

Sensitizer + Activator + Disperser. Time-based arts Under Scrutiny

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Abstract: The primary goal of this paper is to add information to the classification of Time-based arts in mixed media art, performance, experimental film and music, video art and video-installation. What makes this category possible is not only how artists manage time as a concept, but also due to the fact that time becomes a problem as well. Somehow, the analysis and observation of some particular examples of time-based arts today requires more sophisticated lenses to scrutinize every factor involved in the art practice within an experience that involves beholders. Art practices today are exhibited in many stages and layers from the process itself; some of them in early conceptualization while others just before exhibit or actual broadcast. This paper proposes to add Sensitizer, Activator and Disperser to the basket of analysis factors where there already exist factors like: “effect, efficiency, context, sense-making and strange attractors”. This paper adds these classifications of attractors; Attractor as a force of distension, discontinuation, distraction into one time-based experience that has to be considered. Therefore, this is the first approach to the “Sensitizer-attractor” related source of sensitivity and understanding. “Activator-attractor” is the action that drives the performance. “Disperser-attractor” is what disrupts the time-chain and makes it into fragments of multiple experiences. The authors use one example to attempt to exemplify the model; all the concepts will be applied into the one performance exhibited in Physical Poetics 4 in ERG- Brussels, Belgium 2020.

Keywords: Sensitizer, activator, disperser, time-based arts, time-space experience.

I. INTRODUCTION

Approach to the Effect/ Affect model

The model of analysis proposed here to be applied into “Time-Space” experience is one option of a lens of observation about performance, action or video art, among others. The main goal of this lens of observation is to make a distinction between the variables that take place in time-based art practices. Those variables observed are taken from other models of observation that come from physics, mathematics, rhetoric, among others. The model was built on equations called “fake” and is based on the quantum physics equations to connect possible observations from a performative act detected in time-based arts. Common comments about an art practice are qualified under some specific thoughts: how much does it cost to make, how was the impact on the beholders, how many people mobilized the act, what is its place in history, how many changes can that art produce in society and art movements, for example. All these criteria become a part of the variables that art critics, researchers and

beholders consider at the moment to observe and use to make a critique about the art outcome. So the variables that people could use in performance, action art and video-installations are: *effect, efficiency, context, sense-making and strange attractors*.

For this analysis, the interconnection between those variables makes the actions-net complexity possible, but on the other hand, in order to better understand the diversity of perspectives applied into the same articulated piece of time, it is necessary to correlate them in order to scrutinize the net of variables and understand the composition of time. In this specific case, the strange attractor factor plays an important role within the net of actions, in terms of the unexpected or what produces distraction into the whole experience. In fact, the attractors could totally change the meaning of the experience. That is one of the reasons this paper will attempt at the first to describe three forces of attraction, specifically in terms of sense-making for the beholders or viewers: “*sensitizer, activator and disperser attraction*”.

In traditional art forms like painting, sculpting, carving, weaving and others, the art is not constrained by time or space. The art is a visible object and remains to be observed and critiqued. Performance art, however, is a dynamic experience that takes place in a determined space at a certain time, and so it can never be seen in exactly the same way again. The art performance takes place as an interaction between the artist/performer and the guest/holder and is stored in the memories of those individuals. These memories can be very vivid and informative but they are all personal to the individual. In order to give an objective and repeatable view and understanding of a very subjective art form, various lenses are used to define and critique this unique art.

