

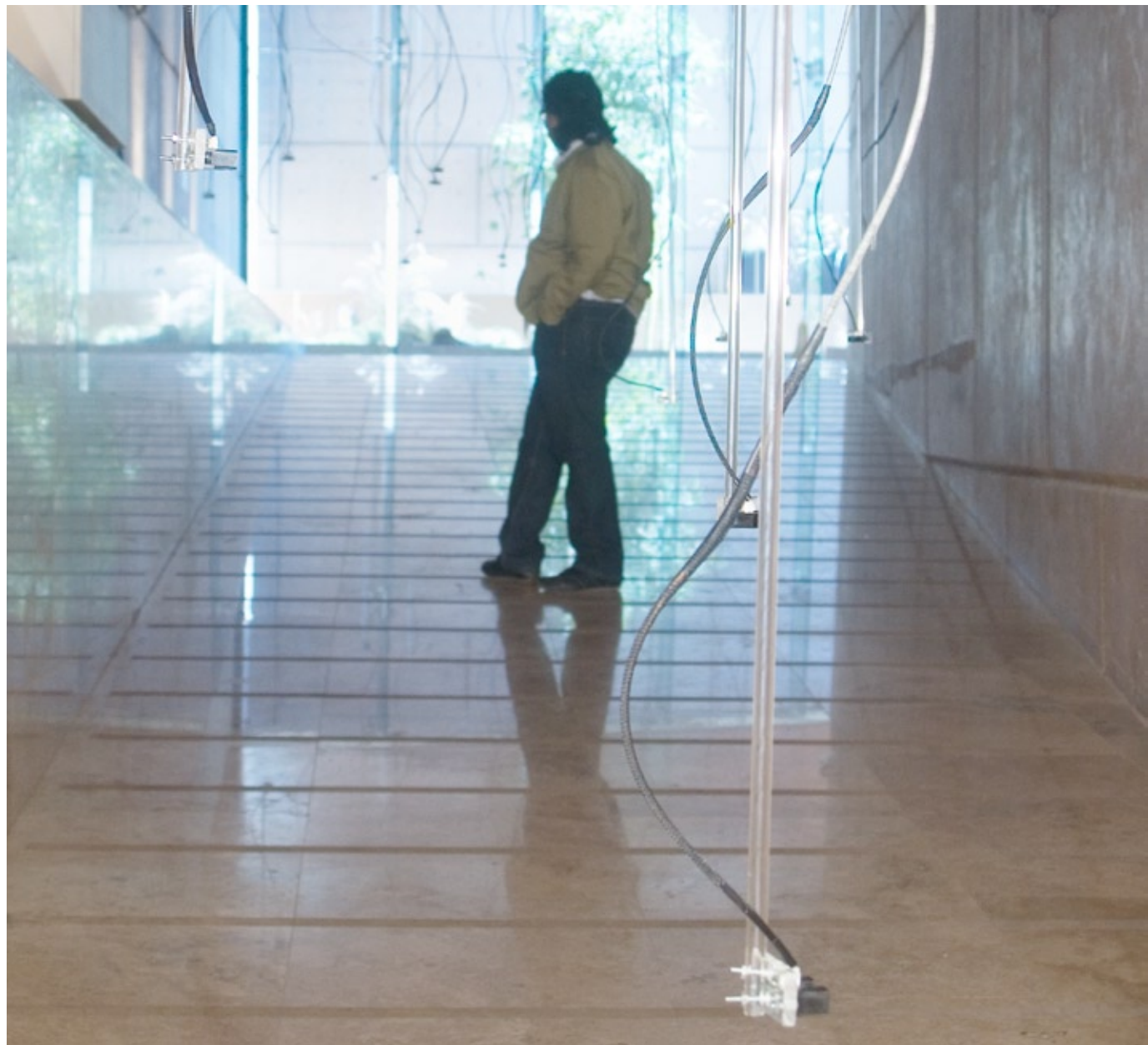


Between Bodies

created for the entrance of the new international wing
of the Centro Cultural Tijuana, as part of the inaugural show
Proyecto Cívico,
curated by
Lucía Sanromán & Ruth Estévez

Nina Waisman
2008

this catalog is dedicated to
the spectacular generosity of Pierre Galaud,
without whom *Between Bodies* would not exist.









***Proyecto Cívico* and the new wing of the CECUT**

Between Bodies developed out of an invitation I received from curators Lucía Sanromán and Ruth Estévez to create a piece for *Proyecto Cívico*, an inaugural show for the new international wing of the CECUT in Tijuana. Among other potential sites, they offered me the long, funnel-like hallway that is the new entrance to this wing. This entrance was to be the first one facing the heart of the city (the original entrance to the CECUT faces the US border). While this seventy-foot long, low-lit, funnel-shaped descent into the museum's main lobby seemed to suggest that a decisive distancing from Tijuana was the proper preparation for the museum experience, I became excited about the sonic potential of flipping this program, of bringing the city back into the passageway and heightening the visitors' connections to the rich mix of energies that make up Tijuana.

