

RHYTHMSYNTHESIS

Thesis argument

Adam Laskowitz
September 2012

Architecture is losing its power to ground us in a particular place, at a particular time, surrounded by specific materials. Rhythmsynthesis attempts to engage the body, stimulate interaction, and encourage new ways of touching, listening to, and looking at space. “How do shared auditory and tactile experiences affect new forms of participation and embodied interaction?”

+ The basis of the entire thesis hinges on the statement that “Architecture is losing its power to ground us in a particular place, at a particular time, surrounded by specific materials.

This statement is weak in providing the motivation behind the investigation of the thesis. The author makes a statement without providing supporting evidence and expects us to believe it. If this is the opening statement to the entire thesis, it should be fleshed out more.

+ Within the opening abstract, the author states that “Rhythmsynthesis responds to Henri Lefebvre’s Rhythmanalysis. Where Lefebvre coined his term for an act, a means for learning and discovering spatial, social, and political rhythms through analysis and writing,”

The inclusion of Lefebvre’s term, and the definition of it, helps the reader identify what the theses ideas are based on, or building off from. However, it is a bit abstract.

+ “Rhythmsynthesis has an approach of exposing, synthesizing, and playing with similar rhythms through an interactive intervention looking towards practices of the Situationists and sound artists such as Max Neuhaus and David Byrne.”

This statement has no meaning if one does not know who these situationists and sound artists are. There are no images or information referenced for the reader.

+ “How do shared auditory and tactile experiences affect new forms of participation and embodied interaction?”

The final statement of the abstract tells us specifically what the author will be researching. He tells us that he is interested in creating new forms of participation and interaction through shared auditory and tactile experiences. According to the author, the method of research will follow Lefebvre’s “Rhythmanalysis” approach.

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Literature Review

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“As the interaction between bodies and the physical world becomes ever more mediated by new technologies, we find ourselves in a state of distraction. The virtual world inside of a screen demands our attention, causing a detachment from the physical world surrounding us.”

+ “The soundscape is a term often used to describe the vast array of sounds which exist within our environment, surrounding us every day.” ... “is the soundscape of the world and indeterminate composition over which we have no control, or are we its composers and performers, responsible for giving it form and beauty”

Starting off with the definition of this term and how it affects us at a broad scale helps shape what the thesis is focusing on in the most general of terms. The next quotation defines what the author hopes to work towards

+ “Part three of The Soundscape is titled Analysis, which Schafer breaks into six chapters: Notation, Classification, Perception, Morphology, Symbolism, and Noise.”

Schafer’s “Soundscape” was a major point of emphasis early on in the literature review which was important in describing the concept of sound and how it affects us.

+The author then starts to move into precedent studies of many different contemporary art pieces/installations that relate to the soundscape.

The major issue with the precedent studies is that there are essentially no images. The author spends 6 pages speaking about nine precedents in which he only provides one image.

+Structure is bad

The beginning of the literature review starts off good. The author reinforces the major idea of his thesis by providing context and arguments for the use of sound. As he moves into precedent studies, he begins to combine them with his methodology, jumping back and fourth between the two. It would be better if the methodology and the literature review were separated.

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Methods and Procedures

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+ Takes what he learns from the precedents and creates the “Music Table”

I think this was a good first step and attempt at creating a system that responds to tactile cues, while playing back soundscape of the surrounding environment.



+ “The purpose behind a written and diagrammatic graphical documentation of these rhythm analyses was to reveal a personal experience of rhythms in a place. By contrast, if the space were rigged with sensors that recorded people passing by against time, this idea of “rhythm” would be fundamentally different than a personal account of perceived rhythm(s).”

The author now provides a series of studies in which he sits within a space and listens to its soundscape. He then writes using his inner dialogue to explain what he hears.



+”What became important were the rhythms of spatial use, actions and interactions, which were produced as people moved through space - such as the flow of people moving up and down a staircase. And even more importantly, the sonic consequences of spatial action and interaction”



Here the author is steering away from Lefebvre’s research and is starting to define his own area of research.



These diagrams don’t really tell us much about the space being studied. There is the mapping of a sound wave, which isn’t real, with people and space. There is a slight relationship between the level of noise and the people/objects making them. But they are lazily mapped onto a background without any thought to composition.

