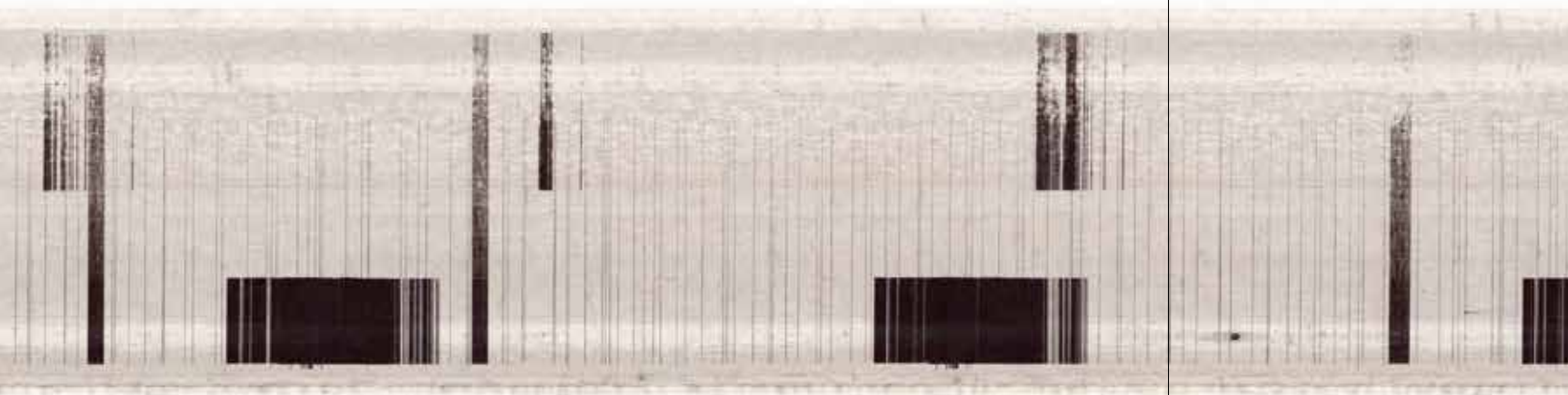
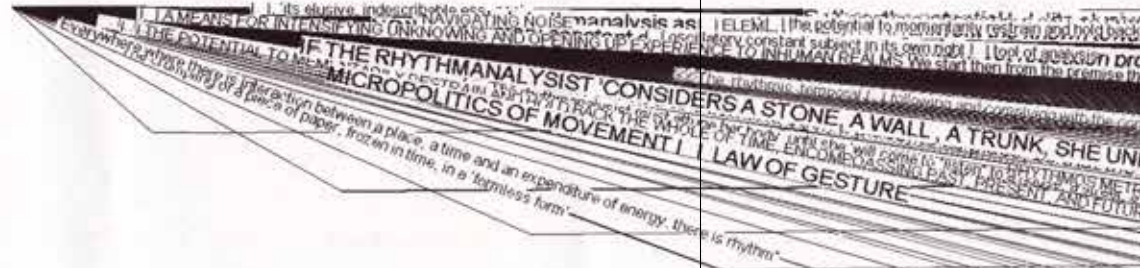


What is Rhythm and What Can it Do?

