

## **Walking in a cage: attuning to atmospheric intensities through corporeality**

Kirsi Heimonen

This article discusses an artistic act: walking for seven sequential days inside a cage made of chicken wire in the grounds of a former mental hospital in Lapinlahti in Helsinki, Finland and its potential to offer insights into past events in mental hospitals through the notions of corporeal attunement and atmosphere. The idea for *Walking Cage* was prompted by a word in the data, which included memories by patients and non-patients of Finnish mental hospitals gathered in connection with a multidisciplinary research project. Passers-by, occasional co-walkers, weather conditions and the grounds of the former mental hospital partially formed and deformed the atmospheric qualities of the artistic research event. These qualities were experienced through corporeal attuning influenced by the Skinner Releasing Technique, a somatic movement method. The article proposes a singular way of approaching the possibilities of corporeal openness and sensibility in a choreographic process in which, illuminated by, among others, the notions of threshold and limit, one becomes a stranger to oneself by surrendering oneself to atmospheric intensities. This artistic research study adopts a phenomenological approach, drawing mainly on the ideas of Jean-Luc Nancy, Mikel Dufrenne, and Emmanuel Levinas.

Key words: threshold, alterity, mental hospital, artistic research, Skinner Releasing Technique

### **And a word emerged**

*I read, sitting at the table, memories and experiences of mental hospitals. My torso starts leaning forward over the table, heaviness suffuses my arms, my breathing becomes shallow as I pore over the seemingly endless pages. It is the darkest season, and the few hours of light rapidly pass; during these cloudy days, light fades almost unnoticeably. My corporeal being breathes in the surrounding darkness and aligns with the darkness of the recorded memories. Feelings of tiredness, pauses, withdrawal. Suddenly, I am seized by the idea of the walking cage, an enclosure in which patients were put to exercise in the open air in the grounds of a mental hospital. This notion sticks with me, haunts me, insists on action.* (Working notes 12.12.2018)

The passionate need to realize *Walking Cage* arose from a note in the research material, which comprises 91 Finnish writers' descriptions of their memories of different mental hospitals, including periods of psychiatric care, from the 1930s into the 21st century<sup>1</sup>. The writers include patients, relatives, friends, and hospital staff and their children. *Walking Cage*, which forms part of my artistic research project, was conducted within a multidisciplinary research project titled *Engraved in the Body: Ways of reading Finnish people's memories from mental hospitals*<sup>2</sup>. My main focus has been on the way in which patients were attached to the material and immaterial characteristics of mental hospitals, to different atmospheres, which I have sought to relate to through a corporeal approach (e.g. Heimonen 2020b; Heimonen & Kuuva 2020; Jäntti et al.2021).

At the core of the research process is the corporeal attunement and alignment that comes from exposing oneself to the memories of mental hospitals and listening to their resonances in one's corporeality. All the phases of this artistic research process, from reading to moving and writing about individuals' memories, are informed by a specific corporeal approach, the Skinner Releasing

Technique (SRT)<sup>3</sup>. The corporeal reading of the extensive material – over 500 pages of handwritten and typed memories – was exhausting, and SRT, the somatic practice inscribed in this corporeality, offered both a kind of method and relief. As the memories moved and resonated in the spatiality of my corporeality, in its caves and valleys, SRT also offered a space to connect with the burden of others' painful memories while not becoming (overtly) enmired in them. However, the words "walking cage", i.e. a cage for walking in, suddenly took hold of me and pierced my corporeal being, eventually leading to this exploration through and in art.

"Psychiatric treatments began to develop into medical care and therapy at the end of the 1960s. Walking cages, which were seen as prisons, were demolished".<sup>4</sup> (SKS 246)

This excerpt was written by a man who, as a child of a mental hospital staff member, lived on the hospital premises in the 1950s and the 1960s. Another writer states that "When the weather was nice, patients from the enclosed wards exercised outdoors in fenced enclosures with their nurses"<sup>5</sup> (SKS 514). Although the use of fenced exercise yards and cages was common, very little detailed information about them is given in the histories of Finnish mental hospitals<sup>6</sup>. A short description of how a five-metre brick enclosure was demolished and replaced by chicken wire in a Finnish mental hospital in the 1960s was found in a trade journal for psychiatric nurses. The change was described as a positive step, since even "those with a key" experienced chicken wire as liberating in comparison to bricks. (Uitto 1968.)