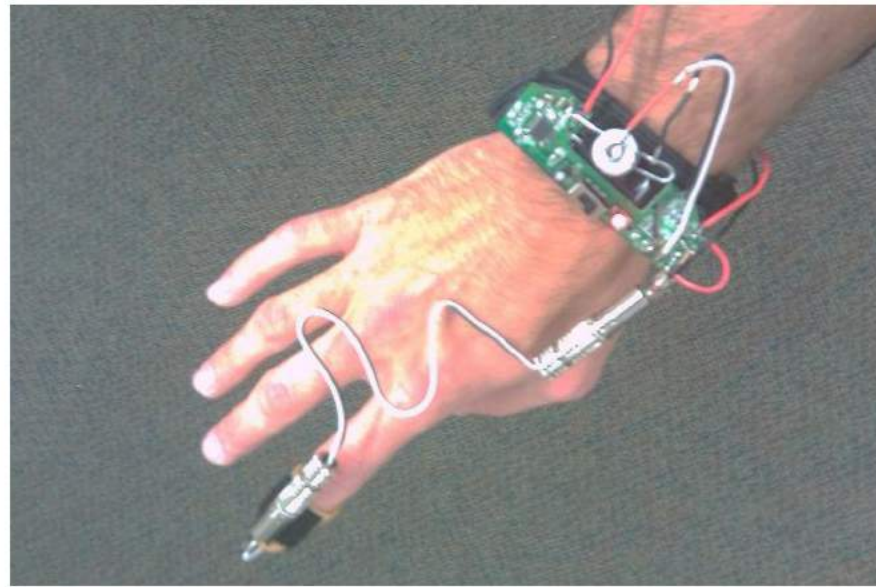
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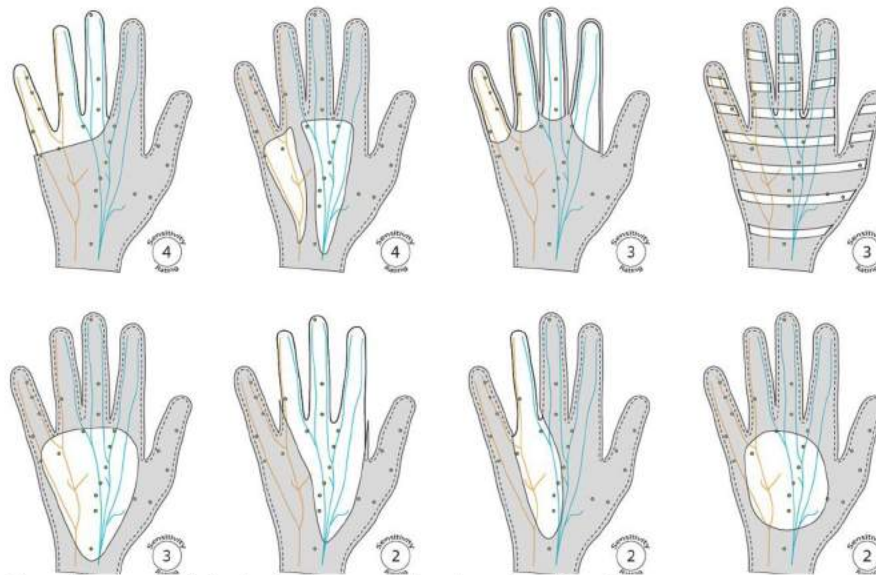


+ “Glove, which was one of the earliest studies of the thesis, attempted to address sensual relationships between body and space, touch and sound. In this study, I was trying to address both hearing a touch, relating them to one another and putting the user in a position where experience would reveal a new understanding of certain spaces, objects, and materials.”

These experiments are useful in relating directly to a single person and their experience of space in a new way.



The use of diagramming with a focus on how the nerves in the hand could affect how and what the user touches is important. It allows one to study the objects that people do and do not touch, as well as the sounds of the surfaces and objects being touched. The objective was to amplify the sounds that users are creating by touching objects to establish a closer relationship between user and object, or space.