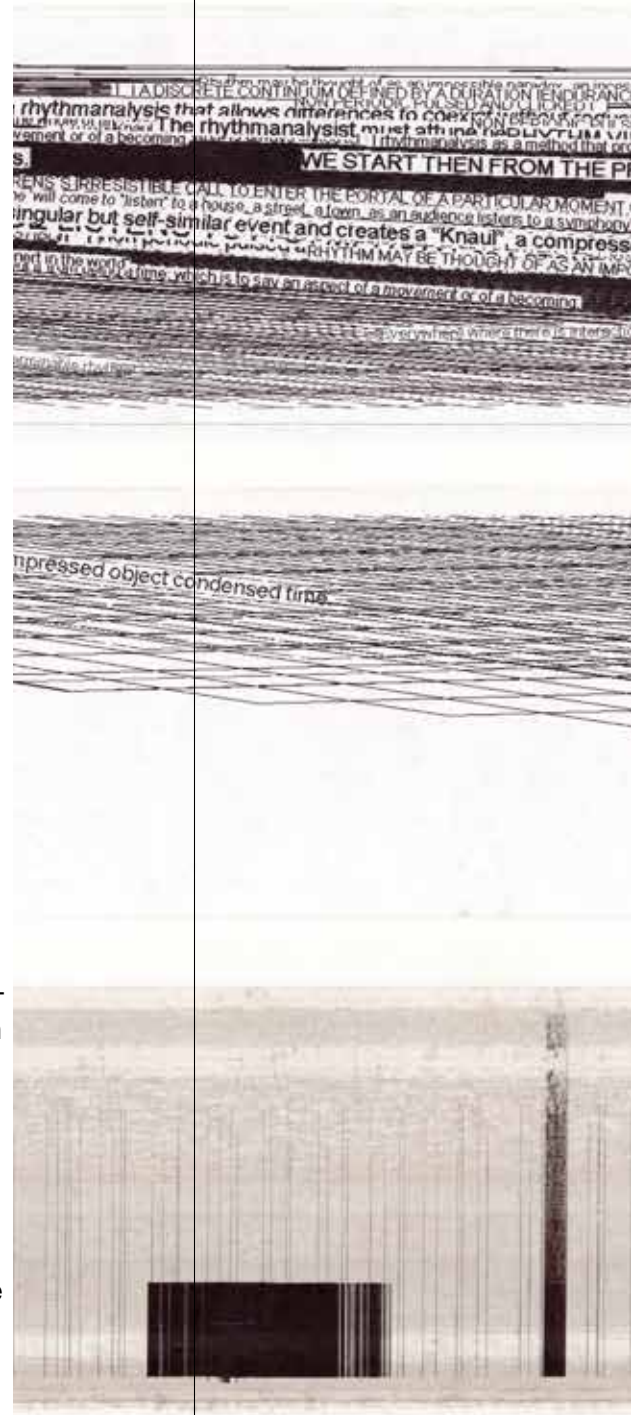
Few words have a more complicated history than that of *rhythm*. The prevailing idea is that the Greek definition of the term *rhythmos*, signifies “order of movement” and, after Plato, indicates a regular, recurring movement or measured motion of time. Rhythm, in this sense, is informed by *metron* (measure) and requires that the form of a moving object follows a particular kind of order—which would explain the usefulness of the concept for musical signification. That said, rhythm has also been associated with flow, in the popular view that wants it to derive from the Greek word *ῥεω*, meaning “to flow,” and Heraclitus’s idea that “everything flows”—referring to the uninterrupted flux of matter. Although rhythm has been linked primarily to time and to a linear, chronological arrangement of events, philosophers such as Henri Lefebvre made significant attempts to rethink it in relation to space. Hence, throughout its long history, rhythm has been associated with regularity *and* unpunctuated flow; symmetry and motion as well as the confinement of movement and pause; both temporality and spatiality. In contemporary scholarship, rhythm is a concept, a property, a practice, and a method that crosses different fields of study.

For example, rhythm is a well-known concept in poetry studies used to establish the relationship between meter and meaning (Thomas Carper and Derek Attridge); it is a tool of analysis with which to rethink various themes (Gaston Bachelard and Lefebvre); it is an element as well as a theory and pattern in writing and language (Henri Meschonnic); and a basic structure and aspect of music (Grosvenor Cooper and Leonard Meyer). For Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, rhythm is an “oscillatory constant” that links together active moments and milieus, but it is not *itself* the moment or milieu.¹ Erin Manning, writing on the micropolitics of movement and drawing on Émile Jaques-Dalcroze’s *eurhythmics*, understands rhythm against the idea of measure or cadence and “moving



through elastic points on milieus of transmutation.”² For her, the potential of rhythm exceeds actual spacetimes, that is, localizable points belonging to specific regions, showing that “not all that is proper to rhythm actualizes.”³ For Rudolf Laban, rhythm must be considered as a subject in its own right, essentially different in many ways from the concept of musical rhythm: Laban writes, “rhythm is experienced by the dancer as plastic (three-dimensional). Rhythm is not for him time-duration divided by force-accents, as one tries to interpret this concept in music. Rhythm is the law of gesture, according to which it proceeds at one time more fluently and at another time less fluently...”⁴ Jarrod Fowler postulates that rhythm is different from metrics and recurrence and that it is better grasped through the “non-frequency politics” of “non-musicology.” Non-Musicology breaks not only with musical self-sufficiency but also articulates another break: it reduces the discourses of philosophy and science to pure material, to achieve what Fowler calls “rhythrights”; rhythm as nonperiodic pulsed or clicked music.

In contemporary art practice, rhythm crisscrosses concerns of spatialized sound, architectural proportions, surface textures of different objects, tactility, acoustics, physicality, temporality, materiality, and experience. The artist-rhythmanalyst knows that, “Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm.”⁵ Concrete times have rhythms, or rather are rhythms—and all rhythms imply the relation of a time to a space, a localised time, or, if one prefers, a temporalized space. Rhythm is always linked to such and such a place, to its place, be that the heart, the fluttering of the eyelids, the movement of a street or the tempo of a waltz. This does not prevent it from being a time, which is to say an aspect of a movement or of a becoming. “Nothing inert in the world,” Lefebvre writes, “no things: only very diverse rhythms, slow or lively (in relation to us).”⁶ For Lefebvre everyday life is a polyrhythmic complex of timings of space and spacings of time, to which the rhythmanalyst must attune her body, until she “will come to ‘listen’ to a house, a street, a town, as an audience listens to a symphony.”⁷