To introduce the lens of observation used to describe the variables before in Strange Attractor Factor (David and Valenzuela 2019) the “Effect - Affect model”, it would be helpful to keep this idea based on the “*fake equation*” used to explain the complexity about how it works:

“*Effect/ Affect*’ is higher or lower because of ‘How’ it has been attracted in the ‘Context’. Then the planned actions result (in the performance) in a smaller or bigger ‘Efficiency’ under the parameter of the beholders... then finally make more or less ‘Sense’. Emotions and reactions (affection) are less than negative or positive energy of unplanned factors, being of greater importance (sense

making) than the physical objects of performance (resources) equals the meaning of experience from which sense is determined (Context).” (1)

$$E_f = (C) - At$$

S

E/A

Fake equation. SEF (David and Valenzuela 2019)

Time - space experience, to be more specific, refers to the time of a live action that results in one experience of living that action, but also that action can fail (failure involved) therefore the experience can change in every single step, in every decision that attempts to reach a goal or a new goal because of the failure as well. At the end, action is not the procedure or the steps, it is the time spent in the space to complete one goal. In terms of the experience two things are needed: who makes the actions and who lives the action, in this case the beholders.

Beholders transform their own role from a distant observer to the spectator-participator, and finally become the spectator-creator that art expects today. Even more, the artist becomes beholder of his own work and takes on the critic spectator role, to position his own participation role within the whole complexity of participatory roles. In order to figure out how these roles play together within action’s net of one experience, it might be necessary to look at the invisible separation today between time/space experience and the beholders roles, in tension with all other variables mentioned in the Effect/Affect lens: context, sense making among others.

The initial conditions and possible ends (anticipations and final formal outcomes, respectively). The specificity of the roles in regards to who just explores and who finally creates and composes within a particular time-based artwork procedure results in a mess (tangle) of directional progression and regression at the moment that time-based arts are observed. From a video viewer’s perspective, it is until a performance is paused or extended or until it goes over durational limits.

The main questions here revolve around the concept of time - either as waste and a useless device or as an activator of the here and now. These nuances are framed in a diversity of actions involved in the body-space-time network, attracting and affecting multiple potentialities of real-time creation as sensitizers.

This model could help in the analysis of Time-based arts to gather together what is experienced by the audience, interpreted by the art critic and instituted by the art market. So

then, this will be quite relevant when attempting to figure out how all the constellations of variables interact in one mutable net.

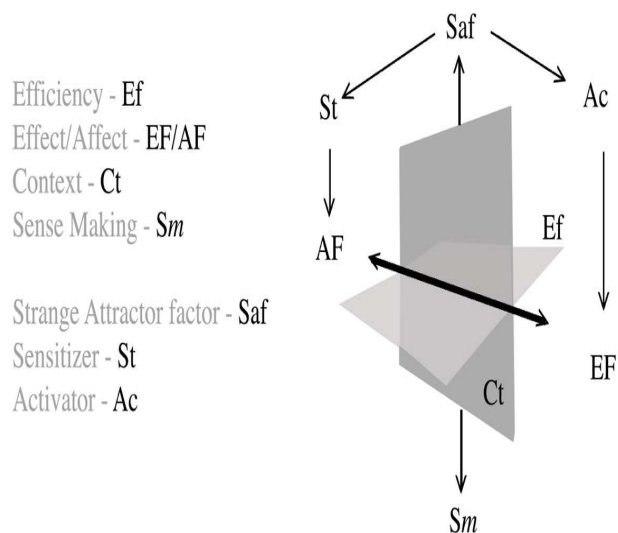


Figure 1. Model visualization Effect/Affect.

To understand the model, it is better to build a narrative between the concepts and variables involved. Under the observation of the relationship between the concepts and notions of Figure 1. Two axes are the principals here. So then, it is important to notice that all the models are applied into a Time-Based art experience.

The principal axis is the Context (Ct) where the full experience will occur-be taking into account that all contexts are merged into one general: cultural, geographic, season year, political movement, space located, durational limitations, single experience within multiple experiences like a biennale, festival, more actions at the same time, for example.

Context (Ct) is affected (AF) and transformed by effects (EF) made by the actions spread on time-space of the experience. How efficient (Ef) are affecting and effective in the transformations of the time -space of the experience determine Sense (Sm) with the beholder, audience and even to those who are developing the actions while the performance unfolds.

