

When will my hands become roots?

by

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Abstract

When will my hands become roots? is a performance and installation motivated by the sense of displacement and desire to belong, which I draw from my own experience growing up in Brazil and then moving to Canada. The project is inspired by phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of body as *chiasm* (from the Greek letter chi “x” used to describe crossing over relations), which defines that body and world are intertwined by their common texture, the flesh. Following the idea of the *chiasm*, I cross over elements from both the performance stage and the art gallery into a project that combines my personal memories, cultural identity questions, and interdisciplinary interests. The outcome is a sensorial installation with performance elements and a performance with visual art elements.

Keywords: Chiasm; Interdisciplinary Art; Installation Art; Performance; Cultural Identity; Personal Memory; Displacement.

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Introductory Image



Figure 1: Still of the video projected for the installation and performance.

When will my hands become roots?

Defence statement

My Masters of Fine Arts (MFA) graduating project *When will my hands become roots?* was an installation and performance primarily motivated by my the sense of displacement that I draw from my experience as someone who grew up in Brazil and then moved to Canada. In this project I presented a combination of crisscross relations that I identify not only in regards to their conceptual elements – questions around identity from two distinct cultures – but also in regards to their formal elements – the crossing over of artistic disciplines. The project took place in a black box studio (Studio T at Woodward's Goldcorp's Centre for the Arts), that was divided into small 'islands', delineated by theatrical lights, and populated with a range of objects from raffia to fresh grass rolls, and two video projections, all of which were surrounded by an eight-channel sound system. The project was presented publicly under two distinct circumstances: as a gallery space to be visited during the day, and as a live performance to be attended in the evenings. In the present document, which serves as a support to the oral defence of my MFA project, I will concisely present theoretical references, methodology and artistic choices that framed my process throughout my graduate studies.

In the past two years I have investigated artistic experiments within a diversely rich range of disciplines that became the foreground of my project. These investigations included: i) the impulsive and proprioceptive nature of improvisational dance and contact improvisation; ii) the welcoming of mundane noises and non-instrumental sounds from experimental music; iii) the embodied expressiveness of physical theatre; iv) the interactions of video projection with tridimensional materials from video art; v) the enveloping nature of installation art; and, vi) the ritualistic element of performance art. What attracts me most about these elements is their capacity to enhance the sensorial experience of the audience with respect to the artwork. The audience's experience is as

important as my experience as an artist, therefore I locate my work closely to the idea of ritual in which both artist and audience go through, in some regards, a transformative experience. My works are not only to be seen and understood but also felt and experienced. I want to engage the audience in a journey with me.

To better explain how such an artistic statement is amalgamated within my project, I would like to refer to the mind-map presented in the handout program, which served as a conceptual anchor throughout my crafting process (see appendix C). The map articulates the key words through the crossing of two main axes: one that indicates the formal elements of the piece with the words *dance-body-space-installation art*, and the second to the conceptual motivations of the piece, which articulates the words *displacement-connection*. In regards to the first axis, I indicate my desire to create a piece that will overlap the interplay between body and space in both contexts of installation art and dance (i.e. relationship between the bodies of the audience/performer and the installation/performance space). In regards to the second axis, I present the word *displacement* in relation to the word *connection* in what I consider in my piece as its counter balance. As such, the content of the piece refers to the state of feeling displaced and the desire to overcome that feeling, desiring to feel connected, grounded to the place I inhabit.

In a closer look at the word displacement, its definition points to the act or process of removing something from its usual or proper place or the state resulting from its dislocation. By seeing this concept through the frame of cultural identity's performativity, the process of displacement can be understood not as an imported set of characteristics and habits, but as a reflection of how the new place sees the dis-located and how the latter, in its own turn, performs for the new place. With this thought in mind, I wanted to create a piece that would elicit a feeling that is perhaps common to many people, in general, and Vancouver residents, in particular, i.e., the sensation of not quite belonging here nor to the place they came from. I wanted to question how my experience in Vancouver enhances my sense of 'Brazilianess' or 'otherness' and how my newfound 'Canadianess' makes me a foreigner in my own country.

Therefore the notion of displacement can be identified in my piece through the choice of dislocating materials that belong to a specific context and bringing them to the performance/installation space. A few examples are: I speak in Portuguese (my mother language) to a English speaking audience; I bring to the cold and institutional studio natural elements such as the fresh grass rolls and images of water, tree logs and forest through video projection (which is a displacement apparatus *per se* that displaces recorded images from a past event into the present); and I dislocate the Brazilian raffia used in religious rituals into an art performance context. The latter is certainly the most substantial material that I used in my piece. Raffia is a palm fibre that is used in costumes for the Afro-Brazilian religious practice of *Candomblé* - introduced in Brazil by Yorubá slaves imported into the country during the Portuguese colonization period (sec. XVII: RIBEIRO, 260). Driven by an interest in how Afro-Brazilian culture has had an impact on my own identity, I conducted research in Afro-Brazilian rituals, specifically the *Candomblé*. My investigations involved paying close attention to the extremely demanding bodily-sensorial experiences of the participants in these rituals. For example, they listened, sang, clapped hands, and danced to live drumming, smelt strong scents of burnt or infused herbs, ate food that was offered to the 'gods', and, some selected ones, were possessed by sacred entities. I not only observed how these actions were performed but also took into account my own kinaesthetic experience when witnessing these rituals as inspiration for the tone of my piece. All of this experience became for me a rich meaningful layering over the raffia's materiality, which already means transcendence and immortality in the *Candomblé* context. Similarly in my project I had it as a mechanism for transformation. As seen in the performance, I displayed one bunch of raffia on each of the performance 'islands'. I gathered each of the bunches in preparation for a cathartic and physically exhausting ritual in which I violently danced to the live drums and uttered vocal sounds until I lost my breath. This ritual – as I call it – shifted the tone of hesitation and restraint from an earlier movement section into an assertive, high energetic tone for the following second half of the piece.