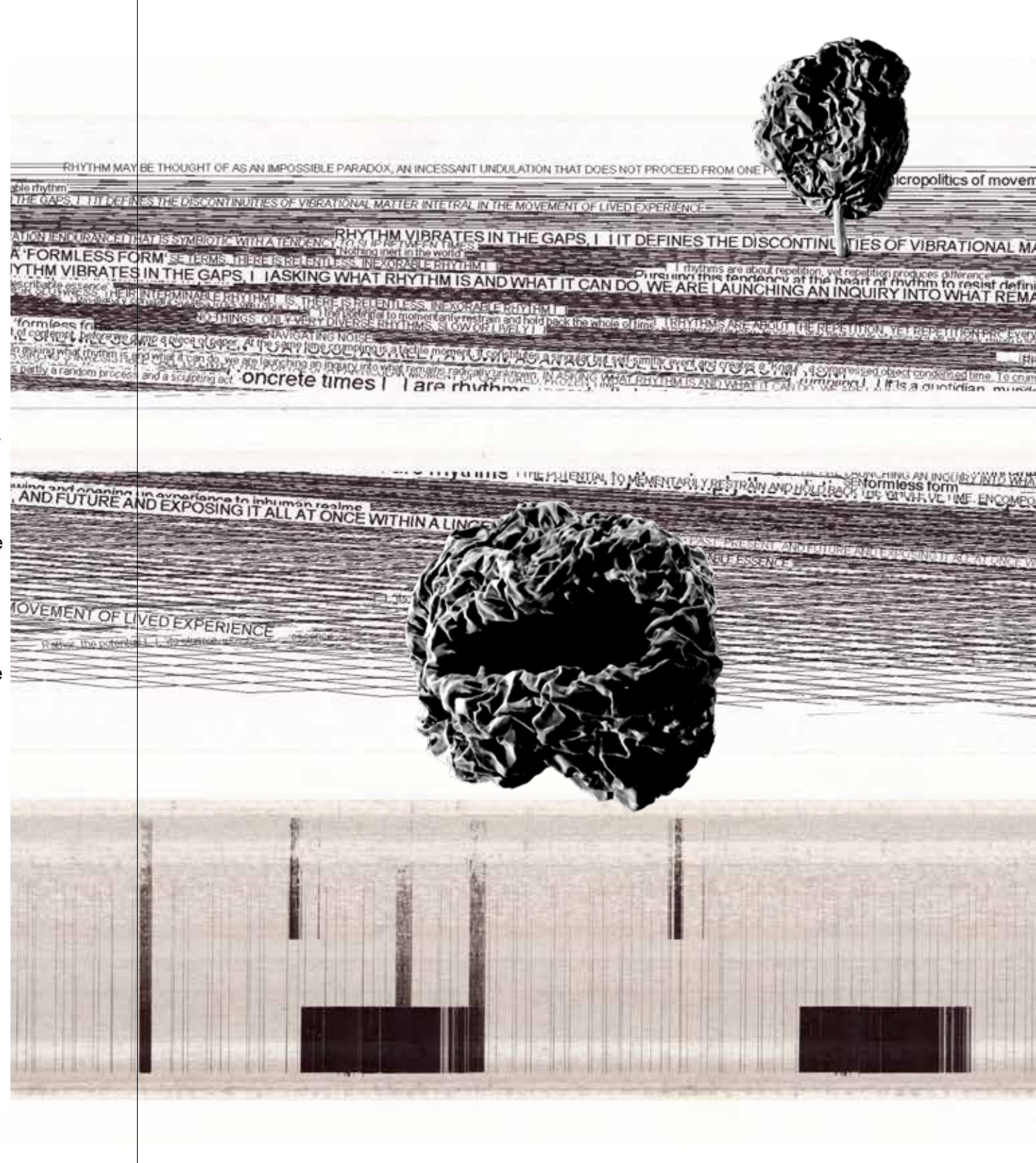


For the world is moving, everywhere and everything, without exception, is rhythm. If the rhythmanalyst “considers a stone, a wall, a trunk, she understands their slowness, their interminable rhythm.” The seven mobiles series “Sensing the Gap,” presented by Kerstin Ergenzinger as part of the Salon der Ästhetischen Experimente “Acts of Orientation” at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt Berlin on February 2018,⁸ following “Navigating Noise,”⁹ investigates the surface texture of different objects, from a tactile, acoustic, and temporal perspective. As the artist states, these are “small, kinetic sculptures, mobiles of transformation. Each is made of an original object and three 1:1 replicates that have been 3D printed using different materials and methods. Each object stores time differently, from the instant moment of scrunching a paper, to the transformation of a silkworm into a butterfly or from a slow dried seventeen-year-old apple to the geological process of mineral formation. By balancing their original weight with the weight of the different replicates, the mobiles revolve around a seemingly empty center and around what emerges from the gaps.” Rhythm vibrates in the gaps, it defines the discontinuities of vibrational matter integral in the movement of lived experience. The crumpling of a piece of paper, frozen in time, in a “formless form.” “It is a quotidian, mundane act, often an act of contempt, before we dump a piece of paper. At the same time crumpling is a tactile moment, it constitutes a singular but self-similar event and creates a *Knäul*, a compressed object of condensed time. To crumple something is partly a random process and a sculpting act.”¹⁰ The tactility of the sculpted mobiles, hanging from a temporal construction, inviting and tempting visitors to touch them, like a Siren’s irresistible call to enter the portal of a particular moment of captured, frozen time. As Nietzsche showed, art has the potential to momentarily restrain and hold back the whole of time, encompassing past, present, and future and exposing it all at once within a lingering moment. The rhythmic temporal convulsion art enables is not to be understood as an intentional act, but as the artist merely following and complying with the contingency of the materials themselves.