Following is a descriptive text generated from plans and notes developed along with the piece. Towards the end of this catalog is a written interview done with Jordan Crandall for the catalog for *Proyecto Cívico*, which explores in more depth some of the issues at play in the piece. Video documentation of the installation can be found online at <http://www.ninawaisman.net>

Between Bodies: Description

Between Bodies seeks to connect the visitors' actions to a wide range of bodily and sonic energies circulating through Tijuana, to make visceral the connections that passers-by have to the huge network of human agency at work in the city. The sounds triggered in the piece sample everyday gestures/communications encountered in the streets of the city. Many of these gestures are undertaken to generate civic services and spaces where there are none officially planned or supported.

Starting from the street entrance (the wider side of the funnel), a narrower but similarly funnel-like configuration of tubes and sensors presents itself as a staggered "curtain" to the visitor. There is room to pass through this funnel of sensors, but they are angled so that it would be very hard to escape being seen by them, and thus generating sound in the space. The sensors here are spaced closely enough to encourage solo visitors to play more than one sound at a time. By using the torso for one sensor, and the hands, hips or legs for the adjacent sensors (this does not require unnatural contortions) visitors can create and modulate complex urban sound networks even if they are alone. By slowing down and wandering off from the architecture's dominant linear program, visitors gain access to more of the sonic map of the city.

This first section of the installation focuses on rhythmic sounds of constructive labor – sweeping, filing, typing, etc. The typing is that of Lourdes Luján, a community organizer/activist, using her keyboard to produce online documentation of toxic manufacturing practices in the maquiladoras of Colonia Chilpancingo. The sweeping sound is made by an older woman in an under-serviced neighborhood above Playas, sweeping up street rubble to prevent it being thrown by passing cars at unprepared pedestrians. The filing sound is made by a young man on Avenida Revolución, as he converts undervalued coins into pricier works of art by filing them into the forms of tourist mementos. Undercutting these rhythms are ambient neighborhood sounds, such as the sounds of roosters crowing in Maclovio Rojas, hundreds of roosters raised on disputed land, for cockfights, a sport/ritual of longstanding import in Mexico. The sources of the sounds are not declared in the space, but it is hoped that the diverse energies of this assertive productivity may be felt. If there are multiple visitors, they pass this entry "curtain" at the same time - creating networked re-compositions of the city's energy.

The next sensor-arrangement encountered encourages visitors to move off to the side of the hallway. One person can "play" the circular enclosure at the end of this curve, or multiple people can engage with it at once. This changeable drawing (I think of these sensor arrangements as drawings) is filled mostly with sounds of people trying to get your attention in Tijuana – vendors using bike horns, voice,

music, bullhorn announcements, people calling on last-generation phones, the sound of a replica of an ancient Aztec flute.

The following S-shaped sensor-drawing also permits solo or multiple visitors to create sound compositions. The sound here consists primarily of children playing and working in the streets - jumpropping, playing soccer, buying ice cream, digging ditches, working in a market, and so on. The last drawing, a simple C-curve, will capture most anyone passing by – i.e. those entering from the lobby side, or from the street. This section communicates with the main lobby and the *Proyecto Cívico* show, and is focused on sounds of policing and control, undercut by sounds that complicate the power narrative.

When there are multiple visitors in the piece, they frequently unleash a chaotic avalanche of sound testifying to the potent mix of energies in the city.