Ritual elements within my work reference the primal condition of human beings that is less rational and more impulsive, which reminds me that we are animals and we are more connected to nature than we realize in our everyday lives. Thus I arrive at the word *connection* on the second axis of the mind-map, which expands the notion of

belonging to a certain culture or group into a much broader existentialist discussion that relates to the idea of how every human being is connected by their biological way of sensing the world.

This discussion was highly inspired by my research on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's existentialist phenomenology that defines the body as *chiasm*, a term that derives from the Greek letter *chi* and indicates crossing-over relations (LANDES 37). This definition claims that body and world are in an intertwined condition because they are made of the same texture, the flesh (MERLEAU-PONTY 247). As such, my subjective understanding of the *chiasm* works in my piece as a counterbalance to my sensation of displacement. If my hands are made of the same texture as the earth, it means that it is also the same texture of the roots that I once desired to become. When I touch the earth, the earth touches me reversibly. My hands do not need to become roots to make me feel connected to the world because they are the world. In Merleau-Ponty's words:

(...) He who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he is of it, unless, by principle, according to what is required by the articulation of the look with the things, he is one of the visibles, capable, by a singular reversal, of seeing them – he who is one of them. (252)

In this quote Merleau-Ponty describes the reversibility rationale in the act of seeing and being seen, which is also applied to the act of touching and being touched (251). Inspired by such a radical philosophy, I put as much consideration on the gesture of touch in my choreography as I put on the visual quality of my installation. The gesture of touch is implied not only on the quality of how I touch the materials, or how the hands in the video touch the tree log, but also how my body touches the floor and how the light touches my body. The lights from both light instruments and the video projection have the potential to expand and contract space as well as reveal and conceal what we can see (figure 2). As an example, during the climax of my performance, which happens right after the afore mentioned ritual with the raffia, I manipulate with my hands the grass rolls on the floor and unfolded them, one after the other, creating my own walking path while a huge projection of water hits my body and the large wall beside me (see figure 3). I touched the grass in such a manner to make noise when releasing it on the floor and letting its fresh smell rise, provoking in the audience empathy for my experience. My performance intentions were based on the feeling of knowing where I want to go with

vigour and clear purpose. When I finish my path I stand bare footed on the edge of the last grass piece and speak a text in Portuguese. At that moment I feel connected to the earth, to nature, I feel rooted and have the courage to express myself generously. It is in this section that I am experiencing the state I wished to be in when I asked myself the question *When will my hands become roots?* Paradoxically my words cannot be understood by most of the audience members, therefore they cannot connect with me cognitively. By choosing to do it in such a way I state that I am not interested in offering a simple answer to my title's question. Conversely, I want to question if it is actually possible to feel absolutely rooted, absolutely understood and absolutely connected within the social context of cultural identity. By reflecting upon the Brazilian stereotypes that do not represent me, and yet Canadians tend to associate with me, I consider that the discussion on cultural identity can reduce a complex culture into a simplistic label. Therefore I believe that the sensation of feeling rooted can only be experienced through connection with nature. Such an idea can be supported by Merleau-Ponty's previously mentioned concept of body as a chiasm.



Figure 2: Stills from the performance's video documentation 1



Figure 3: Stills from the performance's video documentation 2.

Such a phenomenological frame inspires me to have a deeper sensorial experience with the world. It influences my physical training by enhancing my awareness of my body's five senses, the articulation of my joints, my body's sense of movement, and location. Consequently, it helps me to respond more effectively to internal and external stimuli within the framework of my composition of movement and sound improvisation. The internal stimuli go from my body into the space; the external stimuli come from the space into my body. One activates the other. There is energy and vibration in the flesh of my body and the flesh of things around me. This idea excites me, and enables me to perceive more life, energy, and movement in the world. In the context of a performance, the bodies of the audience members are also playing a key-role in this system by giving and receiving stimuli to and from the performer. In my performance, it intentionally happened in a very subtle way.

Therefore, the *chiasm* also happens within the cross-feeding relationship between performer and audience not only physically (performer's movement and audience's kinaesthetic empathy), but also intellectually through the ambiguous nature of

human experience that is, according to Merleau-Ponty, reversibly objective and subjective (247). In my research I relate the reversible relationship between the objectivity of the artwork and the subjectivity of both audience and artist. This relationship is in fact the level of openness that I like to keep in my work. Both artist and audience have distinct ways of creating meaning out of an artwork. The feedback I receive from audience members after a performance makes the work stronger because the audience has a distinct relation to it. This feedback process both confirms deliberate decisions in my creative process and reveals new aspects that I did not consciously anticipate. All this is natural, as the work continues to define itself even after its presentation.

However the perception conditions to which the audience is subjected play a key-role in the way the work is experienced and understood. With that in mind, I wanted to investigate how different the audience would perceive my work if I offered the installation space with and without the presence of the performer. I was not only interested in giving them the point-of-view agency, but also the possibility to stay at the installation space as long as they wanted. By breaking down the project into two distinctive circumstances, the installation and the performance, a much richer variety of interpretations and experiences were possible for the audience, and as a consequence the work becomes more complex.