In summary, rhythms are about repetition, yet repetition produces difference. For example, although Lefebvre insists that there is no “rhythm without repetition in time and space, without reprises, without returns, in short, without measure” he’s also insistent that “there is no identical absolute repetition indefinitely. . . there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive.”¹¹ Rhythm may be thought of as an impossible paradox, an incessant undulation that does not proceed from one point to the next. It is a discrete continuum defined by a duration (endurance) that is symbiotic with a tendency to slip between times. Discreteness does not exclude continuity here; the two spheres enmesh via the conceptual engineering of a rhythmanalysis that allows differences to co-exist without reducing their heterogeneity. As anyone who has attempted to study rhythm will know, there are several diverse definitions and theorisations of the concept. However, the difficulty of discussing rhythm as a fixed and finite term needn’t be lamented. Rather, the potential of rhythm lies in, what Curt Sachs calls, “its elusive, indescribable essence.”¹² Pursuing this tendency, at the heart of rhythm, to resist definitions and evade expectations is the only option. In asking what rhythm is and what it can do, we are launching an inquiry into what remains radically unknown. This is rhythmanalysis as a method that proceeds from the known towards the unknown; a means for intensifying unknowing and opening up experience to inhuman realms. We start then from the premise that beneath actual events, human senses, and precise terms, there is relentless, inexorable rhythm.

Eleni Ikoniadou

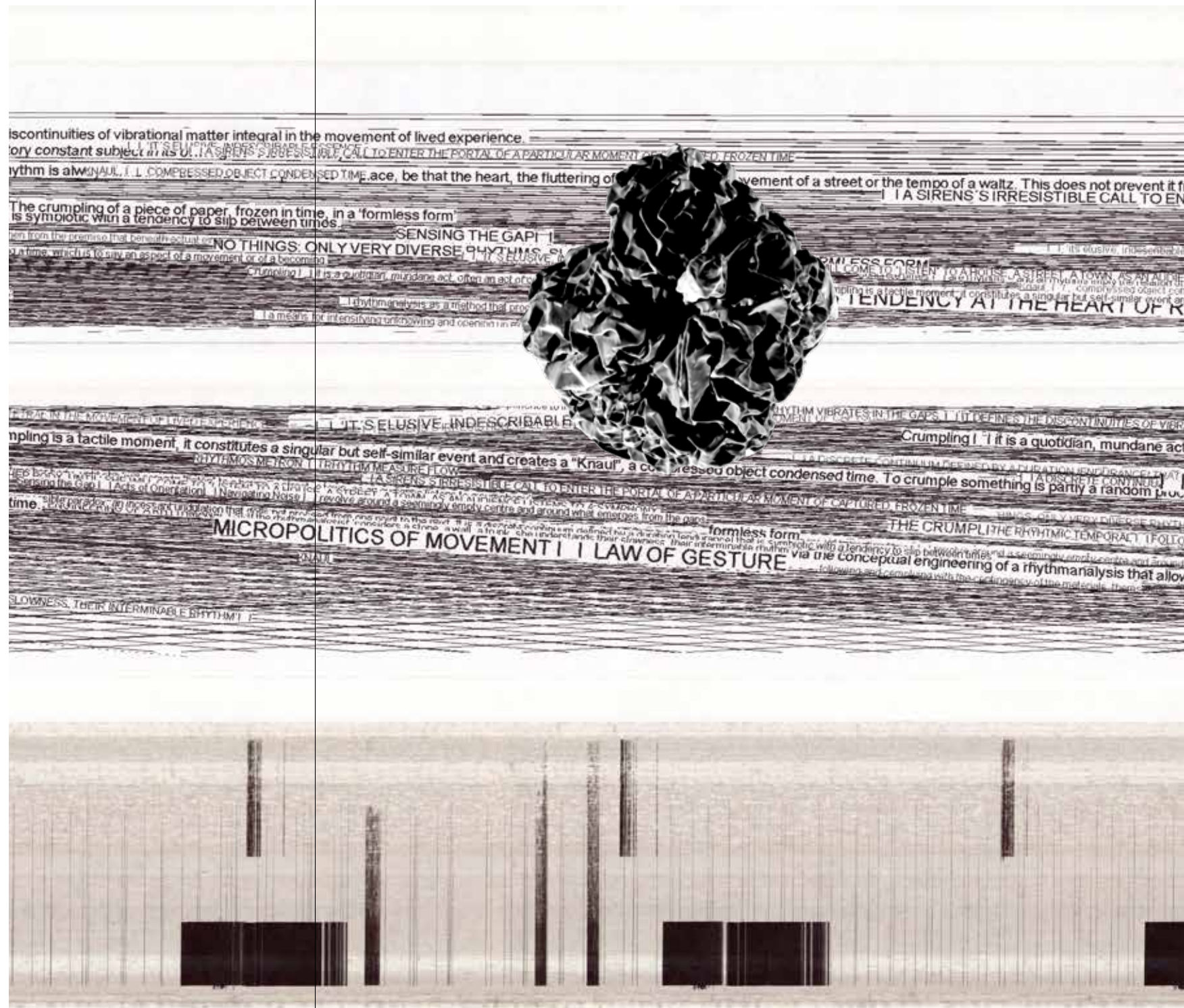
Senior Tutor in Visual Communication at RCA London, Dr Eleni Ikoniadou specializes in digital art and critical theory, drawing on contemporary sonic, technocultural, and alternative futurisms. She is co-editor of the *Media Philosophy* series (Rowman & Littlefield International), and member of AUDINT. Her monograph *The Rhythmic Event* was published at MIT Press in 2014.

