

The Test: “how will we know what it is that we are doing?”

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Abstract

The Test outlines a public art project developed by ROARAWAR FEARTATA titled The Crossing, undertaken as part of Melbourne City Council’s 2019 Test Sites program. Drawing on the figure of the ferryman from Hermann Hesse’s Siddhartha, as well Henri Lefebvre’s concept of Rhythmanalysis, this project sought to occupy the everyday practice of the pedestrian crossing, utilising the position of the artist within this everyday practice to develop a methodology for conducting a rhythmanalysis of public space. Through the process of performative adventure and the reading of rhythms, the project aimed to strategise a process for art to participate in the practice of the everyday whilst maintaining the tension of the question: “how will we know what it is that we are doing?”

Keywords: performance, public space, rhythmanalysis, everyday practice, advene, remaindered

All images by Ben Cittadini.

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The Test: “how will we know what it is that we are doing?”

The Crossing was a project developed by ROARAWAR FEARTATA as part of Melbourne City Council’s 2019 Test Sites program. Aspects of this concept of crossing were first explored in multiple iterations at various sites in central Melbourne by Benjamin Cittadini, Fiona Hillary, Shanti Sumartojo and Ceri Hann, in association with the Contemporary Art and Social Transformation (CAST) research group at RMIT University in Melbourne for the "Performing Mobilities" conference in 2015. For Test Sites in 2019, the project focused on one particular pedestrian crossing in Melbourne at the intersection of Victoria Parade and Cardigan Street, provisionally located within the designated ‘Melbourne Innovation District’, narrowing its focus to the practice and production of public space within a single site and situation.

Building upon an established practice of embodied, performative adventures in public spaces, *The Crossing* aimed to use the Test Sites format to further explore the potential for performance as a practice for *advening*, rather than *intervening*, in the everyday practice and production of public space. Further to this, the project sought to test and develop a methodology for applying Henri Lefebvre’s concept of Rhythmanalysis by firmly positioning the performer’s body as the main tool for rhythm-analysing public space.

In this article we will provide an outline of the initial concept and questions of the project, followed by a descriptive account of the performative process and outcomes on site. We then outline the development of the rhythm-analytical methodology and its application before presenting some of the ‘remaindered’ or unanalysable traces of the performative rhythm-analytical process that are the important but elusive outcomes of producing art in public spaces. Through the continuing development of the practice of performative adventure, along with a methodology for conducting a rhythm-analysis of site, we hope to further establish the practice of art in public spaces as not only innovative, but as a vital means for reading and participating in their everyday production.

Testing: questions and provocations

In Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, the ferryman takes people across the river; people that see the river as an obstacle, a nuisance, a barrier to their forging ahead. (Hesse, 1998) The ferryman tells Siddhartha that the river is a teacher and he is a listener; his life crossing the river and observing its ever-changing rhythms and moods have taught him to listen.

For *The Crossing* then, we first asked ourselves if rather than the overcoming of an obstruction, we could approach the simple act of crossing a busy intersection as an opportunity to listen to the flow that is ‘everywhere at the same time’ (Hesse, 1998). Could it be an opportunity to listen to the journey in its present passage, to not just to negotiate obstacles between the past and the future, but to live in a space that is neither a departure nor a destination, but a deeper space that is only crossing, never crossed? Could we posit a gift-giving of the self; our own body’s fleshly humility given away. Would we receive anything in return?

Secondly, we asked ourselves if this positioning of our bodies within the liminal space of a crossing might be the ideal location from which to read and analyse the rhythms of the everyday. To do so we would have to experiment with some means for documenting these rhythms that adhered to the precepts of conducting a

rhythmanalysis as outlined by Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre states that ‘an accident makes confused rhythms sensible’ however the rhythm analyst ‘does not have the right to provoke an accident’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 21). But what if the accident is art and the artist is an analyst of rhythms?

Finally, we challenged ourselves to confront the deeper question concerning the practice of performance and participation within the public sphere: how will we know what it is that we are doing?

Performing the crossing

To perform the crossing, we aimed to position ourselves clearly as ‘performer’s’, or everyday actors obviously outside the everyday actions of the site. This was important for us to test the notion of art ‘provoking’ the accident of rhythms, but also so as not to imply any conceit that we were doing anything more – or less – than the practice of art within the everyday context of the site. For this project, the uncanniness or the practice of art was crucial to the participation in the everyday. To do so, we dressed in elaborate costumes of uniform white with bespoke headwear and folders containing the rhythmanalytical self-surveying forms awkwardly dangling around our necks, as if absurdly over-sized jewellery. We also had a small portable speaker playing an ambient, harmonic soundscape to further provoke the site.