Finally, I extend the discussion of *chiasm* into the interdisciplinary nature of *When will my hands become roots?* in which I dis-placed elements from the performing arts and visual art traditions into a crisscross between these two disciplines. The result is two outcomes from the same project that sit between the art gallery and the performance stage: an installation with performance elements (i.e. recorded speech, video performance) and a performance with visual art elements (i.e. sculptural materials, audience's point-of-view agency). Within this context I discuss the cross nature of my own cultural identity that contains elements from both Brazilian and Canadian culture. I may not feel that I fully belong to Brazil or Canada, but my experience within both makes me who I am.

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When will my hands become roots?

Project documentation

1. Installation

The following photographs document the installation section of my MFA graduating project as it was showcased from 12pm to 6pm at Studio T at Goldcorp Centre for the Arts (Woodwards campus) from September 11th to 13th, 2014.

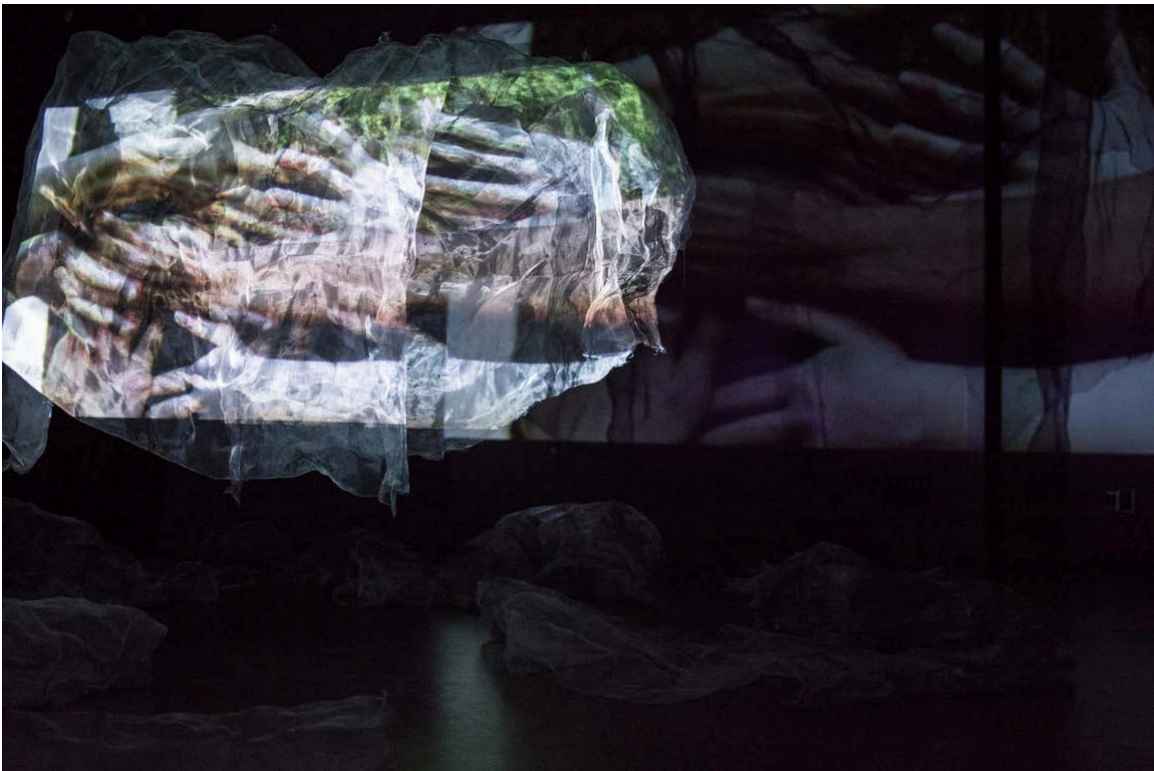


Figure 4: Installation view 1

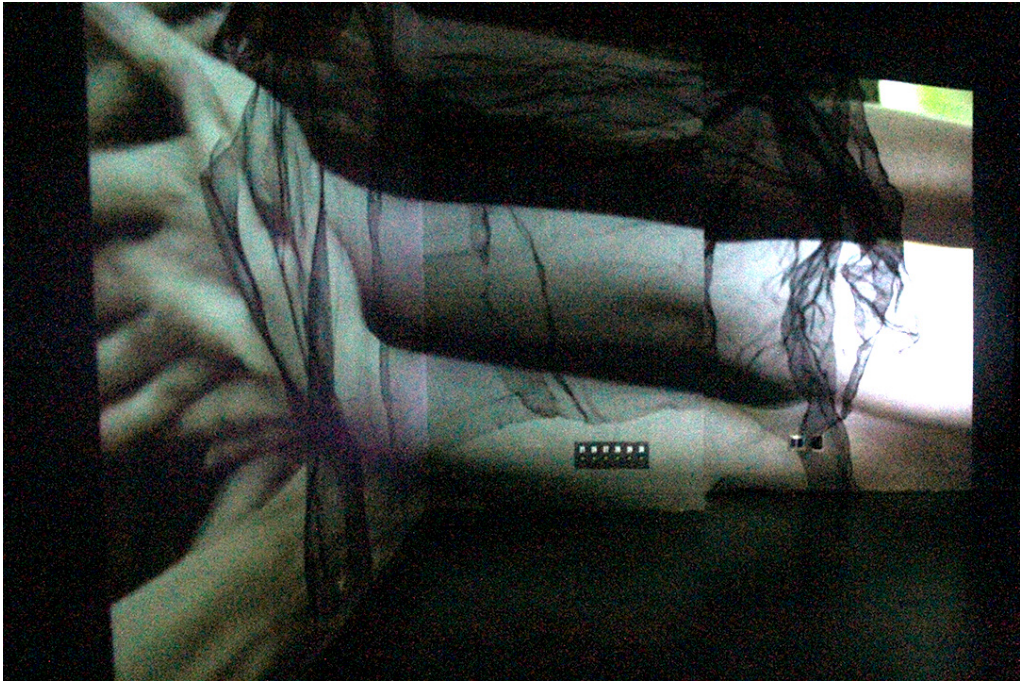


Figure 5: Installation view 2



Figure 6: Installation view 3



Figure 7: Installation view 4

2. Performance

The following photographs document the performance section of the project, a 45 minutes show that took place within the installation in the evenings of September 11th to 13th, 2014.



Figure 8: Performance documentation 1



Figure 9: Performance documentation 2



Figure 10: Performance documentation 3



Figure 11: Performance documentation 4

3. Credits

Performer, creator: Luciana Freire D'Anunção

Musician: Alex Mah

Light designer: Sarah Nutbrown Bourdeau

Technical director: Taylor Janzen

Dramaturg: Aryo Khakpour

Installation/set consultant: Brandi Rawluck

Video mapping/projection: Parjad Sharifi

Projection operator: Gabriel Raminhos

Text: Cristiano Lenhardt

Graphic designer: Raul Luna

Documentation: Lara Abadir, Julian Fok, Luciana Freire D'Anunção

Video projection 1:

Cinematographer, editor: Luciana Freire D'Anunção

Video projection 2:

Cinematographer: Sepehr Samimi

Camera Assistant: Marc-Olivier Harvey

Performers: Valerie Chrisitansen, Rachael Helten, Emilio Rojas, Nicola Awang, Nicholas

Masato, Karley Kyle-Moffat

Editor: Luciana Freire D'Anunção

Appendices

Appendix A.

To absorb and be absorbed

Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive. It breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

1. Introduction

Human beings have an extraordinary complex perceptive system and most of the time in our everyday lives we neglect acknowledging it. However some artists have dedicated their practices in developing works that elicit an enhanced sensorial experience for the audience. In this paper I discuss the works of two artists that can be included in such a category, they are the Brazilian performer Vera Sala and the Swiss videoartist Pipilloti Rist. To do that, in the context of the phenomenological notion of embodied perception, I introduce the term *integral body* to describe both audience and performer's bodily experience when exposed to artworks with sensuous nature. More precisely, I point out how both artists, through opposite strategies, make use of performative elements in the installation space to elicit the audience's kinesthetic sense that accentuate the integration of their perceptive mechanisms. While Rist gigantic video installations absorb the audience, Sala's minimalistic movements are absorbed by them.