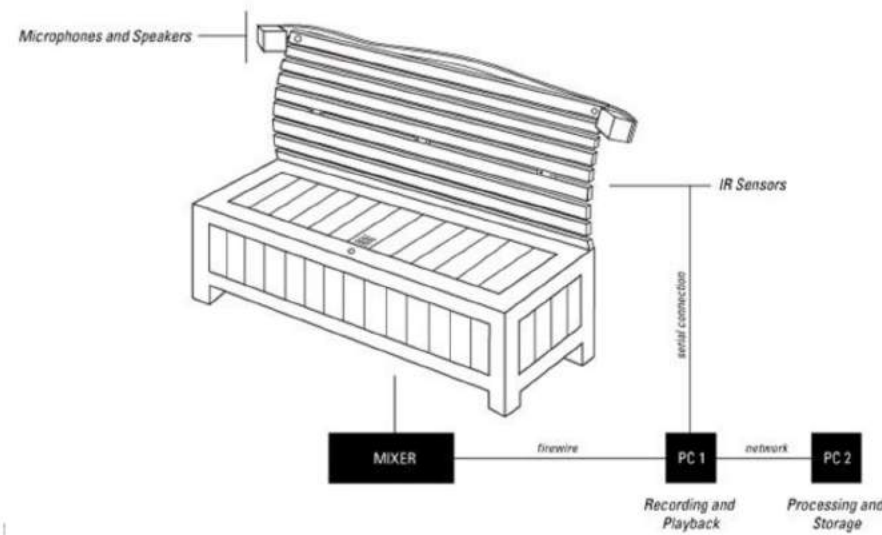
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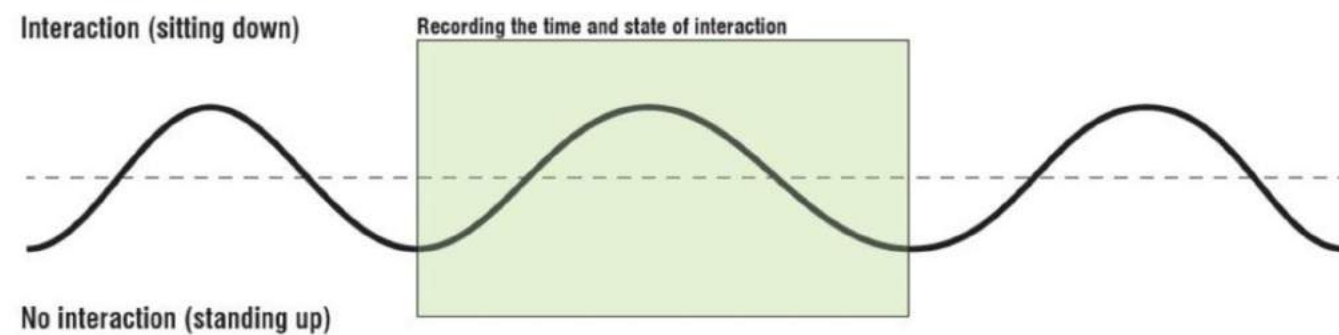
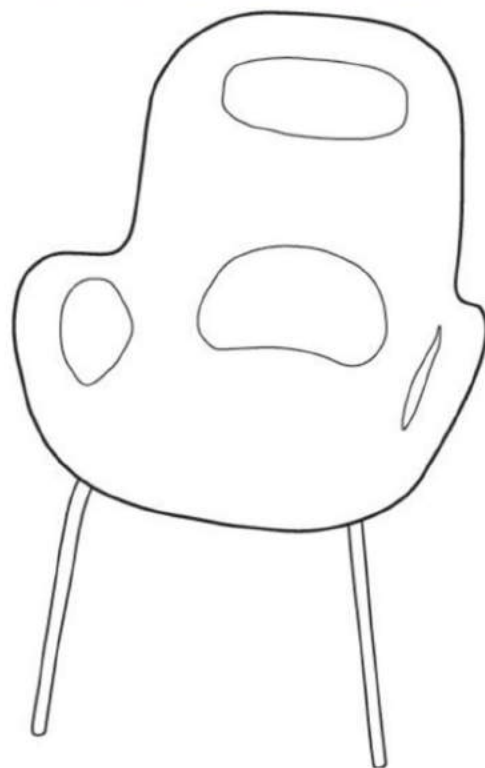


+ Hyun-Yeul Lee's Audio Bench

+ "A point of departure between a work like Audio Bench and investigations I pursued in terms of everyday architecture interfaces entails a desire to embed sensing/audio technologies into already existing spaces and objects rather than designing and building my own like Lee's bench. Audio Bugs live on existing objects in space such as chairs, columns, doors, and tables."