Without canvassing the public for interaction or interrupting the normative functioning of the intersection, we crossed from opposite sides of the crossing on each and every stopping of the traffic. We had a set of broad and basic actions which we would improvise according to each crossing situation, including but not limited to:

- Offering to hold hands with other pedestrians
- Bowing low as if in deference or servitude to the crossing
- Spreading arms wide in joyful embrace of the space and the people crossing
- Walking backwards, stopping mid crossing, experimenting with the propulsive movement of crossing the road, exploring the space in the time afforded by the traffic lights.

Whilst the offer of holding hands was rarely taken up, when it was it produced an uncanny and awkwardly pleasant sharing of the journey. After each crossing, we would immediately fill out the rhythmanalytical self-survey and wait for the next crossing. Each time somebody asked us “what are you doing?” we directly explored the question “how will we know what it is that we are doing?” We would answer with what we knew (we are doing an art project and conducting a rhythmanalysis of the site) and open the conversation to further discuss what we didn’t know. This often led to pedestrians lingering with us after they had crossed to further discuss our understanding, or non-understanding, of what we were doing.

We also experimented with a more specific choreography of crossing – a ritualised ‘dance’ that took place in the middle of the crossing whilst cars waited and watched and pedestrians moved around us. The dance involved walking hunched over, meeting together and bowing courting gestures where each greeted the other with semi-circular backward steps; the palms of each other’s hand slap playing patty cake, an exaggerated self-grooming of the head and its hair; a climactic lift book-ended with a return to hunched over backward steps bowing with arms down and palms out upon display. One pedestrian asked us: “is this a traditional dance?” Perhaps it was, a provincial cultural practice for this unique site.



Figure 1, 2 and 3.

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Figure 4, 5 and 6.



Figure 7.

Rhythmanalysing

In developing a methodology for conducting a rhythm analysis, two main questions arise: how do you *do* a rhythm analysis? What would it *look* like? Previous studies, drawing from diverse disciplines such as architecture, urban design and geography, have taken different approaches, mostly utilising the strategies of “mapping” either the prevalence of observed activities, the observed accumulation and dispersal of groups of people or the observed occurrence and regularity of certain events (Simpson 2012, Edensor, 2010). Whilst some have tried to place the observer’s body in the middle of the observational activity (Roberts, 2015), some have been concerned with the visual mapping of movement and the collation of socio-cultural data to build a rhythm analytical picture (De Wandeler & Dissanayake, 2013). One of the main ambiguities of the concept has been Lefebvre’s insistence that just observing is not enough, that there is no way of visually documenting the production and affect of rhythms: ‘No camera, no image or series of images can show these rhythms. It requires equally attentive eyes and ears, a head and a memory and a heart.’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 36) For Lefebvre, observing rhythms involves both the action of *grasping* and the position of the *grasped*: ‘Observation [...] and meditation follow the lines of force that come from the past, from the present and from the possible, and which rejoin one another in the observer, simultaneously centre and periphery.’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 37) He is clear that the main instrument for reading rhythms is the body of the rhythm analyst.

To approach the question of how to do a rhythm analysis, an understanding of what Lefebvre is referring to when he talks about rhythms is important. For Lefebvre rhythms are inherent in the practice of the everyday, and within this practice the body is the

foundation of the rhythmic world. From within its metabolic activities the body produces a rhythmicity – a ‘chronobiology’ – whereby the body is seen in its entirety as a rhythm-based organ (Meyer, 2008: 151). Taken together, these bodily rhythms form ‘a harmony, an isorhythm’, whose oscillations produce a distinct temporality – a *lived* time (Meyer 2008: 150). In contrasted to this, there is the abstracted clock time of contemporary life, which is set upon the *capitalisation* of temporality and its ‘imperious contempt for the body and lived-time.’ (Meyer 2008: 151) Alongside these are the narrative rhythms of an individual’s trajectory through life – birth, childhood, youth, middle age, old age and death – and the social rhythms of friendship, family, love, random acquaintance and the mutuality of other bodies oscillating in close proximity. Through all these draw the vaster cyclical rhythms of nature, the seasons, the elements and rotations of our planet (Read, 1993: 127). Rather than a ‘teleologically settled’ (Roberts, 2006: 61) or fixed and trackable temporality (linked seamlessly with the past and projecting unerringly into the future), the rhythms of the everyday are inherently complex, contradictory, conflicting, elusive and unstable.