The Strange attractor factor could force the whole net into a different result distracting the beholder and radically changing the Sense making (Sm) and the aim of the actions planned. SAF is an external and unplanned factor that occurs within the experience transporting the whole experience into a different time -space experience perception. The initial condition of the planned experience mutates into another net of actions resulting in unexpected situations capturing the attention and distracting the beholders and participants into a new experience.

What the hypothesis of this article attempts to classify is that at least two different attractors could shape shift the time-space articulation in two directions. If the attractor is a Sensitizer it could affect (AF) the participants (beholders, viewers and art practitioners -performers) into the affective level. So then it attracts the whole net of actions into an extreme sensibility and opens up new sensations (body, emotional statement). On the other hand, if the Attractor is an Activator it could make a big impact, making the experience have more effects (EF) in the whole art experience and its composition, specifically in the aesthetic level. Moreover, the attraction could activate multiple layers of compositions and lectures, making the experience a complexity of streamed content by the use of many mix-media mutations.

Two simple definitions about sensitizer and activator. The notion of Sensitizer about “*to make sensitive.*” (3), help us to understand that the attractor could make an impact in the senses creating a different ramification of attractions, but more detectable than others, abstracts or something that is not perceptible for the participants. On the other hand, a definition of Activator that could help us with the model of observations is what is referred to as something “*to accelerate a reaction.*” (4) This means that what the attractors make in the whole experience will generate a big impact in the actions and plans, maybe modifying acceleration, lights, the use of time and energy to continue the mutation of actions.

To make it more metaphorical or complex, perhaps what D.L Dexter refers to Activator and Sensitizer in terms of Light, could help us: “*The term ‘sensitized luminescence’ in crystalline phosphors refers to the phenomenon whereby an impurity (activator, or emitter) is enabled to luminesce upon the absorption of light in a different type of center (sensitizer, or absorber) and upon the subsequent radiation less transfer of energy from the sensitizer to the activator.*” (5) To better understand the article, the notion of Sensitizer -absorber / Activator as the emitter is the graphic direction of the attractions in terms of impact and how participation could be reorganized to mutate together with the actions. For example, the actions attracted by a sensitizer attractor could absorb another and make them more sensitive and responsive to change. Meanwhile the ones who get attracted by the activators will emit more responses and become bigger and more spectacular (in failing or success), for example.

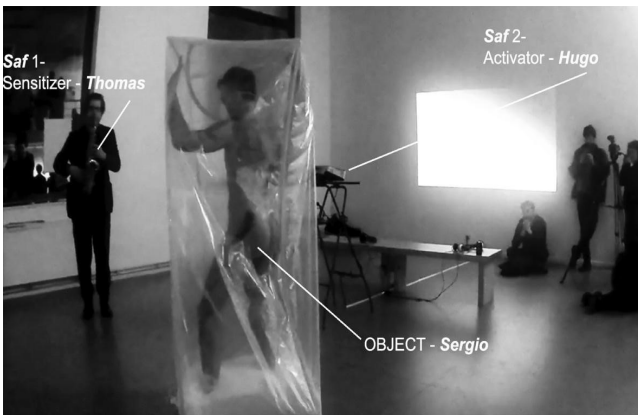
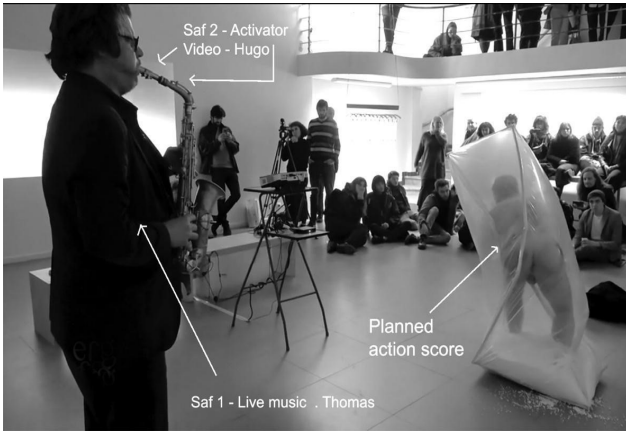
To understand in a concrete example how those “variables” could work within a performance and video documentation about the live actions, we will use an example from one of the last performances by one of the authors, to briefly connect the dots of actions and possible attractors- sensitizer -activator chain. To find out those attractions, it will analyze a live action “Microgravity - Delivered body from a private space” (made by one of the authors in February 2020), because this performance has clear examples of which forces (attractors) have produced the whole experience. One of the last events this year between performance, actions and hybrids formats was “Physical Poetics” organized in ERG – Brussels by

