

**THAT, A R O U N D
WHICH
THE U N I V E R S E
R E V O L V E S**

**ON RHYTHMANALYSIS
OF MEMORY, TIMES
AND BODIES IN SPACE**

A research, performance and exhibition project

BY SAVVY Contemporary

IN COLLABORATION WITH

Gintersdorfer/Klaßen QdanceCenter (Lagos) FFT (Düsseldorf)

Njelele Art Station (Harare) Kampnagel (Hamburg) Hebbel am Ufer (Berlin)

ARTISTIC DIRECTION Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung

CURATORIAL TEAM Elena Agudio Anna Jäger Saskia Köbschall

FUNDED BY the TURN fund of the German Federal Cultural Foundation

**S A V V Y CONTEMPORARY
THE LABORATORY OF FORM-IDEAS**

**KULTURSTIFTUNG
DES
BUNDES**

S U M M A R Y

The research, performance and exhibition project *That, Around Which The Universe Revolves* brings together visual artists, urbanists, photographers, performers and theorists to investigate the interrelations of space and time, memory, architecture and urban planning through Henri Lefebvre's concept of »Rhythmanalysis.«

The cities of Lagos, Düsseldorf, Harare, Hamburg and Berlin will be engaged in a network to explore their specific urban epistemologies and histories. The cities will serve as laboratories of an investigation into the temporal and spatial dimensions of everyday urban life, seen through the interrelations between the body, rhythm and urban structures. Conceived as a dialogue between visual arts, performance, critical theory, and sound, the project will feature a series of artistic and performative interventions in public spaces, as well as a discursive program, an exhibition and a publication.

C O N C E P T

THE »QUOTIDIEN«
IN DELIMITED SPACE
AND TIME

Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm.¹

The French sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs stressed on distinguishing between collective memory and history in his posthumously published essay *Historical Memory and Collective Memory* (1950). He asserted that history aims at attaining an objective and universal truth cut off from the »psychology of social groups« while »every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time.« This interconnection of a people's or society's memory and a specific space and time was also a driving force behind the works of sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre, renowned inter alia for his reflections on the politics of and production of space – representation of space and spaces of representation, as well as spatial practices – and his critique of the »quotidien.« In his posthumously published book *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, Lefebvre puts a spotlight on the concept of rhythm, in his effort to synthesize a new scientific field of knowledge through rhythmanalysis. In general terms, Lefebvre recognises

rhythms in our everyday life, in our movements through space and our interactions with objects in space, i.e. in every interaction between the biological and the social. In this seminal work, Lefebvre tries to renegotiate the understanding of urban and rural space, things, media, politics etc. through the concept of rhythm. It is about analysing everydayness, the mundane, the repetitive, the »interference of linear and cyclical processes,« just as much as the cycle of life »birth, growth, peak, then decline and end,« and all these supply »the framework for the analyses of the particular, therefore real and concrete cases that feature in music, history and lives of individuals or groups.«

Might this imply that rhythmanalysis is a possibility to read both the history of a people, its collective memory and understanding what a society has inherited from its ancestors, how it cultivates or cares for the inherited and how it bequeaths this inherited to the next generation? Can the call to watch one's eco- and geosystems in a natural heritage scheme be understood through the concept of the rhythmanalyst – just like the call for the preservation of both tangible and intangible attributes of any group of people, and their technologies, architecture, and industries? In *The Critique of the Thing*, which could and should be understood as a critique towards physical and non-physical entities, Lefebvre writes about the possibility of »crossing the notion of rhythm with

¹ Lefebvre, Henry: *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013: 15

those of the secret and public, the external and the internal.«

That, Around Which The Universe Revolves will use the stratification prescribed by Lefebvre for this crossing as a starting point for artistic reflections on natural, cultural, spacial or conceptual heritage in the context of five different cities.

The project proposes the artist as a contemporary rhythm analyst who could chronic a delimited space and people. But who exactly is the rhythm analyst?

THINKING WITH THE BODY IN LIVED TEMPORALITY

The rhythm analyst will have some points in common with the psychoanalyst, (...) He will be attentive, but not only to the words or pieces of information, the confessions and confidences of a partner or client. He will listen to the world, and above all to what are disdainfully called noises, which are said without meaning, and to murmurs (rumeur), full of meaning – and finally he will listen to silences.²

In the chapter *The Rhythm analyst: A Pre- visionary Portrait*, Lefebvre gives a vivid description of who the rhythm analyst could be. He portrays an individual who looks at the intrinsic by listening to his/her body and who is open to the extrinsic by appreciating external rhythms,

without any »methodological obligations«³. The corporeal plays a very important role in this concept, as the »body serves as a metronome«⁴, ready to perceive rhythms without perturbing them nor distorting time. The body, according to Lefebvre, is a collection of rhythms with different tunes that result from history, facilitated by the calling on all senses, drawing on breathing and blood circulation, just as much as heart beats and speech utterances as landmarks of this experience. These embodied histories in the form of rhythm enable the rhythm analyst to »hear the wind, the rain, storms; but if he considers a stone, a wall, a trunk, he understands their slowness, their interminable rhythm.«⁵

ARTISTIC PRACTICES AND NEW URBAN EPISTEMOLOGIES

The complex circulations and mobility of bodies, things, information and sounds within the entities of the cities engaged in this project, as well as between them, challenge the conception of »situated knowledge« as a series of simple and direct relations between places, subjects and epistemologies. The project proposes to replace those direct relations with the complexity and flexibility of rhythms. At the hands of artistic practices within the rhythm analysis framework, new and surprising knowledge about the urban quotidian will be produced. Everyday urban activities become

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p.30

an investigation into silenced histories and epistemologies, or a protest against demarcations and exclusions that shape urban spaces.