So how to grasp them, be *grasped* by them and identify their complex affects? To begin with, we would clearly position our bodies as the primary instruments for measuring rhythms. Rather than mapping the accumulation, regularity, dispersal and aggregation of people, interactions and events, we would try to annotate the *trajectories* of our own experience of the space at regular intervals (each crossing of the intersection) over a period of time. We identified three broad areas of the experiential space that we would self-analyse after each crossing:

- Atmosphere / to include elements such as sounds, smells, heat, cold, dust, wind, pressure etc.
- Interaction / to include social participation, conversations, exchanged looks, physical interactions etc.
- Daydreaming / to include memories, fantasies, imaginings and other coalescing temporalisations that provide the depth for the human understanding of space.

Lefebvre posits classifying rhythms by ‘crossing the notion of rhythm with those of the secret and public, the external and internal.’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 17) For our purposes, this would mean our experiences in these three areas would be measured on a seven-part scale for each area. The scale would indicate a level of interior or exterior quality to the experience, whereby three would be most exterior or interior and one would be least interior or exterior. The dynamic between exterior and interior would measure the quality of the experience as it passes through the measuring body of the rhythm analyst. For example, if in the measuring period one experienced a distant, abstracted sound that elicited no particularly corporeal response, this would register a three in the exterior of Atmosphere. Or if there was a strong, physical repulsion to a certain smell, then this would register a three in the interior of Atmosphere. If there was an interaction with someone that was mostly gregarious but slightly self-conscious, this might measure a one or two in the exterior of Interaction. Or if there was a feeling of being a little lost in one’s memories during the crossing, this might measure a one or two in the interior of Daydreaming.

In the middle of the scale, zero would indicate an event space. In this space, the rhythm analyst’s experience is neither, or both, internal and external; the moment exists

in itself beyond the measurement of the rhythm analyst and is shared in its unanalysable presence by everyone. This event space represents what Brian Massumi refers to as a 'vanishing point', an 'escape' within the interactive measuring process 'where the interaction turns back in on its own potential, and where the potential appears for itself.' (Massumi 2011: 49) Within this event space our own fragmented presence co-mingles with the situation of strangers creating intimate spaces together as we cross a space that is neither departure nor destination, and within all these fragments experience is shared, each 'with its own little ocean of complexity' (Massumi, 2011: 52).

ROARAWAR FEARTATA: The Crossing Test Sites, Melbourne 2019		Site:	Date: __ / __ / __	Observer:	
Time Start:				End:	
Atmosphere	Internal	3			
		2			
		1			
	E				
	External	1			
		2			
		3			
	Interaction	Internal	3		
			2		
		1			
E					
External		1			
		2			
		3			
Daydreaming		Internal	3		
			2		
		1			
	E				
	External	1			
		2			
		3			

Figure 8.

So, immediately after each and every crossing, we would self-analyse our experience of Atmosphere, Interaction and Daydreaming on the scale, noting the exact time of each measurement and taking further notes outside of the measurement scale where we might include the rhythmic instances 'of flowers and rain, of childlike or bellicose voices, of secret meetings' (Lefebvre, 2004: 69). Due to the high volume of pedestrian traffic, we would take a rhythmic measurement approximately every two minutes. This regularity of rhythmic readings would gradually produce the outline of the *trajectories*, or experiential waves of Atmosphere, Interaction and Daydreaming, representing the oscillations between external and internal affect, occasionally touching upon the 'vanishing point' of event, tracking over the course of the measurement period. The next step for this project is to explore ways of reading the rhythm analytical data we have collected that can form the basis for further performative adventures. Rather than addressing some socio-spatial problem, the aim is to develop strategies of continued artistic production that advenes with the everyday production of space.