2. The integral body

Instead of appropriating an existing philosophical term and conform my research to it, I decided to coin a new expression, the *integral body*, in order to have the freedom to combine theories and methodologies that have been catalysts of my artistic research and practice. Thus, I examine the *integral body* experience from both the perspective of the performer and the audience. I connect such a concept to the notions of body consciousness, empowerment and body perception, with a close look in kinesthesia.

However, before that I would like to contextualize it under the framework of phenomenological philosophy.

The *integral body's* rationale is inspired by phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodied perception, which claims that perception is not only a question of vision but it involves the whole body (Bishop 50). By presenting such a statement Merleau-Ponty defends the body as the core of human existence within the world. As Eric Matthews notes:

As embodied subjects, our subjective existence, our existence as persons, necessarily takes place in a certain atmosphere, created by the character, structure and need of our bodies. Our bodies express existence just in the same way that language expresses thought. (84)

The discussion of the embodied perception is closely related to the relationship between object and subject, inner and outer world. By proposing the body as the core of existence, Merleau-Ponty stresses the importance of subjective experience in addition to objective thinking, which allows us to analyze our own bodies as objects. However, this simulated distance between the analytical eye and the object can be very paradoxical. Merleau-Ponty argues that the objective point of view coincides with the subjective because one cannot truly speak from another point of view but their own. In his words:

I have no means of knowing the human body other than that of living it, which means taking up on my own account the drama which is being played out in it, and losing myself in it. I am my body, at least wholly to the extent that I possess experience, and yet at the same time my body is as it were a "natural" subject, a provisional sketch of my total being. Thus experience of one's own body runs counter to the reflective procedure which detaches subject and object from each other, and which give us only the thought about the body, or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality. (198)

Therefore, Merleau-Ponty concludes that individual and world are intertwined as in an exchangeable system. One contains the other.

The thing is inseparable from a person perceiving it, and can never be actually *in itself* because its articulations are those of our very existence, and because it stands at the other end of our gaze (...) To this extent, every perception is a communication or a communion, the taking up or completion by us of some extraneous intention or, on the other hand, the

complete expression outside ourselves of our perceptual powers and a coition, so to speak, of our body with things. (Merleau-Ponty 320)

By considering Merleau-Ponty's argument that every perception is a communion, the integral body can be understood as a state in which the body's enhanced sensorial experience allows an awareness of its own relationship with the world. Therefore the giving and taking between body and things can be consciously experienced, as some extent, allowing the body to play a much more participatory role within the world.