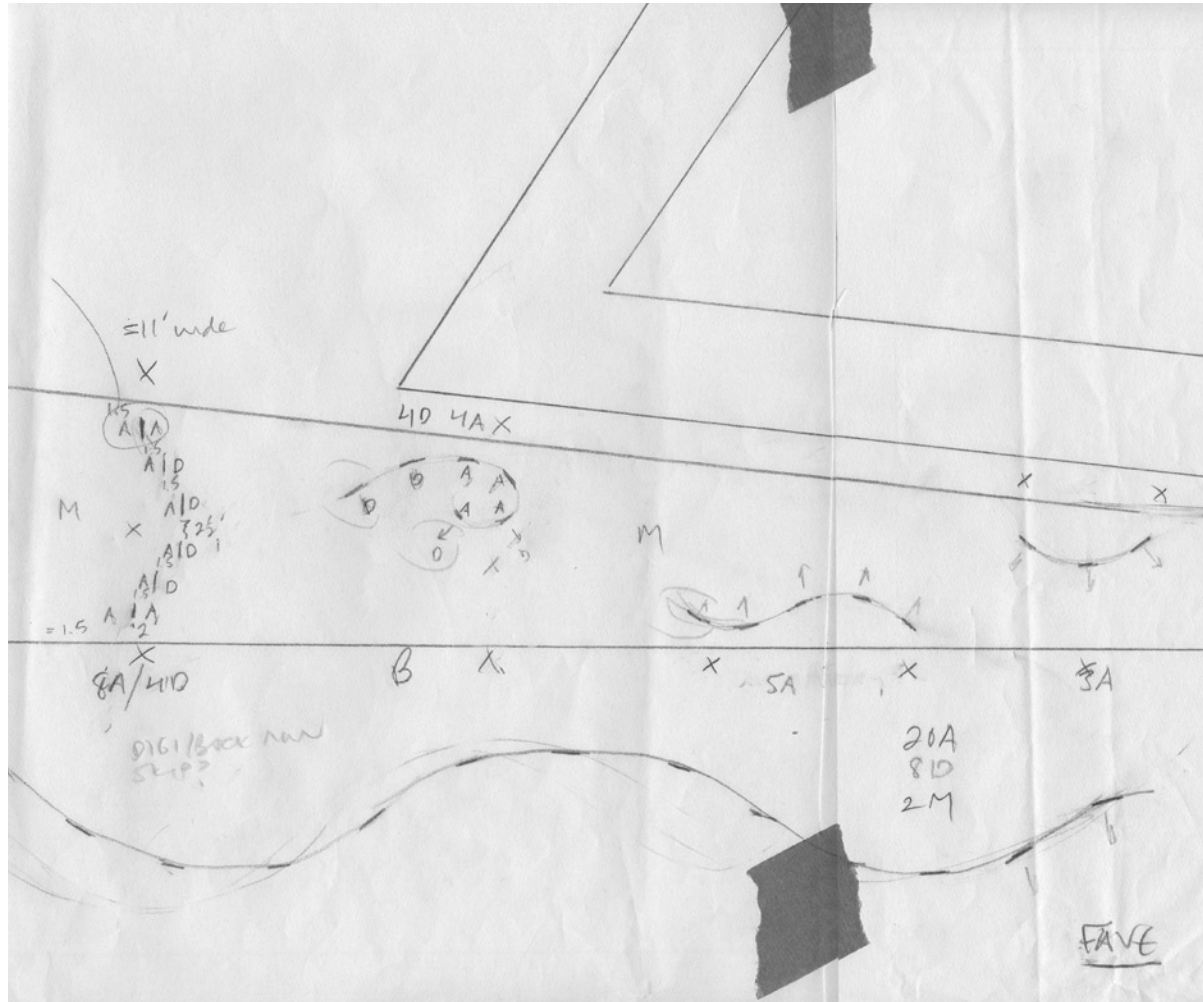
In all sections, the sounds are triggered and changed by visitors' movements. Pitch, speed, volume, spatialization and layering of the sonic components are variously changed in real time in relation to a visitor's proximity to sensors. Movement at some sensors allows the dominant sounds to be undercut or replaced by sounds of a contrasting nature. Sensors are placed at different heights in relation to the visitors body; the area of sensitivity lies between 6" and 3' in front of each sensor's clearly visible "eyes". An exploration of physical proximity to these sensors affords the visitor increased co-creative

proximity with respect to the sounds of others' recorded gestures. Thus the encounter for visitors is one in which their bodily gestures meet those of Tijuana residents. Moving towards the sensors, gesturing, trying out just slight-out-of-the-ordinary moves, will allow a visitor to experience and modulate sound generated by other bodies in Tijuana, to sense and explore the sonic traces of an endlessly improvised civic fabric.

From the Invitation to *Proyecto Cívico*

“Proyecto Cívico investigates the reconfiguration of the notions of civic responsibility and citizenship under political and social conditions defined by exception to the rule of law. The exhibition departs from the recent attention paid to the city as central theoretical model and site of study and turns the focus towards those who inhabit the city, to all citizens and potential citizens...

Exceptions to the rule of law, however, also create vacuums that are increasingly appropriated by individuals and groups as spaces of renewed personal and communal possibility of social engagement and change.”