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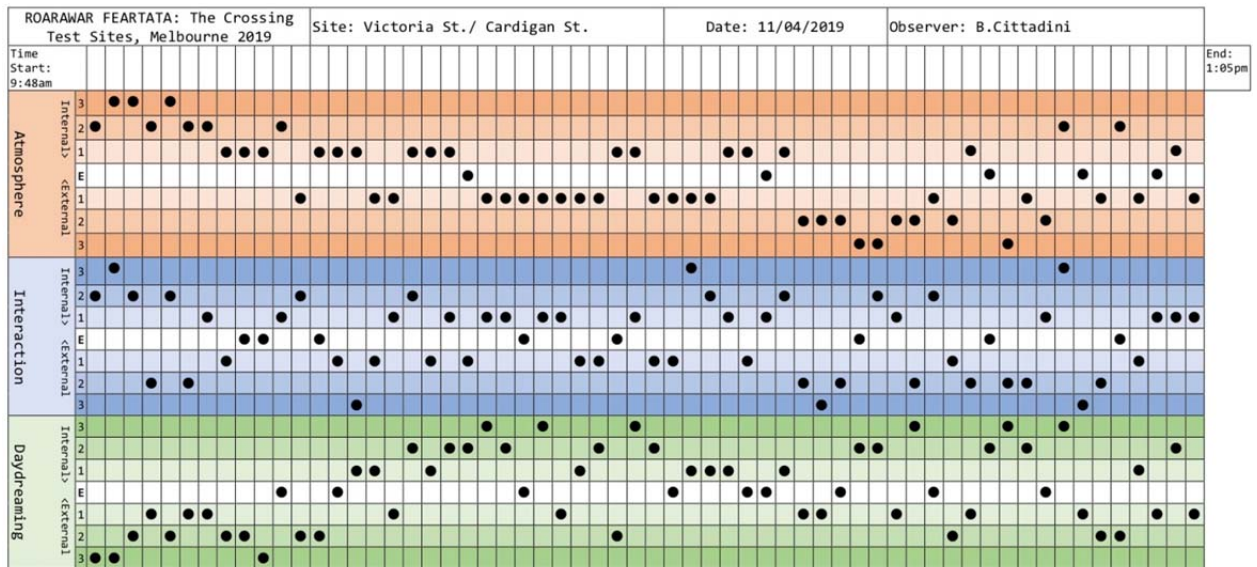


Figure 9.

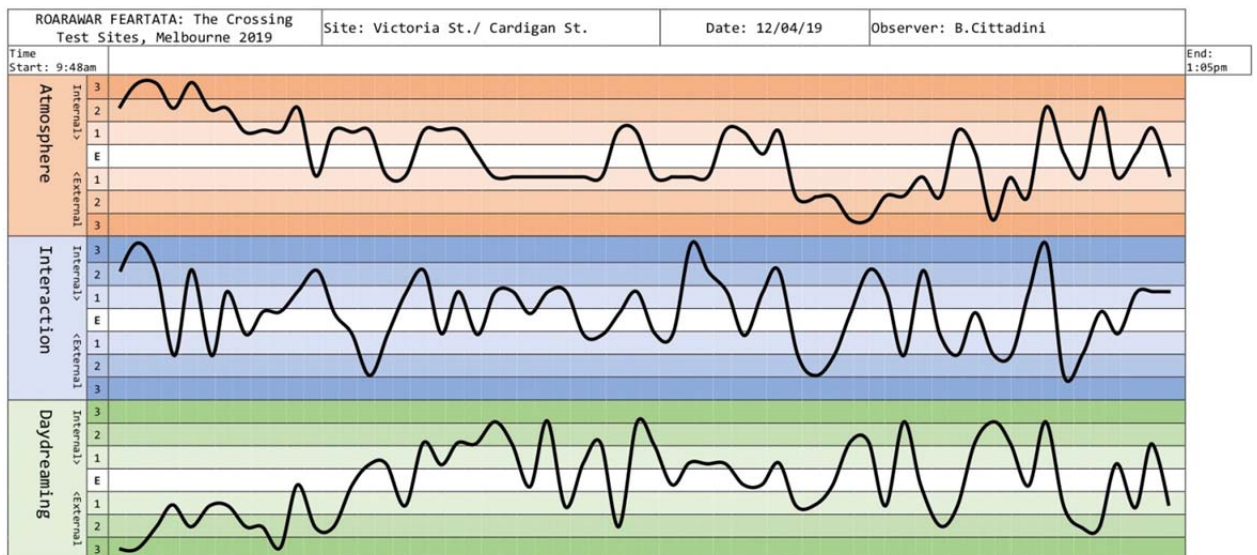


Figure 10.