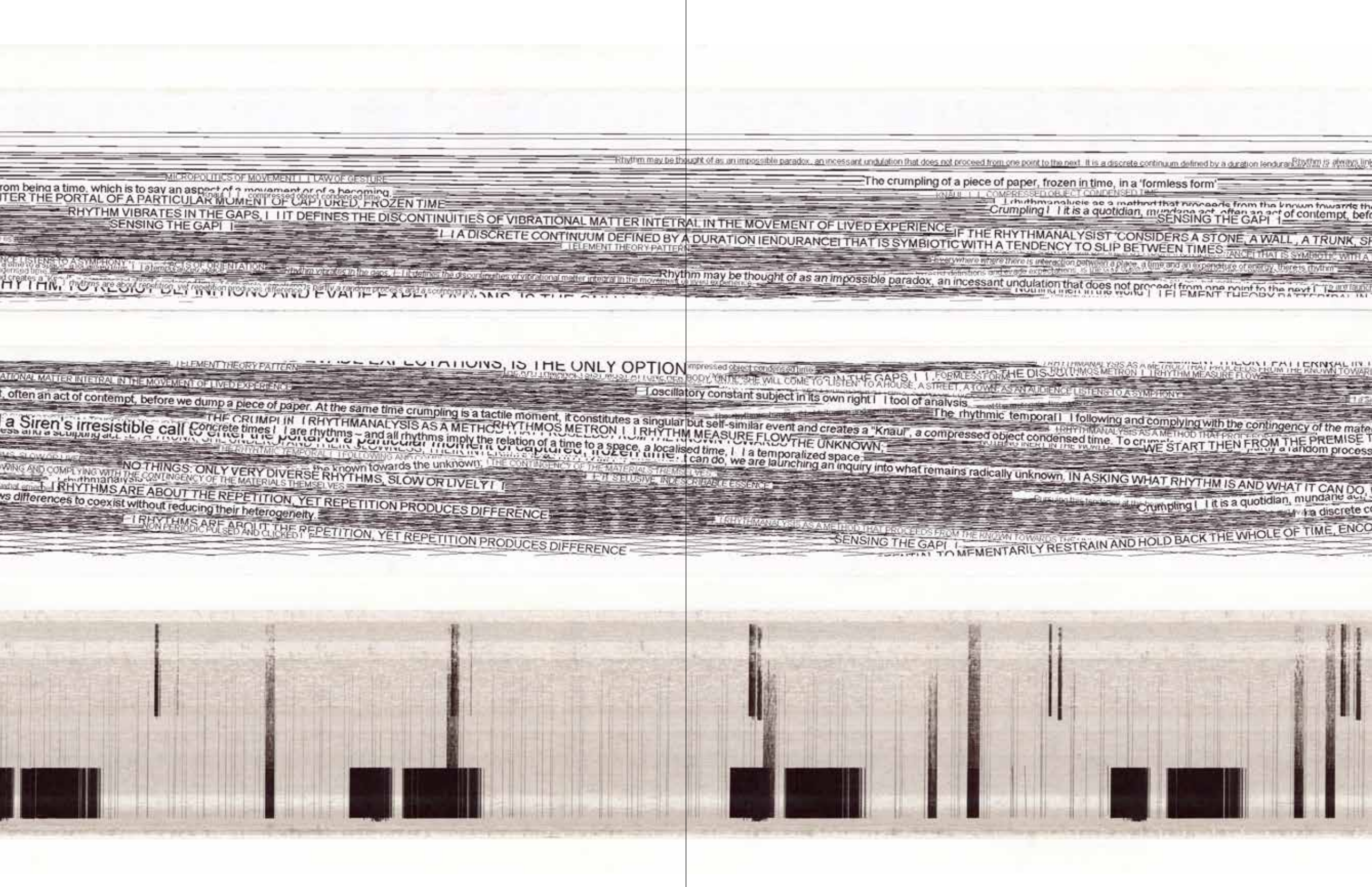


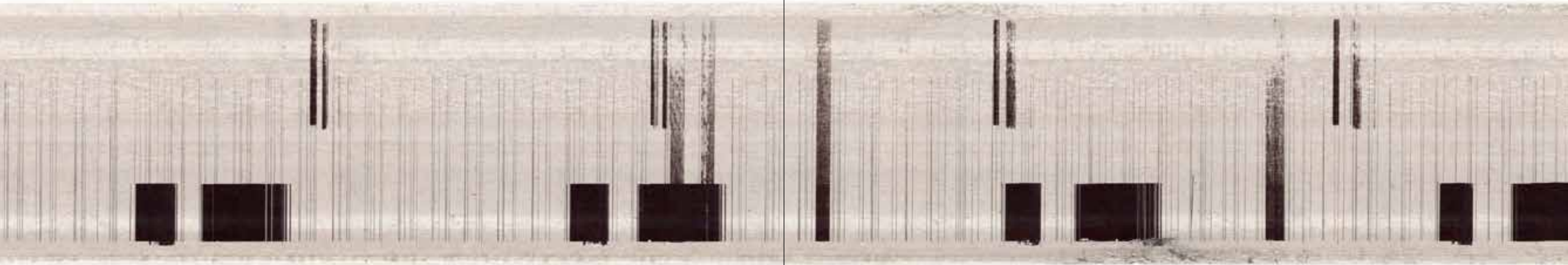
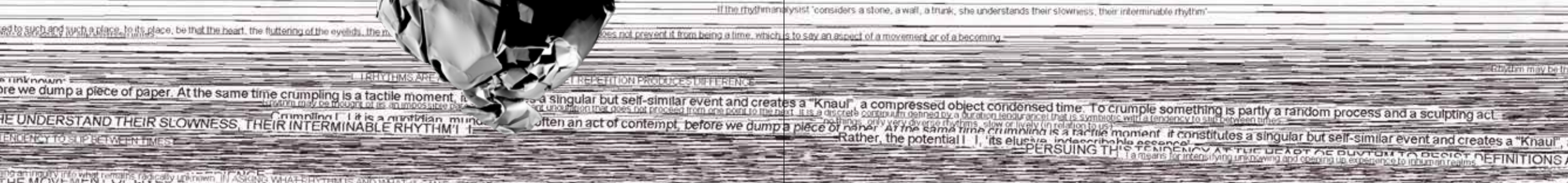


1
A Thousand Plateaus
(London, New York:
Continuum, 2002),
320.
2
*Relationscapes: Move-
ment, Art, Philosophy*
(Cambridge MA, MIT
Press, 2009), 131.
3
Ibid, 132.
4
Die Welt des Tänzers
(Stuttgart: Walter Seif-
ert, 1921), 55.
5
Henri Lefebvre,
*Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Eve-
ryday Life* (London:
Continuum, 2004), 15.
6
Ibid, 17.
7
Ibid, 22.
8
Acts of Orientation is
the title of a long-term
interdisciplinary re-
search project initiated
by curator Nathanja
von Dijk, artist Kerstin
Ergenzinger, and phys-
icist Thom Laepple to
address—from multi-
ple perspectives—the
question how we
navigate through
unfamiliar, noisy
surroundings (both
physical, and more
conceptual, abstract
surroundings) within
the sciences, the hu-