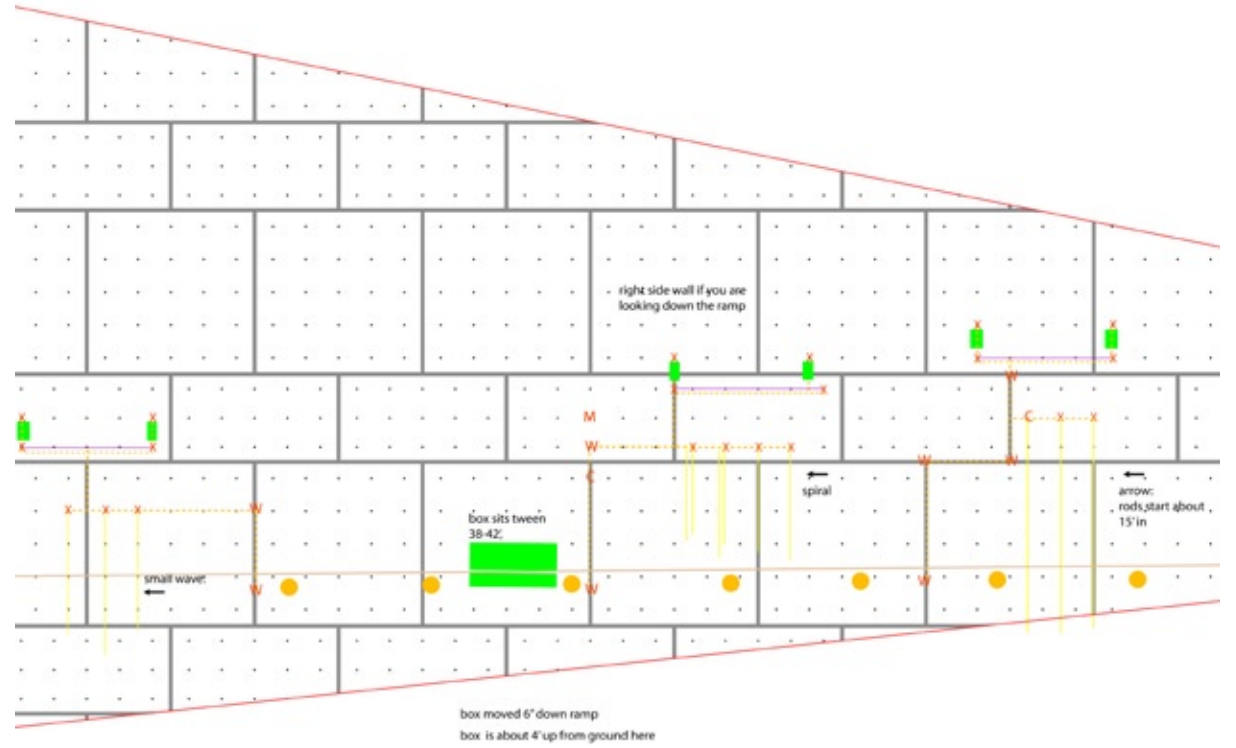


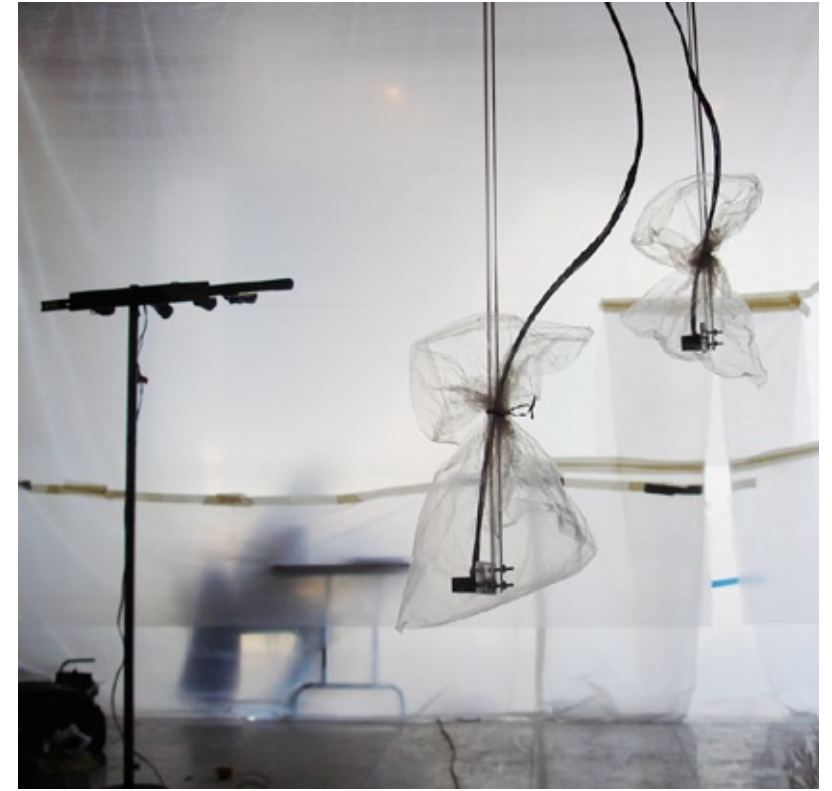
Process

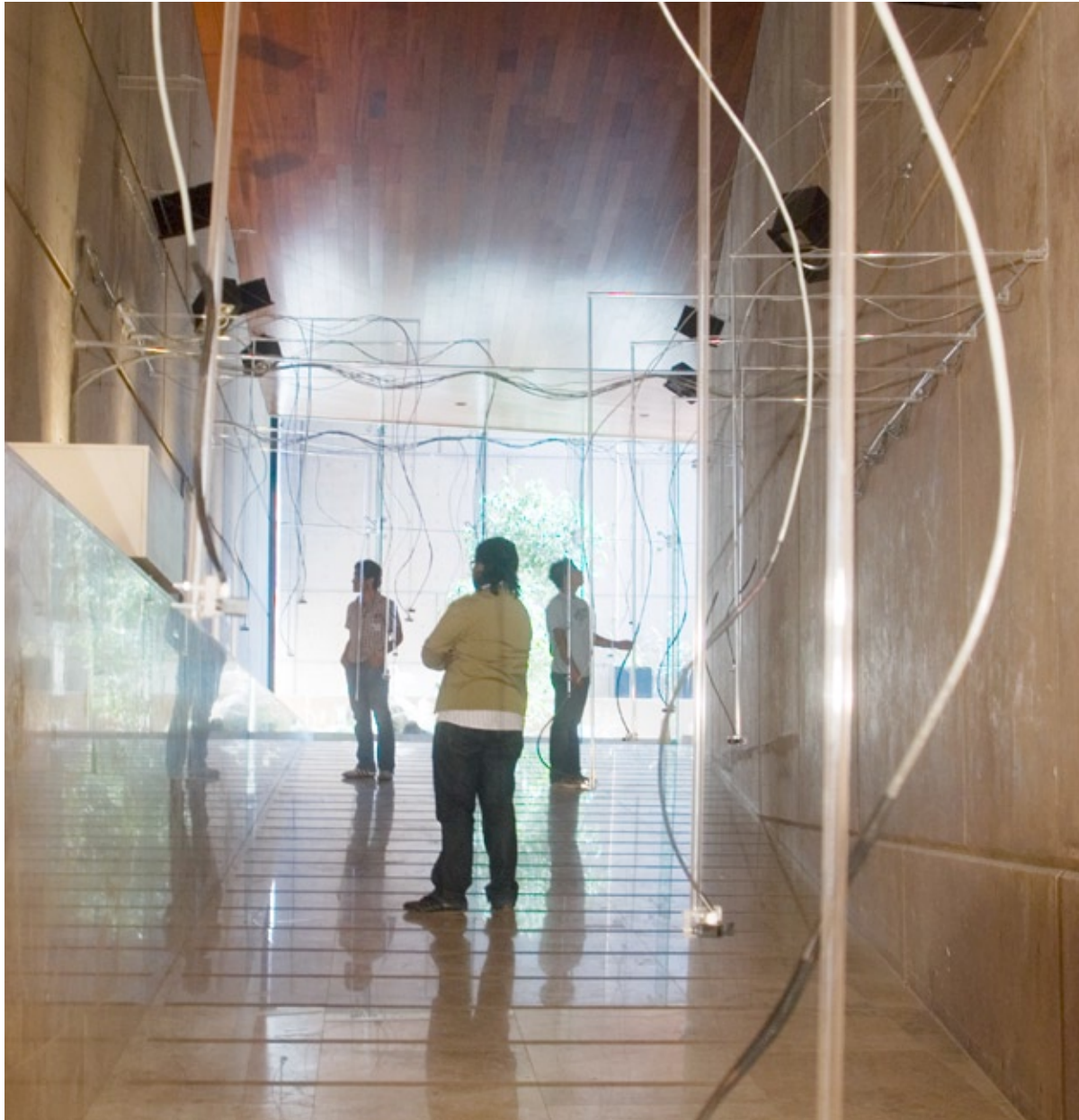
The installation was surprisingly complex to create. The need to attach using only the irregular pattern of holes left from the fabrication of the CECUT's concrete walls, led to a numerical tangle of wire lengths, tube lengths, sensor angles, and so on. Construction on the building continued as we installed over 3 weeks, adding clouds of dust and unexpected sounds to the mix.

I chose very lightweight, transparent plastic tubes to support the sensor wires, and to maintain the sensors at a range of particular heights and angles. These tubes are suspended in a manner that allows the tubes and sensors to swing when bumped or played with, allowing for temporary repositionings/re-anglings of the sensors, and thus the sounds. The physical installation makes visual reference to, among other things, the gerry-rigged electrical networks found in many of Tijuana's poorer colonias and the surveillance systems employed at the border.









Interview between Jordan Crandall and Nina Waisman

For the catalog, *Proyecto Cívico*

Jordan Crandall: Let's begin with the dynamic of the encounter. The visitor to the exhibition space encounters sounds that are derived from the activity of unseen others – Tijuana residents in the act of building or maintaining the city – and through this encounter, enters into composition with them. This happens not through vision, but through more subtle attunements or adjustments in the body sensorium. What happens during this encounter?

Nina Waisman: Well, I imagine that at first there will be a run-up of recognition and confusion. Many of the sounds triggered by visitors to the entrance hallway are seemingly iconic – hammering or raking or jump-roping. On the other hand, abstracted sound can be hard to pinpoint in the mind; the quality of a particular sound may evoke a range of activities. So the sounds might be at once familiar, but simultaneously suggest a host of disparate bodily actions, memories and associations, some pleasurable and some not. I'm interested in this blurred state of recognition, in which the body perceives a stimulus, triggering multiple responses, while the mind attempts to fix an understanding – to locate the sound in a time and place, to label it – but can't exactly. There is an anomic quality to this kind of perception, that defies the desire to categorize.