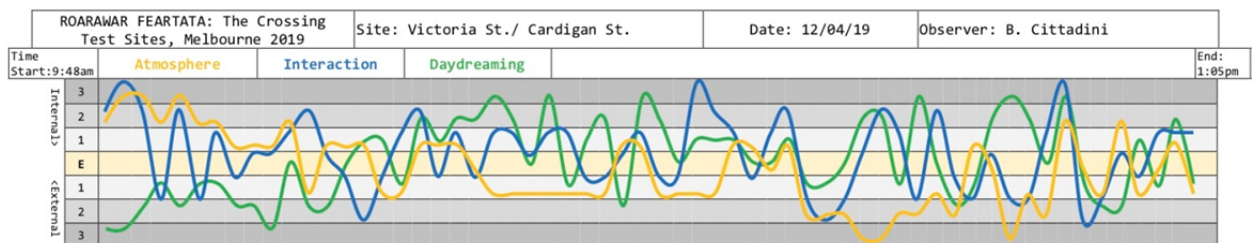


Figure 11.

The remaindered

In the lived, practiced experience of space, there will always be a surplus, something *remaindered*, an 'unanalysable but most valuable residue' that resists expression other than through poetic means (Schmid, 2008: 40). The following notes, taken alongside our rhythmanalytical readings, represent some of the traces of our experience of the situation that will forever elude analysis, but remain some of the most valuable documentation of the project. Within these traces the most valuable question remains: how will we know what it is that we are doing?

*What are we doing?
Get into it brother - fuck oath!
The Boys!
Smokers cuddle.*

How long have you been crossing the road?

I have been documenting a socialist meeting.

a whimsical smile as children play with their parents keys.
And there is lack.
There is passive aggressivity.

Are you having fun? - I'm not.

You have something in your teeth - spinach?

we are going nowhere - well nearly, almost going nowhere.

ALMOST.

Meet Victor from Rhode Island.
There is a stumble.
Nearly a tripping over - almost
Sideways glances and caution abounds.
There is blue finger nail polish.

Are we spaghetti monsters?

WTF

What?

The fuck

Sun joy.
Trolleys.
Cyclists.

Breath. Breathing. Leaf blown.

Hands held. Hold up. Joy. Held. Up.

Did ya lose a bet mate?

Emergency sirens as she walked by. SIRENS! - as they walked by!
EMERGENCY.
SIRENS.
DESIRES.

Mouth. Thirsty.

Mouth.

Fatigue.

Hunger.
I have a scratch.
I cannot itch.

More questions.
What are the parameters?
Less answers.
Savoury chips!

Are you for real?
As real as you sir!

Art is beautiful man.

Clichéd Americans.

There is a couple of them!

Child.

Infectious.

Greetings. Nodding greetings.

That way boys.
What am I supposed to be imagining?
What are we?
Scientists?

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ROARAWAR FEARTATA are a real-playtime-based-interactual-live-immerciful-performancapist-asocial-insituational art theatre established in 2003 by Benjamin Cittadini and Craig Peade. They have created text-based performances, including the award winning “Bunny”, performance interventions in galleries and curated art spaces and have conducted site-specific performance exploration residencies in inner and suburban Melbourne in Frankston, Dandenong, Footscray, Collingwood, Bendigo as well as internationally in New York, USA and Prato, Italy. In 2009 they were involved in the 'Interventionist Guide to Melbourne' at Platform Artspace located at Flinders St. Station and performed with Jill Orr, Stelarc and Domenico DiClario at Federation Square in central Melbourne as part of Karen Casey's “Global Mind Project”. They presented “I luv Amanda Crowe 4 eva” as part of LiveWorks at Performance Space in Sydney in 2010. In 2016 they collaborated with Triage Live Art Collective on “Hotel Obscura” and with Punctum Inc. on “Complete Smut: Art Auction” for the Melbourne Festival of Live Art. In 2015 and 2019 they developed work for the City of Melbourne's Test Sites program and are currently developing a new live art work through Punctum Inc's “What If...” residency program. Benjamin Cittadini completed a Master of Arts (Art in Public Space) at RMIT University that included collaborative projects with Craig Peade.