manities, and the arts.

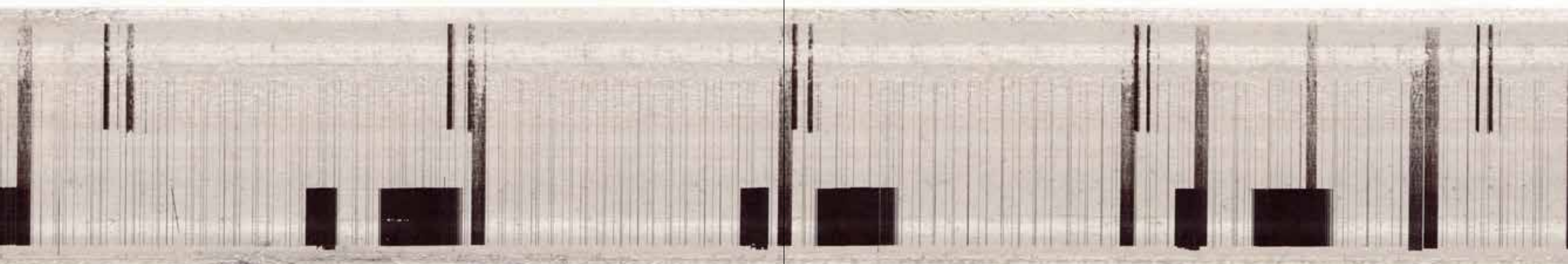
9
Navigating Noise is
an ephemeral, sound
architecture, which
can be described as a
poetic exploration of
how we orient our-
selves in a noisy, sonic
environment through
our sense of hearing
and the movement of
our body. *Navigat-
ing Noise* is also the
title of the subsequent
publication edited by
Nathanja van Dijk,
Kerstin Ergenzinger,
Christian Kassung,
and Sebastian Schwes-
inger: The hybrid of an
art book and an aca-
demic reader, it brings
together academic
and artistic contribu-
tions that address the
need for alternative
means of orientation
to deal with noise, and
to understand and (re)
establish our unstable
position within a
highly technologized,
mediated, and glo-
balized reality.
10
Artist Kerstin Ergen-
zinger, in conversation
with the author, 2018.
11
Lefebvre, 16.
12
Rhythm and Tempo
(New York: Norton,
1953).