Engaging the cities of Lagos, Düsseldorf, Harare, Hamburg and Berlin in a circuit of research, exchange and artistic dialogue, this project sets out to investigate possibilities of literally arriving »at the concrete through experience«⁶ through performativity and sculptural/ installative interventions in public space. It is to this end that the project *That, Around Which The Universe Revolves* invites artists, architects, scholars, poets and dancers to explore concepts and forms of urbanity through the prism of the rhythm analyst.

The project will set out to engage with urban settings as places to create knowledge *from*, not *about*, taking their dwellers seriously as creators, not receivers of knowledge. This is achieved by integrating things – buildings, trees, cars etcetera – and people in his/her environment »in a dramatic becoming, in an ensemble full of meaning, transforming them no longer into diverse things, but into presences.«⁷ Lefebvre emphasises on the distinction between presence and present; presence being a product of nature and culture, which is »at the same time sensible, affective and moral rather than imaginary«⁸, innately temporal in character and can only be understood through the analysis of rhythms. Present, which is made of sensory perceptions, relies on false representation (trap of the

⁶ Ibid., p.31

⁷ Ibid., p.33

⁸ Ibid., p.32

present) and thus commodifies reality by appropriating the characteristics of presence.

FRAMEWORK OF NAVIGATION

Amongst many other options, four Lefebvrian rhythmic contexts within which the participants in this project could find an anchor point in their navigation through space and time could include:

SECRET RHYTHMS

This is a context of physiological and psychological rhythms that facilitate recollection and memory, be it in the form of the oral, written, embodied or otherwise, wholly encompassing the said and unsaid. The artists in this project will explore this terrain of the secret, tickling out lost or suppressed memories, which could be expressed performatively, photographically or sculpturally, trying to make this context of inaccessible movements and temporalities somehow accessible, but not necessarily transparent or blank.

PUBLIC RHYTHMS

This epitome of a social rhythmic context encompasses public ceremonies like the carnival, but also all other events of public interest, but also self-expressive phenomena like tiredness. This phase would be a step into the politics of public space, investigating modes of expression and representation.

FICTIONAL RHYTHMS

Within this realm of narratives, the verbal and gestural rhythms play an important role. The construction and cultivation of

myth, which according to Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* is a »system of communication, that is a message.« Lefebvre sees the rhythm analyst as poet, as they both perform a verbal action with an aesthetic import.

DOMINATING – DOMINATED RHYTHMS

The power gradient inherent to every society is reflected within this context. In consideration of a project that reflects on modes of dealing with or understanding heritage within an architectural and social structure built on a foundation of colonialism, and functioning within a post-colonial space and time axis, the dominating-dominated rhythmic context plays an important role.

*The rhythm analyst is capable
of listening to a house,
a street, a town as one listens
to a symphony, an opera⁹*

This rhythm-centric knowledge scheme which Lefebvre aimed at setting up resonated with many concepts of rhythm established in various cultures and societies before and after him. Just like the legendary Nigerian percussionist Babatunde Olatunji is quoted to have said »Where I come from we say that rhythm is the soul of life, because the whole universe revolves around rhythm, and when we get out of rhythm, that's when we get into trouble.«

C H A P T E R S

- Oct 2016 C H A P T E R I
L A G O S
In cooperation with QdanceCente
Format Performance interventions
- Mar 2017 C H A P T E R II
D Ü S S E L D O R F
In cooperation with FFT
Venue FFT
Format Exhibition residencies
and performance interventions
- Aug 2017 C H A P T E R III
H A R A R E
In cooperation with Njelele Art Station
Format Performance interventions
- Oct 2017 C H A P T E R IV
H A M B U R G
In collaboration with Kampnagel
Venue Kampnagel and public space
Format Performance interventions
in public space and discursive program
- Nov 2017 –
Jan 2018 C H A P T E R V
B E R L I N
In collaboration with Hebbel am Ufer
Venues Hebbel am Ufer
and S A V V Y Contemporary
Format Exhibition Performances and
Discursive Programm

⁹ Lefebvre, Henry: *Éléments de rythmanalyse: Introduction à la connaissance des rythmes*, Paris: Editions Syllepse, 1992

A D D R E S S

S A V V Y Contemporary
c/o Silent Green Kunstquartier
Plantagenstraße 31 13347 Berlin

C O N T A C T

S A V V Y Contemporary
c/o Silent Green Kunstquartier
Gerichtstraße 35 13347 Berlin

A R T D I R E C T I O N

art @ S A V V Y - contemporary . com

M A N A G E M E N T

management @ S A V V Y - contemporary . com

C O M M U N I C A T I O N S

communications @ S A V V Y - contemporary . com

D O N A T I O N S

S A V V Y Contemporary e.V.
I B A N DE85 1005 0000 0190 5591 95
B I C BELADEBEXXX
B A N K Berliner Sparkasse