"Audio Bugs" was an attempt to embed sensing/audio technologies into already existing spaces. The problem is that it was just a copy of a project that had previously been done before. It lacked context and the author even admits the only difference is that he adapted furniture that had already been made.



Recording/Playback as a function of recorded rhythm of interaction with object

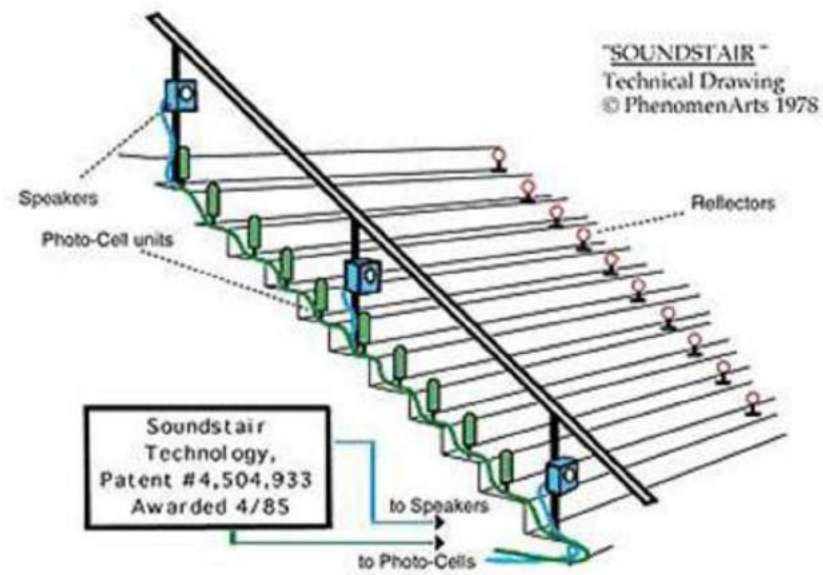
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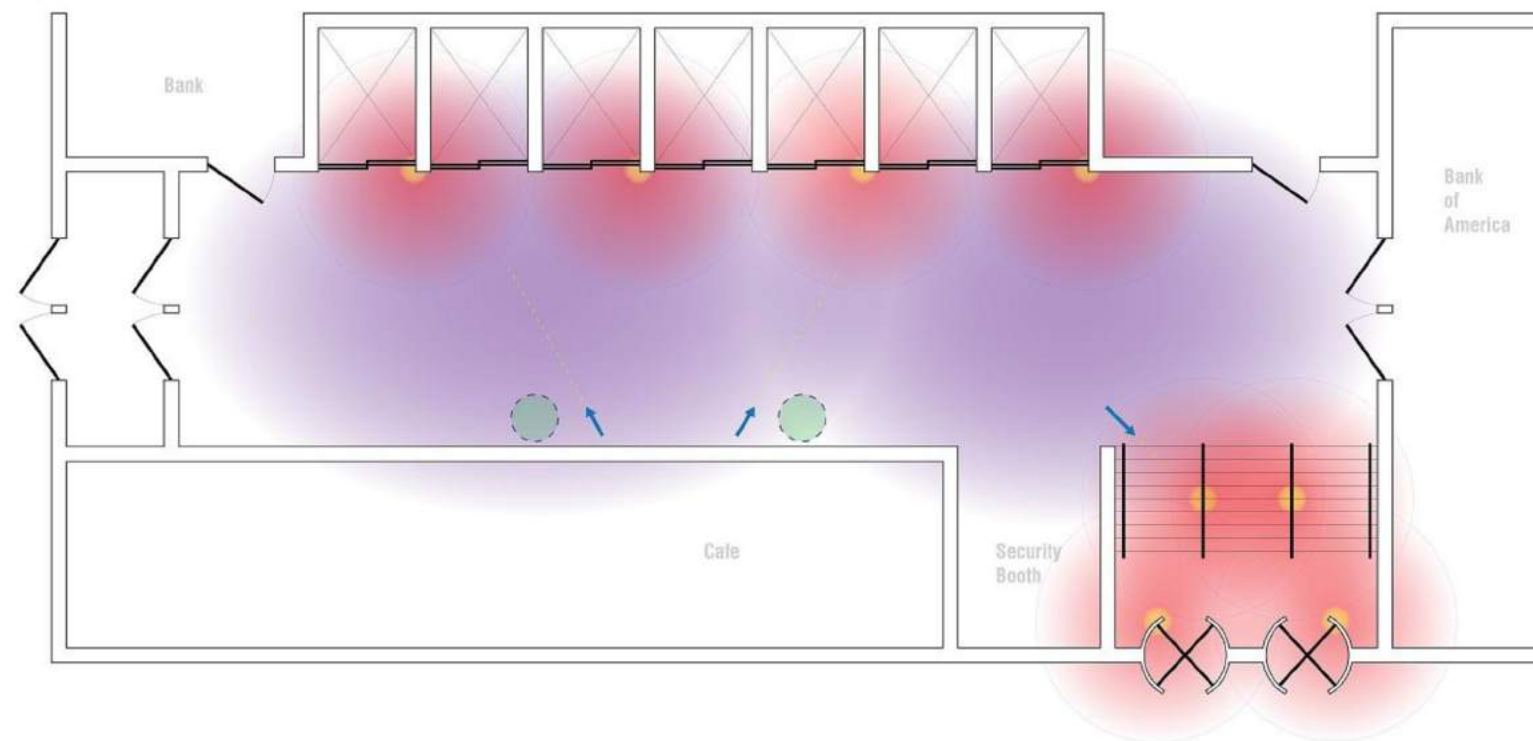