From the performer's perspective, the integral body can be experienced through what the philosopher Jose Gil defines as body consciousness. Based on the Deleuzian notion of affect - which this paper does not intend to go in depth - Jose Gil describes body consciousness as a state in which performers can affectively experience through their physical creative process. It relates to a decision making in improvisation based on a movement agency, as if the bodies would manifest some sort of intelligence that acts as fast as movement impulses and for the same reason enables the body to move faster and independently to an analytical thinking. By analyzing the practice of Contact Improvisation, Gil argues that when affected by body consciousness dancers are no longer led by thoughts such as what they will do next or how it looks from outside. According to him, when the dancers truly engage in their actions, a new thinking process emerges; their bodies move and speak for themselves. Their movements fill the consciousness with its own plasticity and continuity. As a consequence, the body consciousness amplifies the movement in its scale and quality (109). Such an experience can be extended to performers from other artistic realms other than dance. As a great example, the actress JoAnne Akalaitis describes the body consciousness in her theatre performance practice:

It has been my experience that performance is one of the means to enter another state of consciousness. Performance is the present – that is why it's like drugs or meditation – it's one of the few times when you're living totally the moment (...) At some time the evening of the performance I step over the line into a new physical and interior space. All my relationships to people change, they become more thrilling, more heightened, more immediate. I feel in touch with the other people in the piece – and the audience who are strangers – in a way that is not available to me in any other situation but performance. (Sommer 7)

I dearly relate to Akalaiti's words not only with respect to how she arrives at that state of consciousness but also how it enhances the way she senses the other bodies and her own, which come from an awareness of her experience with the present time. When I inhabit the body consciousness in my performance practice, I realize that my body can do more than I crafted in my rehearsal time. I feel that my body expressivity is enhanced and consequently I feel empowered by it. Therefore, I believe that the integral body facilitates empowerment because when one fully inhabits their own body, they will have better mechanisms to express themselves and be participatory beings in the world. Such an idea is based on the understanding of body expression as language. It can be observed in performance of the everyday life, for example, the body language of someone giving a speech when fighting for her rights in a rally. She may be passionate about her belief and translate it in her performance. Most likely, her body articulates gestures and words powerfully, it stands and situates to her interlocutor or audience assertively, she may blush in anger or passion. That body is fully present, and at that very moment, has the power to express itself and be active in the world.

The notions of body consciousness and empowerment articulate a broad idea of the integral body. Both relate to the understanding of the act of thinking through the body, or better, understanding the body as a thinking being. For this paper I am framing the concept of integral body into the perception of artworks. More specifically, I am interested in the dynamics between multi-sensorial art works (installation and performance) and the audience's experience in relationship to them. I am fascinated by the bodily experience of the audience when they enter an installation. I wonder about how they decide to approach it, if they follow the artist's intentions or disregard them, if they actually change location to experience many points of view within the space and how it affects their bodies. In parallel, I am also fascinated by the audience's response to movement-based performance. I wonder about how their own bodies act when watching it, if they feel what the performer feels, if they engage with a strong performance presence. In both cases, the elements that I am interested in are related to kinesthesia, the sense of movement and location. Through such a lens I will connect the works of Pippilotti Rist and Vera Sala. But before that I would like to explain more fully what kinesthesia is and how I find it important to the experience of the integral body.

3. Kinesthesia

Kinesthesia, the sense of movement and position, plays a key role in the experience of the audience in both sensorial installations and performances. The term kinesthesia was coined in 1880 in response to a growing body of research establishing the existence of nerve sensors in the muscles and joints that provide awareness of the body's position and movement. Since then the term has been developed and used in many other directions. Lately it has been taken up in the work of neurobiologists exploring how the brain senses bodily movement (Foster 7). More precisely, the kinesthetic system "integrates information about position, motion, and orientation with other visual, aural, and tactile information so as to construct a sense of one's location in the world" (74).

Kinesthesia facilitates our ability to stand, to bring our left foot forward after the right so we can walk towards the direction we decide to go in, jump a puddle, run to catch the bus or stop when we hear an ambulance siren, to cite a few examples. As Moore & Yamamoto argue:

Although Kinesthesia does not yield distinct perceptions (like hearing a sharp sound or seeing a bright light), it constantly provides us with a substratum of knowledge of the body's position and posture, as well as knowledge of the direction of the movement or our limbs. Without any difficulty we know where the body is, and where it is going, at any moment, with eyes shut. (14)

However, kinesthetic interactions with the world draw upon many receptors from our sensory nerve systems located in many parts of our body. More intrinsically, kinesthesia relates to exteroceptor and proprioceptor nerves. The first ones are the five well known senses: vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, while the second are located in the joints, muscles and the vestibular apparatus of the inner ear. Proprioceptor nerves' function is to record information about the position of the body in space, its movements and the relationship of body parts (14).

In fact, our senses rarely work in isolation from each other. Our complex sensory-motor system tends to perceive stimuli from many parts of the body in a simultaneous and complementary fashion. The action of eating, for example, is never related only to

the sense of taste, but also smell, vision, and of course many other factors related to the condition of the person who is eating. Therefore, most of our experience in the world happens synaesthetically, through association of different sense experiences. As Thomas Clifton has pointed out “Synaesthesia refers to how emotions or stimuli to one sense can prompt responses in another (...). Synaesthetic perception forms an important part of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body as a general instrument of comprehension” (qtd. in Reason 221).