Visitors following the dominant program of the entrance – the push to funnel directly into the building – might move quickly by, occasionally triggering bits of sound as they pass a few sensors, intent on concluding their linear path through the space. They will accidentally engage in a dialog with the life of the city, upon which they have little impact. But those who are a bit more curious or who notice that it is their presence that triggers the sound, might begin exploring the potential for interaction. They will find that the kinds of gestures and positions they assume vis-à-vis the sensors will gain them increased interaction with and control over the sound-gestures they hear. The sensors are a way of activating attention – if we are living in an attention economy, the sensors are perhaps triggering little advertisements for the energy of the city. But these adverts ask you to dance with them, to supply your bodily energy to the system. The visitor's body can become, in a sense, a tuning instrument for other recorded bodies, a transducer of other bodies' energies.

JC: Could you elaborate on this concept of transducing? How does the visitor's body act as a transducer?

NW: Here's one dictionary definition for transducer:

transducer, n. a device that is actuated by power from one system and supplies power usually in another form to a second system.¹

I'm thinking of the body as a vast system of transducers, actuated by powers (physical, social, technological) in the environments it encounters.² In the CECUT installation, a body will inevitably come near one or more of the sensors in the hall. So the question becomes, what powers are being actuated by this visitor's body, and what new forms of power does that body then provide to "the system"? The most obvious force actuated by a body at each sensor is sonic. As the sound waves enter the body in response to its motions, the body responds by avoiding or courting these waves. The sonic waves might be transduced by a body into the force of curiosity, driving a visitor further into the piece, or hurling it away if the sound is unpleasant. The desire for control might be transduced from the comprehension that the physical waves penetrating the body can be manipulated. There might be an erotic or empathetic or exploitative power generated by the body's actuation of the sound of another recorded body.

As a visitor triggers sound, others in the room often turn to consider the sound source, i.e. the behavior of the person triggering the sound. The "transducer" in this case suddenly becomes a watched performer and this role functions as a stimulant for some or a discomfort for others. Sonic energy here is now transduced by a body into social dynamics centered around exhibitionist energies and bodily confidence, while the interactor feeds additional sonic content into the space, which will in turn actuate a range of responses and potential soundplay from others. The system is in many ways collaborative, as it is shaped and played by multiple mind-bodies.

This transduction ideally is not a one-way street. To explore the sound of another's body in an interesting way requires one to listen to its rhythms, its pitch, to become attuned to them, to internalize them in some way. A kind of gestural, or bodily understanding is hoped for.

JC: This reminds me very much of some of Helio Oiticica's concepts of how his Parangolés should function. The Parangolé is a cape that is worn and activated by the body. But it is not only the wearing of the cape that matters, but how the wearer becomes watched – and the social dynamic thus instituted, as wearers become watchers and vice-versa. The Parangolé does not only move with the body, becoming activated by its movements, but it is also a dynamic that interweaves itself in social space. This was coming out of Brazil, influenced by the samba and life in the favela. There are many connections to be explored here. But what you're saying is that it is not only the conduction or transduction of energies that matters, but how they interface with – inform – a dynamic of looking and performing, watching and being watched. And this gets internalized, incorporated by the body.

NW: Yes, I'm thinking of how when you dance with a stranger in a dance hall, once in a while it is incredibly exciting – you find a rhythm and logic of movement with this unknown person that is like a sublime conversation, or great sex. And there is the thrill and fear of doing this in public, of having others witness this exchange, and pick up on its energy. Alternatively, the dance might be agonizingly awkward, and

that too becomes public. In any case you exchange something with this other dancer that you might not discover if you were only to talk with them. The sensor/sound/gesture combination in the installation will allow you to adjust your rhythms to those of a recorded body (or machine, in some cases), or to adjust its rhythms to yours. While visitors may not appear to be “dancing” in the traditional sense, I'm hoping the gestural-sonic exchanges they generate afford a kind of synching-up of bodies, or at least that they produce some unusual bodily dialogs. Visitors might seem to be driving the exchange, but the recorded actors will inform the visitor's body in some way. And these one-to-one exchanges will create sound and movement in the room that sets up other exchanges amongst the actual bodies in the room.

JC: This dynamics of looking, and of bodily adjustments and internalizations, brings up issues of biopower. You are activating these in terms of the specific technologies used. In your work, how does the technological apparatus play a thematic role? Do the sensors have a history that we should be aware of, and should this inform our reception of the work?

NW: The sensors connect to a number of issues present at the border, most obviously, the overwhelming technology of surveillance. The border is watched by infrared night vision systems, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), video cameras, motion detectors, heat sensors, seismic detectors, and thousands of human eyes, paid and unpaid. I'm using mostly infrared proximity sensors, which look like tiny eyeballs

or binoculars. Whether one is familiar with these particular sensors or not, the presence of many small eyes in the room will likely strike a chord. But the last decade has seen an increasing appropriation of surveillance technology by individuals and groups recognizing an opportunity for networking and communication that runs counter to the intentions of those watching. Sensors gather data that can be mined, morphed and recombined in ways that give unplanned powers to those being watched; sensor-networks can be hacked to serve purposes antithetical to those for which they were constructed.