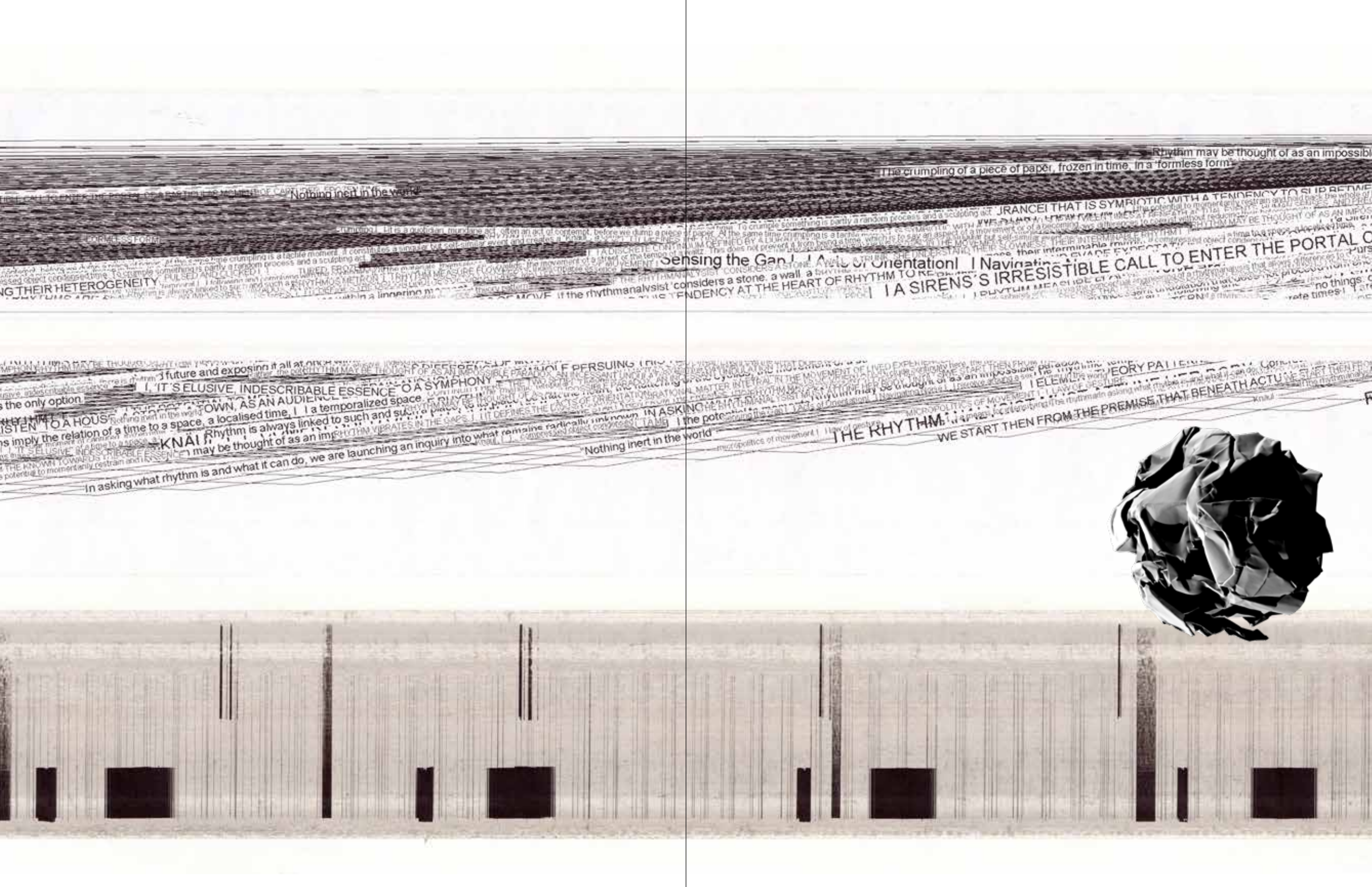






in asking what rhythm is and what it can do, we are launching an inquiry into what remains radically unknown. IN ASKING WHAT RHYTHM IS AND WHAT IT CAN DO, WE ARE LAUNCHING AN INQUIRY INTO WHAT REMAINS RADICALLY UNKNOWN.