When talking about synaesthesia, supported by neuron science facts, we can understand that the synaesthetic experience of the body is not merely a metaphor. When analyzing the perception of sound in music, Clifton argues that the terms to describe sound such as high, low or rounded, point to a synaesthetic perception. Following another example, “we say the sky blue is restful because our body has adopted a mode of restfulness, which is not stimulus impinging on the body, but effects produced by the body, without which the responses would not exist (...) the restfulness of the sky blue is not the color blue but in the bodily experience of that color” (qtd. in Reason 223).

In installation art the kinesthetic senses of the body play a key role in the audience’s experience. These senses facilitate the awareness of the position of their bodies in space. Through kinesthesia, the human body can sense the object’s mass around it, therefore by dislocating from one point of view to another, the audience member will go through a variation of sensations when nearing an object, moving far from it, or adjusting to the other bodies in the space. Hence, at some extent, the installation artwork itself gains movement that reflects the audience’s motion.

In addition to some of the kinesthetic elements provoked in installation art, the kinesthesia in performance is primarily provoked by the audience’s response to the performing body known as kinesthetic empathy. When discussing the topic, Susan Foster argues that the viewer’s response is less passive than we might imagine. According to her, they “partake in the same kinesthetic experience as the dancers on stage” (7). John Martin, as cited by Foster, states:

When we see a human body moving we see movement, which is potentially produced by any human body, and therefore by our own...through kinesthetic empathy we actually reproduce it vicariously in our present muscular experience and awakens such associational connotations as might have been ours if the original movement had been of our own making. (7)

In order to better understand the sense of kinesthesia in perception of art, I will now take a close look at Pipilotti Rist and Vera Sala's work. Both of them present clear connections to phenomenological concepts of communion between inner and outer world, which is translated into the relationship between their artworks and the audience. However Rist seems to absorb the audience in her installation space, while Sala is absorbed by the audience's gaze.

4. To be absorbed: kinesthesia in Pipilotti Rist's work

Pipilotti Rist has developed during her 30 years career an incredible range of work that challenges the human senses. The core of it is based on video, however her pieces were never merely audio-visual, they stimulate much more than the eyes and ears of the audience's bodies. As Stephanie Rosenthal noted:

Pipilotti Rist's videos, sculptures and installations invite us into a world of the senses that is recognizable, yet strangely unfamiliar. Her works link our minds to our guts, our thoughts to our feelings, both through their content and through the manner in which they are intended to be perceived – through our bodily responses. (17)

Even her early single channel videos are highly stimulating due the incorporation of engaging elements such as the video's plasticity, colorfulness, and fluidity. The video's plasticity comes to the foreground by the lines, dots, and glitch effects, which elicits the audience's awareness of the video components, its limitations, effects possibilities and, most of all, its imperfections. For example her video *Entlastungen*, aka *Pipilottis Fehler* (1988), starts with television noise images interlaced with a close-up angle of a female's face (Rist's) rolling her eyes and acting mentally unstable (fig. A1). However we never see her face fully because of the videographic vertical rolls and RGB non-calibrated colors. Those images are juxtaposed with black out frames that follow a synchronized rhythm led by a drum roll sound and a sinister voice that recites a poem in

German. The whole video is edited together in such a fast way that we barely see a continuous movement of the female character. It almost looks like damaged and colorful frozen clips put together. What follows next is a sequence of clips that shows a woman (Rist again) simply letting herself fall on the ground in various outdoors locations. The video quality is still shaky, hatched, none-linear and speed variety, yet we see the consistency between all of the clips: a woman dressed in a bright red dress on location with colorful elements falling on street pavements and bright green grass.



Fig. A1. Pipilotti Rist's Entslastlungen, aka Pipilottis Fehler, 1988.

The use of colors plays a key role in Rist's work. They are usually very bright and presented in contrast and complementary color simultaneously either through a single frame composition or by overlapped layers. For example in her video *I Want to See How You See* (2003) there are clips of bright magenta skin tones of a hand manipulating colorful flowers up against a blue sky in the background, or bright green grass images are embedded within the interior of a house that starts white and changes the hue tones to blue, yellow, purple then pink within less 3 seconds.

All the color and shapes are presented with a great sense of fluidity. Such element is presented not only by literal images of fluids like pouring water, the ocean waves, and colorful liquids but also by the movements of the filmed objects and by the

camera itself. Most importantly the fluidity comes from the frame assemblage of multiple actions and images choreographed together.

The above descriptions of Pipilotti Rist's work define the main elements to making it sensuous. The video has a vibrant and energetic materiality, which stimulates more than the sense of vision and hearing. It has the potential to stimulate all the five senses of our exteroceptor sensory motor system. As if by watching her videos, the audience can anticipate the sense of touch, smell and taste. The content of the work is presented with such a visceral quality that it seems to dominate the video projection.

Such embodied audience engagement with Rist's video also happens due to its performative content. The majority of Rist's pieces incorporate human figures. These are usually female, and most of the time it is Pipilotti Rist herself. These bodies appear in luring physical actions. They swim, run, fall. We see close ups of feet stepping on mud, hands smashing fruits, tongues reaching food. Sometimes the figures are cut out from their original frame and inserted into a decontextualized image, such as a clip of woman jumping inserted within another clip of tree branches' close ups as in the video *I Want to See How You See* (fig. A2). Because the ground from the raw footage is cut out, the edited video gives us a surrealistic impression that the figure is flying around gigantic tree leaves.