In this installation, visitors are “tracked” in order to connect them to others in Tijuana. The sensors serve to underscore the network of activities outside of the museum that visitors are connected to, highlighting everyday actions in the city that add up to a huge source of inventive energy. The installation gathers traces of this wide-ranging civic energy into one space, where it can be felt as a common source of power, putting the agency of the city in dialog with that of the visitor. The sensors allow visitors, through acts of bodily transduction, to sense the agency of others in different ways.

JC: And through a specific focus on the body, on its movements and gestures, as conducted, a new source of agency emerges?

NW: As our environments become more densely populated with networks that observe and require our physical behaviors to work their “magic”, gestures – microgestures, such as button-pushing, hand-

waving, as well as macro-gestures such as walking – become part of the material caught up in the ongoing tug-of-war between control and expression that technology affords.

As a former dancer, I have been attracted to (and working with) various “gesture-sensors” for a few years. The data captured can be easily “info-morphed”, that is the gestural info can be used to alter sound, video, or any other data stream. So the sensors allow the rhythms and characteristics of bodily gestures to be experienced through other senses. Connected to this is my interest in the cross-modal production of thought, in how the abstraction of a perception obtained through one branch of the sensory system (the proprioceptive, say) might affect another adjacent branch – the linguistic, for example. V.S. Ramachandran, the Director of the Center for Brain and Cognition at UCSD, has proposed that human brain structure – the fact that the angular gyrus sits at “the crossroads between the parietal lobe (concerned with touch and proprioception), the temporal lobe (concerned with hearing) and the occipital lobe (concerned with vision)” – permits a “convergence of different sense modalities to create abstract, modality-free representations of things around us.”³ Ramachandran proposes that the cross-activation of these regions of the brain is the likely springboard for abstraction of many kinds, including language.⁴

Gesture, sourced in the critically located parietal lobe, is thus a key contributor to the formation of language and to all logics and

abstractions that proceed from the site of language. In this light, does “performing” a certain gesture or choreography generate flavors of thoughts and logic? Not that movement x generates thought y, but movement x might incline one to see the world in a fashion analogic to that movement. How then is our vision of the world changing as increasingly smaller gestures are used to give us control over increasingly larger terrain? Bringing awareness to the impact of the everyday micro-gestures we perform, and framing slight alterations to these mundane micro-movements, is an ongoing experiment with the new “language” these movements are generating.

Notes

1 Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, Springfield, Mass, G. & C. Merriam Company (1977)

2 Brian Massumi’s eloquent writing on this subject has been a huge help. See: Massumi, Brian, *Parables For The Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham & London, Duke University Press, pp. 75-77, (2002)

3 Ramachandran, V.S., *A Brief Tour of Human Consciousness*, New York City, Pearson Education Inc., p. 74, (2004)

4 *A Brief Tour of Human Consciousness*, pp. 72-81

CV

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education

Candidate for the MFA in Visual Arts 2008; UCSD, San Diego, CA
BFA with distinction/valedictorian; Fine Art Media; Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA
BA, magna cum laude; Visual & Environmental Studies; Harvard University
NYU in France; studied in the Universites de Paris III & IV, as part of Harvard degree work

selected exhibitions/grants (*solo shows marked with a *)

2009

**Between*; The Museum at the California Center for the Arts, Escondido, CA;
Curators: Mary-Catherine Ferguson & Olivia Luther.

Scalable Relations; Grand Hall of Science, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA;
Interactive sound installation, as part of a multi-media collaboration with
Particle Group (Ricardo Dominguez, Diane Ludin, Nina Waisman, Amy Sara Carroll & Marius Schebella); Curator: Christiane Paul.

2008

Civic Project/ Proyecto Cívico; CECUT/EI Cubo International Gallery, Tijuana,

Mexico; Curators: Lucía Sanromán y Ruth Estévez.

The Lament Project; http://www.integr8dmedia.net/viralnet/2008/each_lament.html?artist=waisman; Curators: Cindy Bernard, Kathy Brew, Tom Leoser, Beth Rosenberg, Martha Wilson. (online project).

Particles of Interest; gallery@calit2, Atkinson Hall, UCSD, San Diego, CA;
Interactive sound installation, as part of a multi-media collaboration with
Particle Group (Ricardo Dominguez, Diane Ludin, Nina Waisman, Amy Sara Carroll & Marius Schebella); Curators: Sheldon Brown, Jordan Crandall, et al.

MFA 2008; University Gallery, UCSD, San Diego, CA; Curators: Isabelle Lutterodt and Stephen Hepworth.

Travelog; haudenschildGarage, La Jolla, CA; Concept: Steve Fagin; Curator: Lucia Sanroman.

Your Documents Please; The Museum of Arts & Crafts-ITAMI, Japan; 2B Gallery, Budapest, Hungary; GALÉRIA Z, Bratislava, Slovakia (2009); Galerie Kurt im Hirsch, Berlin, Germany (2009), and other venues worldwide;
Curators: Daniel Georges and Rumiko Tsuda.