+ Christopher Janney's "Soundstair" (1978)

+ Soundstair was used as a musical device. As one stepped on each step, a new tone would play.

+ "Continuing with the idea that this thesis is concerned with materials, objects, and rhythms of interactions in space, and the consequent sounds that are produced, the Liberty Building was chosen as the installation site. Brass detailing can be seen throughout the entire lobby space of the building which creates a visual rhythm as eyes glance from end to end."

Speaks about visual rhythm for the first time when the entire thesis has been about auditory rhythm. The culmination of the thesis has become an imitation of the "Soundstair" with a few additional add-ons. It was semi-successful in amplifying one's awareness of space through the use of sound but did not achieve the goal that the author wanted. (Which was to create a space in which people would start to "play with the building" by creating rhythmic scores with others.)



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Critique

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“Mark Shepard pointed out that it was hard for him to experience the work and not think about being at a review for a sound installation. Etienne Turpin criticized a comment I had made about the installation being successful because the “reviewers began to play with the space in unconventional ways.”

+ The thesis started off strong but the ambition in the end was lacking.

It was interesting when the author started talking about the soundscapes of space and how that could then be augmented by a sound table or a glove that acts as an apparatus, or extension of the body to emphasize interactions within a space.

+ The author relied too much on precedents that had been made before him.

In two cases the author copied projects that had already been made before him, while adding some additional interactions. It was unfortunate that the final installation constructed in the Liberty Building was a glorified “Soundstair” recreation.

+ I do not think that the Liberty Building was a good site for engagement.

It may have been better to choose a public space outdoors, or a space within the campus where there are many people circulating at once. It seems to me that the Liberty building was chosen because the environment could be controlled more easily. If it were say, outdoors, new elements may have been discovered based on the randomness or the chaotic nature of the space.

+ “Mark Shepard pointed out that it was hard for him to experience the work and not think about being at a review for a sound installation.”

This was a big issue I had with the project. First, the knowledge of the tools being used was lacking, in that the installation became a series of speakers and microphones wired together. I thought the glove that was developed was the most interesting and intricate piece made. The craft and installation of the objects was bad. The problem a critic should never have is one where they comment on the craft. The fact that the author had exposed wires and speakers that were not integrated into the space was a major issue. It made the whole project feel rushed.

+ The thesis argument in the beginning was weak, but ultimately justified through literature review and precedent studies.

It was a shame that the thesis started off strong with the research but ended a little muddled. It seemed like the author made a series of models that were not related to each other and then found a precedent he liked and tried adapt it into what would become his installation for the thesis. I would have liked to see the omission of the “Soundstair” and “Audio Bench” and more studies based off of the glove and music table.

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