Fig. A2. Pipilotti Rist's *I Want to See How You See*, 2003.

Even though such bodies are presented in a two dimensional form, they can still provoke some level of kinesthetic empathy. The audience recognizes the body in the screen as similar to their own, therefore as mentioned in the previous section of this essay, they can actually feel the anticipation of those senses in their own bodies. Furthermore, Rist uses the videographic techniques to enhance the performance of the bodies in the video, which is something that live performance cannot offer easily. For example, she uses repetition and speed changes in her editing, wide lenses, and extreme close-ups to the point of capturing the skin's porousness.

If all those sensuous elements can be stimulated by single channel videos, they become even more powerful in environmental installations. Here the audience is immersed within the images by being surrounded by video walls or even becoming the target of the video projection themselves. Thus, the perception of the work goes beyond the exteroceptor but also hits the proprioceptor sensors due to the perception nature of installation art *per se*, which is based on the physical presence of the viewer and his/her bodily responses to the elements positioned/installed in space (Bishop 6). The audience experiences the sense of movement and location by dislocating their bodies around the space and having multiple experiences within one single work. They can chose their standing point, get closer or far away from the objects of the structure, observe the video

projection closely and also negotiate the spatiality of the installation with the other bodies in space (audience members). When creating the installation project, Rist choreographs their kinesthetic experience as she suggests how they should use their bodies to perceive her work. For example, in some of the pieces, the audience needs to lay down, relax their muscles and watch the video installed on the ceiling (as in the work *Gravity be my Friend* - 2004), or sit down in a chair and see the video projected in their laps (*Lap Lamp* - 2006), or inserting their head in a hole while the rest of their bodies remains outside of the structure (*Eine Spitze in den Westen* - 1992/2001).

Overall, it seems that Pipilotti Rist's exploration on the visual materiality of the video comes from her desire to turn everything inside out. In her single channel videos, the plasticity of the medium comes to the fore ground and in her installations it reaches us, embrace us. Similarly, she wants to share the internal structure of the material that she works with, she wants to share her own way of experiencing the world. In her own words:

When I close my eyes, my imagination roams free. In the same way I want to create spaces for video art that rethink the very nature of the medium itself. I want to discover new ways of configuring the world, both the world outside and the world within. (Rosenthal 21)

It becomes clear that there is a connection between Rist's work and phenomenological discussions about the embodied perception and inner-outer world relationship. As a literal example, in the mentioned videos *Entlastungen* and *I want to See How You See*, Pipilotti Rist sings the lines: "I see. You see. I see you. You see me seeing. I want to see how you see. You want to see how I see. I want to show how I see. You want to show how you see". She wants to see, to feel, to experience. She wants the other to do the same and compare those two experiences by showing and seeing, by giving and taking, by intertwining those two realities. Which is exactly the integral body's rationale mentioned earlier, which refers to the exchangeable condition between body with the things and the other bodies in the world. Her pieces are the translation of such desire of exchange, as if she could enter someone's body the same way as she wants the audience to be immersed in her own world. This idea is clearly defined in her sentence: "I would love to drill through our skulls and sew our brains together" (Iles 109).

5. To absorb: kinesthesia in Vera Sala's work

Similarly to Pipilloti Rist's work, Vera Sala's performative installations facilitate an integral body experience in the audience through a multi-sensorial installation. However Sala's work proposes a completely different mood. There are many factors that contribute such contrasts of experience.

Firstly, and most importantly, Vera Sala brings the actual presence of her own body as the main element of her installation. Her performance has a great relationship to the structures installed in the space because they function as a continuity of her body, a resonance apparatus for her movements. Glasses, steel, mirrors, lights or video projection are converging lines to her presence. Still, the audience can wander around the space, choose their standpoints and decide for how long they want to stay.

But the installation settings are very theatrical. The room in which Sala performs is usually dark with spotlights on herself and the structures suggesting a visual hierarchy in the environment. For example in her piece *Pequeñas Mortes (Procedimento 1)* (2007) the space is carefully filled with glass structures in the shape of long rectangular tables, displaced horizontally and vertically (fig. A3). The room is illuminated by broken video projections that cross part of those structures and hit the walls and the floor. There are also dramatic lights from the ceiling and from the floor directed towards Vera Sala's body, which lies over a spread pile of glass plates (around 2 square inches each). Alternating with moments of complete stillness, Sala moves her body in crescendo spasms that reverberate on the plates producing an uneasy noise. Overall, when the audience enters the space they are led through such noises, the structures, and the lights towards the performer's body. Thus, the installation elements serve as a guide, formally and conceptually, to what they will encounter in the performance.

As Sala argues, her installations are an arena for exchange. When the audience enters these spaces they will have a sensory-motor experience due to the illusion effect from the structures in dialogue to their own bodies (Fiochi 37). Those structures are built to provoke instability, to trick the audience's kinesthetic sense of location by making them question where they are in space and if what they see is real or not because the

glasses and mirrors reflect things. According to Sala, some people leave the installation with a heightened sense of wonder (37).



Fig. A3. Vera Sala's Pequenas Mortes (Procedimento 1), 2007.

