicality; like the sensation of gravity or physical condition. For me, the most influencing and long lasting knowledge is installed in the sensation of movement, or better in our sense of proprioception: the experience of our moving bodyparts in relation to each other and to the space around.

Its one of the reasons why I am interested in objects or spaces that invade, change or intensify our proprioception, for instance the elements we use to cover ourselves like costumes and clothing. I experience myself that wearing the 'wrong' clothing, can really influence how I feel and subsequently behave. It's not so much the appearance of the clothing; moreover the material and how it is fitting onto my body: the interaction between my movements and the outfit can easily become a severe element of distress. If my pants is too tight it causes claustrofobic feelings, if the material is not natural but synthetic, my own breathing becomes artificial as well. On the other hand, floating material around the body makes me feel like flying (or at other times just huge and fat). High heels may cause a strong upright posture but also sometimes evoke detached emotions.

Amy Cudden¹ talks about how our physicality impacts how we feel. She discovered that our non-verbals not only influence how other people think of us but also govern how we think and feel of ourselves. Our bodies change our minds. To do a power pose (like holding up ones arms as body builder) for two minutes changes how we feel and think of ourselves. It changes our stress levels (cortisol) and our hormonal level (testosterone) making us more laid back. This talk was one of the inspirational sources for my interactive installation *Cylinder_RollingStairs_ Seesaw* that - among other aspects - secretly induced and played with these power poses. The technology inside the balance objects gave a feedback loop that stimulated the participant to explore his relation with his own body through interaction with the objects².

In another installation: the *Physical Phenomenological Interfaces* (PPIs) I explored if it is possible that two bodies are connected and communicate with each other by moving one body part, so that there is no division between the two? That the skin is permeable? That they become one? These technological objects, shaped like a dress, a helmet, a glove and sleeve, and three headpieces, only function when the visitor performs 'their missing bodies'. By wearing, touching, moving or standing underneath these non-wearables, the visitor's body becomes the digital other, merging together into a whole. Can we step into somebody else's body?³

¹ http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are.html

² see: visual documentation

³ see: visual documentation

My recent installation *Chair_Jump_Chute* took the side of material and objects as starting point and visualised their impact on our physical communication. For this installation, I created a wearable Chair, Jumper and platform with integrated sensors. By putting on and moving with the Chair or the Jumper on the interactive stage it became possible to manipulate the soundscape and interact with the parachutes. By letting the shape and material of the Chair or the Jumper influence the intention and quality of ones physical movements, the sound and parachutes responded accordingly and at their turn would start to influence your own movements, like this creating a dialogue or duet⁴.

Textielfactorij

As a result of talking to the Textielfactorij about a new installation in relation to my works so far, I really feel the necessity to research practically what traditional costumes are about and how they are made, the handicraft behind them. Just observing from a distance will not bring me new views on why these old crafts should be preserved. By wearing the costumes, embodying their creation processes and going into dialogue with their historical meaning, new ideas can arise that may highlight the importance of this part of our heritage. By using simple hands-on technology to translate this, I also hope to bring new ideas and practical possibilities to the traditional processes.

In line of my previous works, for Textielfactorij, I will create an interactive installation that will deepen the research of

1. our proprioception, the knowledge hidden in the relation between bodily movements and costume and expand
2. the use of technology to bring this knowledge to the surface in a poetic and imaginative manner.

In order to do so, I want to create a sculpture / wearable piece inspired by the experience of wearing traditional costumes and executing the handicraft of Tie & Dye⁵. I chose the (5000 years old) technique of Tie & Dye while its such a delicate and beautiful manner of creating the patterns. Its like performing a very precise but simple choreography of the hands: just binding the many tiny knots, waiting and then unraveling them, like a long line of little stories.

Research Areas and Time path:

1. September/October 2016: field research in Holland

The similarities and differences between two traditional costumes (as inspiration for the shape of the wearable sculpture), namely:

⁴ see: visual documentation

⁵ Tie and dye (also known as Bandhani in India) refers to a resist- dyeing technique where a length of cloth is bound in several places using threads, before dying. Later, the unravelling of these knots result in the creation of fantastic designs such as ambadal, shikari, chandrakukdi, and satbandi.

The Dutch “Kraplap” (and long dress) in comparison to the Sari worn by women.
The traditional “Klepbroek” in comparison to the Choti and Lungi worn by men.

a. in relation to one’s physical movement:

for instance the various ways of putting on / off and the wearing of a sari

b. in relation to the meaning behind the use of colour⁶ and visual patterns.

2. October/November 2016: field research in India

The execution of Tie & Dye (as inspiration for the interactions with the wearable sculpture):

a. in relation to one’s physical movement:

for instance the washing of the cloth, the binding of parts with cord, the stirring of the colours, the drying of material hanging them in the wind

b. in relation to the meaning behind the use of colour and visual patterns.

c. in relation to the possibilities of mixing electric paint⁷ with the colours used. In the traditional Tie&Dye practice the colour black is hand made by fermenting rotten iron: is this colour already conductive? Or how can the conductivity be intensified?

3. November/December 2016 in Holland and India:

The assembling, making, mixing and recording of sound and / or video material:

a. in relation to one’s physical movement:

b. in relation to the meaning behind the use of colour and visual patterns.

c. in relation to the possibilities of making electronic circuits.

For instance, when a piece of cloth with a conductive surface is hold into water, it completes a electric circuit, as a result this movement will trigger an audiofile⁸.

4. November/December 2016: creation of wearable sculpture / installation’:

The new installation for Textielfactorij will invite an audience to physically experience a variety of personal views on the (embodied) knowledge behind the creation and wearing of traditional Tie & Die costumes. This is done by putting on or wearing the sculpture and move with it in various ways. As a result, the wearable with the integrated conductive areas will create a range of electronic circuits. Each circuit will trigger another audio or video clip and in doing so will direct the attention of the participant.

⁶ Ochre, red, black, green, blue and pink are classic tie and dye colours, each with its own meaning. For instance, red is a wedding colour and symbolises luck in a woman’s married life, while yellow implies recent motherhood.

⁷ Electric or conductive paint is an electrically conductive material that makes it possible to turn any surface into a sensor. It can be bought (bareconductive.com) or made by combining glue and graphite powder.

⁸ For an example of the plug and play digital board Makeymakey and the creation of circuits see:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfQqh7iCcOU>