Alexander Schellow. for example. Physical Poetics is briefly described as: “*it offers a platform where practices within the arts, science and literature step in resonance towards each other...multi-layered experiences, unfolding each time as a particular format. Our goal is to bring together artists, scientists, thinkers, writers, translators and researchers from various fields, who develop from this occasion the original proposition.*” and continue with the description of the project “Micro-gravities” from Olfa Lopez - *Objet de l’espace*: “*the new environments we discover are forcing the frontiers of our imagination and creating the need for new tools, adapted to the unknown worlds yet to conquer. As an engineer working in space technology research, my work is to invent those tools.*” (6)

What is relevant for this paper is to consider that *Time - based media art* is mostly referred to performance and video-installation, what Lopez pointed out about the ‘frontiers of the imagination’ is performance words is about actions, specifically how planned actions can be shape shifted within a time-space experience. One specific trace The case of observation is “Microgravity- Delivered body from a private space” performed in February 2020, at the gallery in Brussels of ERG (École de Recherche Graphique). The performance itself is not what we will examine this time. Here we will contextualize a bit about the conceptual overview, the description of the actions that are based on particles suspended in microgravity experiments. Beside the formats of the exhibition and dimensions of the gallery, the whole experience resulted as an outcome of the Physical poetics and “Microgravities workshop” with Olfa Lopez, Alexander Schellow and Thomas Voigtman.

One of the possibilities for this particular art event itself brings is the interaction with other actions in a space that is shared between several artists that showcase their actions at the same time as part of the Context. Also the gallery space and ERG theater auditorium are connected. The gallery has big windows where pedestrians could also see the activity, and a hallway that connects the three spaces, linking and giving the possibility to switch spaces easily. On the other hand, a great diversity of materials were exhibited: photos, videos, video compilations, documentation of a workshop and 3d simulations edited by other artists. In fact, this complexity of materials was linked in the art performance by the idea of particles. Also included in this interdisciplinary experience was a microgravity workshop, lectures and guest artists all as part of the program of Physical Poetics. Moreover, the event itself opened up ways of exchange as well as contamination from another artwork, overlapping ideas and complicating the experience of the whole exhibition to beholders and participants.

The most important and relevant observation for this article are two unplanned simultaneous experiences presented at the same time with the actions score, in this case the live sounds from Thomas Olbrecht (7) and the wall video projection on the back from Hugo Bonnet- Massip. (8)



Screenshot 1, 2 and 3 . ERG - Microgravities (9)

The chain observed in this specific performance is how the whole experience changes. The music becomes a very immersive and emotional aspect which creates a certain rhythm in the compositions evolving around the actions planned. This is changing the course of the score, but also the relationship with the beholders and how it changes the actions performed. In this case the Saf - Sensitizer is the music of Thomas, opening new ideas about the sensations of the body in tension with the sounds.

Also the wall video has clearly two parts exactly when the performance is evolving. At the beginning it has a relationship

and makes sense with the sounds from the other attractor, and also with the materials like the tube to breath in the performer's costume. Furthermore, when the artist Hugo appeared collecting white objects from the costume, immediately there was a link with the pearls from the costume which projects the idea to another level of meaning, becoming the Saf- Activator.