[illegible]



Rhythm may be thought of as an impossible

The crumpling of a piece of paper, frozen in time, in a 'formless form'

Nothing inert in the world

FORMLESS FORM

ING THEIR HETEROGENEITY

Sensing the Gan

A Wall of Orientation

I Navigation

CALL TO ENTER THE PORTAL

A SIREN'S IRRESISTIBLE CALL TO ENTER THE PORTAL

the only option

HE RHYTHM

ISTEN TO A HOUSE

is imply the relation of a time to a space, a localised time, I a temporalized space

KNÄI

Rhythm is always linked to such and such a place

may be thought of as an im

Nothing inert in the world

THE RHYTHM

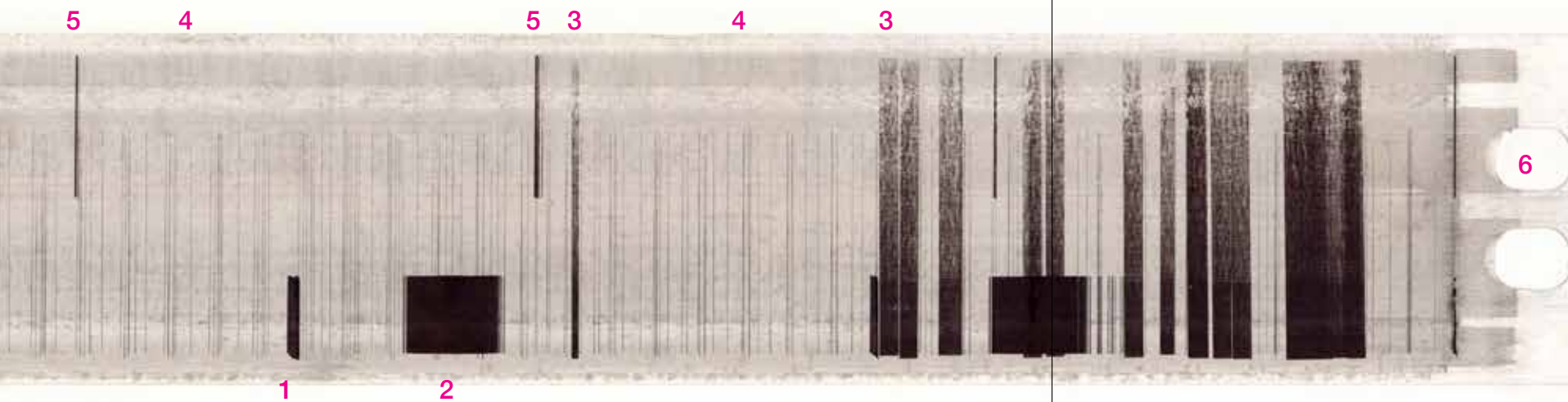
WE START THEN FROM THE PREMISE THAT BENEATH ACTU





LEGEND TO THE TIMEKEEPER

- 1 forwards movements per day – marks repeated with every passage
- 2 backwards movements per day – marks repeated with every passage
- 3 places of rest – marks the printer stopping when switched off
- 4 forwards and backwards movements per exhibition period – marks adding up
- 5 number of days – marks repeated once a day
- 6 point of return/ calibration



The contribution *on rhythmanalysis* is based on the continuously evolving installation series *Wanderer Spacetime Poetry* by artist Kerstin Ergenzinger and physicist Thom Laepple, in collaboration with writer Daniel Cauty.

Small, modified, and individually programmed thermo-printers—Wanderers—roam along paper strips in different constellations. On their journeys the Wanderers leave traces behind; a line, a dot, or words. Like a snail and its trail, the units dynamically create a poetic drawing over the course of an exhibition.

In opposition to industrial manufacturing's dictates of maximized performance, they are devoted to slowness. They translate the passage of time into movements in space. The little automata interact with the texture of time as such. Counting, heat-printing, and changing frequencies and speeds, they stress and compress moments.

A group of Wanderers is ascending and descending slopes stretched between two fixed floating aluminum swings. Each printer shares a slow mean pace but randomly changes its speed each time it turns. The Wanderers perform a gravitational experiment, while the slowly shifting weights create a continuously changing formation.

According to a set of rules based on probabilities, the machines pick “their” stream of consciousness from a text score written by Daniel Cauty. The automata partition—the poetic library from which the algorithm selects its words—reflects both on the essence of time, and connects to the different constellations and technical specifications of the machines. The writing changes with the particular location where the poetry is performed.

In this publication the automata partition for *Spacetime Poetry on rhythmanalysis* is developed in collaboration with Eleni Ikoniadou and executed by two Wanderers.

Close to the group of Wanderers, a lonely Timekeeper moves at a constant speed on top of a horizontally stretched paper stripe. The Timekeeper records and measures the duration of the exhibition on a four-meter-long paper strip. It divides the given time-distances with different vertical lines, creating a ruler-like time map. The Timekeeper moves at a constant speed, and its aim is to set its marks with utmost precision. Doing so, it manifests the system's limits and its own idiosyncratic take on them.

Materials:

Kerstin Ergenzinger in collaboration with Eleni Ikoniadou, *Spacetime Poetry on rhythmanalysis*, 2018. Two generative thermal prints, each 58 x 3400 mm.

Kerstin Ergenzinger in collaboration with Thom Laepple and Daniel Cauty, *Timekeeper footprint—72 days* Shanghai, 2017. Process-related thermal print, 58 x 4000 mm.

Kerstin Ergenzinger, *Sensing the Gap - meta / apple*, 2018. 3D surface texture rendering; *Sensing the Gap - meta / crumpled #1*, 2018. 3D surface texture rendering. From the series “Sensing the Gap – meta.”