Inside the Wave; San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego, California;
Interactive sound installation, as part of a multi-media collaboration with
Particle Group (Ricardo Dominguez, Diane Ludin, Nina Waisman, Amy Sara Carroll & Marius Schebella); Curator: Betti-Sue Hertz.

2007

Training; performance, part of “*Showing*”; Telic Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; Curator: Jordan Crandall

Particles of Interest: Tales from the Matter Market in Performance Program Nomadic New York; The House of World Cultures, Berlin, Germany; Interactive sound installation, as part of a multi-media collaboration with Ricardo Dominguez, Diane Ludin, & Marius Schebella; Curator: André Lepecki

Cascando; A high-tech, improvisational performance of Samuel Beckett’s radio play *Cascando*, created and performed in collaboration with Philipp Danzeisen; Fraunhofer-Institut für Digitale Medientechnologie IDMT; Ilmenau, Germany; Curator: Holger Grossman

Soundwalk; C1D Gallery, Long Beach, CA, Curators: Kamran Assadi, Shea M Gauer, Frauke von der Horst, Scott A Peterson, Shelley RuggThorp and Marco Schindelmann

San Diego Art Prize Show; Art Academy of San Diego, San Diego, CA; nominated by Derrick R. Cartwright, Executive Director of the San Diego Museum of Art

Origin is the Goal; LACE, Los Angeles, CA; Curator: Darin Klein

**Dictation*; Marcuse Gallery, UCSD, San Diego, CA
Russell Grant, MFA Research Grant, Travel Grant; all UCSD

2006

Greater Los Angeles Masters of Fine Art Exhibition; Gatov Gallery, Cal State Long Beach; Curators: C. Finley, Jeff Foye

Where 3; a site-specific sound installation for Queens Nails Annex, San Francisco, CA, Curator: Julio Morales

The Dolphins of San Onofre; Compact Space, Los Angeles, CA, Curator: Malik Gaines

Where 2; a site-specific sound installation for Fritz Haeg’s Sundown Salon, Los Angeles, CA, Curators: Amy Adler, Zerek Kempf, Shannon Spanhake

Displacement 1.2; first year MFA Solo Show, Marcuse Gallery, UCSD, San Diego, CA

UCSD 1st prize MFA research grant, selected by Holly Willis

2005

Soundwalk 2005; Koos Gallery, Long Beach, CA, Curators: Kamran Assadi, Frauke von der Horst, Shea M Gauer

CEAIT Festival 2005; RedCat Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, Curator: CalArts

2004

**Around*, Senior Show; Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA

**Quinine*; BFA Open Studios Featured Exhibition, Interactive Objects & Spaces Exhibition, Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA

Rules Made Broken; Millicent Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, Curator: Enrique Castrejon

Character by Design; Gray Matters Gallery, Dallas, TX, Curator: Jason Cohen

2003

**Buddy*; Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA

**Freetime*; Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA

**The Painting Game*; Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA

Undergraduate Fine Art Gallery Group Show; Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA, Curator: David Schaefer, Lawrence Dreiband

2001

ArtHeals; Auction for 9/11 fund, Eyebeam Atelier, NY, NY, Curator: Andrew Mer

1999

The Passions of Art; Richard Anderson Gallery, NY, NY, Curator: Richard Anderson

1995

Revson Grant Recipients; Cork Gallery, Lincoln Center, NY, NY Curator: Rosina Florio

Received Revson Foundation Grant



Between Bodies

Interactive Sound Installation: Nina Waisman

PD programming: Marius Schebella

Guides/Translators in Tijuana: Jennifer Donovan & Ingrid Hernández

Videography: Patricia Montoya

Many Thanks To:

Lucía Sanromán for support of every kind; Carmen Cuenca, Tania Abril Castro, Selene Preciado Ramirez, Carlos Alberto Garcia Cortez and Felipe Zuñiga for generous logistical and financial support at CECUT; Luis Castro and Hortensia Hernández (community leaders and activists fighting for property and community rights in Maclovio Rojas), for their generous interviews and tours in Maclovio; Lourdes Luján (community organizer/activist against toxic manufacturing practices in the maquiladoras of Colonia Chilpancingo) for her generous interview; Jennifer Donovan, Gabriela Torres Olivares and Tambor Tamborini for their bubbly assistance with installation; Patricia Montoya, Mely Barragan, Jennifer Donovan, Gabriela Torres Olivares, Daniel Ruanova, Tambor Tamborini for their artistry in the video documentation; Jordan Crandall, Sheldon Brown, Jennifer Pastor, Miller Puckette, Amy Adler, Ricardo Dominguez Norman Bryson, BJ Barclay & Scott Richards for ongoing support throughout my time at UCSD; Pierre Galaud who selflessly offered his fabulous brains and body along the whole path of this project.

Photos & Illustrations

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