The Sm (Sense-making) of the whole experience turned into something more than choreographic, into more of a visual orchestra where it flows above in many directions. It evolved further than what was planned in the beginning for all the participants and artists. Live music, bidimensional video projection and live actions surrounded by beholders (inside of the gallery or outside through the windows) all together created an experience that went beyond. The attraction forced the experience to follow directions that more than disturbed or distracted the whole situation into a distention of the forces. It moved the attention and polarized the action between two aspects that were not contemplated as part of the whole experience. Of course the live music played by Thomas created and articulated movements and coordination with the steps and actions made by the artist's body. Perhaps the video was a weak attraction in terms of the intervention in the space, and the level of sound did not affect the experience more than the accidental pictures related with the materials used in the live performance.



SP- Microgravities. Intervined screenshot from Frédéric Dupont's video (10)



Polystyrene pearls and costume - leftovers. SP- Microgravities

The relationship between both forces is: the lower the Sensitizer the higher the Activator, when one is fluctuating the actions get more attention, but complex by the real context. Perhaps the force of distraction made by their own actions, for example, the plastic and the pearls created a different third attractor: “a disperser” - *Saf - Dp*. In this case, it would refer to the phenomenon of dispersion: “Phenomenon of the change in velocity of propagation of radiation in a medium, as a function of its frequency, which causes a separation of the monochromatic components of a complex radiation.” (11) where the medium of dispersion is not the initial conditions of the experience, therefore, in this specific case the dispersion occurred independently of the Activator or Sensitizer and created a new dimension of the experience where even the leftovers of the actions were shapeshifted into a new performance, without actions needed. More interactions as a survivor and one strong component, gave a totally new sense making to the whole experience, to be considered as a new sense making - *Sm** (Figure 2). It seems to be worthy to develop a new article about this specific issue in the future.

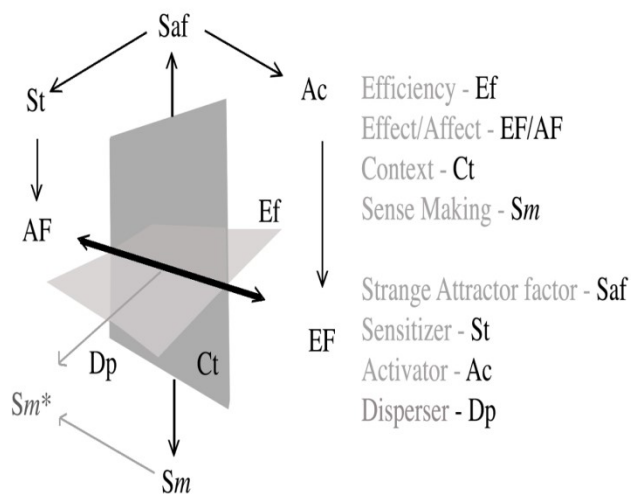


Figure 2. Sensitizer + Activator + Disperser. New scheme

To close here the reflections, it is time to observe casualties in the time art performance, as a projection of meanings. The trace of those ideas will hopefully build the new concepts and upcoming visions for this kind of practice into deep time-

space experiences. The “Sensitizer-Attractor” would point to the source of sensitivity that makes it possible for the beholders to make sense in the art performance. “Activator-Attractor” would focus on what action drives the performance. “Disperser Attractor” disrupts the performance time chain into several art experiences. Even if the planned action is disrupted during the performance, it identifies what or who activates or directs or increases the activity. The “Effect-Affect” model of observation published before by this author will be used to make and add possible definitions to this new “chain” by using a concrete video performance from the Microgravity performance within the frame of Physical Poetics 4 in ERG-Brussels, Belgium 2020.

The emphasis of this paper is to offer concepts that can be used as tools by art critics and audiences alike to make objective comments, positive or negative, about what they experience in time-based art practices. These concepts or lenses are not explanations. They are tools used to define the interconnection between the elements, materials and results produced by time-based arts. These lenses also give art practitioners and beholders a way to objectivity critique and discuss their own experience.

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