The conceptual content in Sala's pieces is based on the notions of precariousness, instability and transitoriness¹. They are related to the vulnerability of the body and the fine line between life and death, inside and outside, body and environment (Figueredo 111). These concepts can be observed in *Pequenas Mortes (Procedimento 1)* not only in the quality of Sala's dance but also in the material of the installation. Everything in the space is based on glass, which constitute these three mentioned concepts by being at the same time fragile and dangerous, it can be broken and hurt someone, it can reflect an image or be seen through. The performer embodies such precariousness but at the same time suggests the potential to break the glass structures. The audience members, in their turn, experience a seductive installation with structures and lights beautifully composed, but at the same time, empathize with the performer's vulnerable situation.

Thus the audience's kinesthetic empathy plays a key role in the perceptual process of Sala's work. Sala deliberately does not work with virtuosi dance movements

¹ My literal translation to Vera Sala's words in Portuguese: *precariedade, instabilidade* and *transitoriedade*.

from classic dance techniques. Therefore, instead of distancing themselves from a dancer who presents rigorous skills towards beauty representation that is unachievable for those who doesn't have the same training, the audience members identify themselves with the mundane quality of Vera's dance, which may elicit a sensation that her movements have more potential to be executed by themselves (Daltro&Azevedo 8). The quality of her movements goes against the notions of spectacle and the ideal body in traditional dance, which are translated in chaotic, spasmodic, vibratory, and unpredictable movements. Vera Sala's dance methodology is not based on choreographed dance steps sequences, but on a development of movement concepts or movement qualities (Fiochi 38).

Sala is very interested in the idea of micro-movement in dance, which brings the audience's attention to one single part of her body. She allows herself to go deep into her experience of the movement by reducing the possibilities of the dancing body to a single gesture. Or, in a more extreme way, reduce the movement into desire of movement that is translated in a stillness with a high presence quality as in *Impermanências* (2006) in which she entangled herself in a gigantic steel wire cloud that was responsive to her extremely limited movements (fig. A4). When talking about her experience is this piece, Sala says that she becomes aware of the mass of her body, the mechanisms of motion between muscles, joints and bones. When she feels the sensation of the interior organization of her physicality, it seems that her body becomes huge, the small things start to have significant importance (Daltro&Azevedo 7).

The micro-movement's magnifying affect is highly facilitated by how Vera Sala's challenges the experience of time. Her performative installations are durational. She uses stillness, slow moves and repetition as instruments. Because those three actions do not develop into something else as in a narrative sense, what actually can be transformed is the perceptual experience from both performer and audience. The audience member who decides to engage with Sala's presence can experience some sort of meditative state, which is similar to the body consciousness of the integral body previously mentioned. When immersed in such a concentrated mode, the audience's sense of time changes as if they have the illusion that a long time passed by quickly.



Fig. A4. Vera Sala's *Impermanencias*, 2006.

In summary, the relative sense of time, the micro-movements, vulnerability of the body, kinesthetic empathy and the installation's structures are the main elements that elicit such a focused engagement from the audience in the perceptual experience of Vera Sala's pieces. The integral body experience here is facilitated by the kinesthetic experience from the audience's perspective, and body consciousness from the performer perspective.

6. Final considerations

It is important to note that even if both artists have a similar nature of work - installations with performative elements - each of them come from a very distinct artistic background. Rist is primarily a video artist, while Sala is a dancer. Therefore, they are attached to the politics and the history of their own media. As mentioned before, Rist is interested in pushing the boundaries of videoart, and so she does by expanding the materiality and usual function of the video. Likewise, Sala is interested in problematizing the *status quo* of dance. In her pieces she questions what a dancing body can do outside of the traditional vocabulary of such an art expression. Hence Sala inherits in her work the never-ending discussion in performing arts about the stage's role and the performer-audience relationship within the performance space. So it is clear why Sala creates such a perceptual hierarchy in her pieces attached to the theatrical elements: lights, costume, soundtrack, and time narrative.

However both Rist and Sala converge into the creation of a highly sensorial installation that comes from the same desire of sharing with the audience how they experience the world. It is so interesting to compare how both artists speak about their own work because they are so similar. They both describe the installation space as a room filled with the overflow of their own bodies, their imagination, desires, anxieties, and visceral content. They want the audience to step in and experience it.

Through the perception of particular art works, one can access the integral body experience because when they enter the art space they are willing to see, analyze, and experience things, as if there was an agreement that they would step out from their everyday lives into a new reality. It is ironic that very often artists dislocate the content from one place to another for the purpose of enhancing the audience's attention to the ordinary. Pipilloti Rist and Vera Sala follow a similar rationale; for example when Sala presents in her performance the simple act of breathing, or Rist the simple act of eating. In sensuous art works like these the audience is reminded that the bodies they see performing are just like the one they inhabit. At the same time they are invited to be aware of their own senses to perceive the artist's world, to absorb it and be absorbed by it, in communion, intertwined.

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Appendix B.

Video files

1. When will my hands become roots? (Installation)

File name: WWMHBR_installation.mp4

Duration: 01:45

Video documentation, editing: Luciana Freire D'Anunciação

Description: Brief video documentation of the installation section of the project *When will my hands become roots?*

2. When will my hands become roots? (Performance)

File name: WWMHBR_performance.mp4

Duration: 03:08

Video documentation: Lara Abadir

Editing: Luciana Freire D'Anunciação

Description: Excerpts from the performance section of the project *When will my hands become roots?*

Appendix C.

Poster/Program