Attunement to listening through porous corporeality and integrating inner and outer realities via the practice of SRT resembles the notion of listening proposed by Jean-Luc Nancy, who describes how the act of listening, which forms one's perceptible singularity, is "to be *at the same time* outside and inside, to be open *from* without and *from* within" (Nancy 2007:14). Alongside the practice of SRT, writing is a method of inquiry in which attuning to language takes place through the spatiality of corporeality. Moreover, the wording of text is a way to meander, not merely to provide information about or define a phenomenon, since its resonance may offer something beyond individual experience (Pylkkö 1998). Hence, language can be understood as an atmospheric quality, since writing refers to something yet never quite captures it; textual qualities create something to breathe with, and yet something exists beyond them that can never to be attained.

How then, does one write about the experience of being in the artwork or part of the artwork in the installation, performative act, choreography, or performance titled *Walking Cage*, when corporeality becomes stranger with each step? One challenge is to convey a notion of corporeality that comprises not-known elements; it neither belongs entirely to the subject nor is it directed by the will of the subject. This hovering between passive and active happens in writing as corporeality is moulded by the human and more-than-human in the act of walking. Below, I illuminate the nature of the walking cage in a conversation with (mainly) the phenomenologists Jean-Luc Nancy, Emmanuel Levinas and Mikel Dufrenne.

### **Life in the cage: score and temporality**

The cube-like cage for this project was built<sup>7</sup> according to my own sketch: its horizontal dimensions were 3 x 3 metres and height 2 metres 10 cm, and it was constructed from chicken wire attached to a wood frame. It was entered and exited via a door, 1.50 metres high, requiring a person entering or leaving the cage to stoop. It was much smaller than the walking yards used in mental hospitals and asylums in the past as I wanted to intensify the temporal and spatial experience by extending the

daily duration of use and restricting the walking space. The site was in the immediate vicinity of the main building of a former mental hospital, Lapinlahti,<sup>8</sup> the first mental hospital in Finland. The event took place from 18 to 26 May 2019, including the days spent constructing and dismantling the cage. The city of Helsinki owns both the hospital buildings, which are listed, and the grounds, which are nowadays open to the public for recreation. Currently, the main building is occupied by an organisation working for and with people with mental problems and has workspaces for artists and therapists. The site is located at the intersection of the city's cemetery, a motorway, and the sea. Why list these facts? I was struck by the odd atmosphere of the place, its historical layers and sediment and the felt presence of the lived destinies hanging there, all of which strongly affected the time I spent there.



Figures 1–3: The construction of the cage.  
Photos: The author.

I walked in the cage on seven consecutive days for periods ranging from two and half hours to three hours and three minutes each day. The score took shape by attuning to the current local conditions and to those (imagined) of the past and resulted in the following rules:

no eating, no drinking, no going out of the cage during the daily walk, no jumping, no lying on the ground, no making of big arm movements, no shouting, no display of emotions, and no keys, telephone, or other belongings to be taken with you except clothing and a watch, no changing of clothing (extra layers due to cold weather were allowed along with a transparent raincoat during rainy days) and, during the event, no sudden movements.

The actions of walking and standing with the arms hanging freely formed the basis of the score. Occasionally, I allowed myself to pattern my steps differently and to squat (when pain in the lower back became unbearable). I also allowed myself to converse with passers-by, shifting instantly from being a performer to a representative of a research project, a guide on how to walk for those who volunteered to join me in the cage, a part of the artwork, a researcher, and a listener.

The strictness of the rules derived from my immersion in the atmosphere of the site and of the written memories. I had also visited the location several times at different seasons during the preceding two years, and I had read both about the history of psychiatric care and studies on mental health. SRT also influenced the size of the cage and the choreography through my continuance of the exploration of stillness that has been a revelatory practice for me. According to Joan Skinner, the founder of SRT, “Releasing begins with allowing oneself to be in the darkness – and to be

still.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it was clear from the moment of entering the cage, that not much could be done inside it.

The nature of walking and standing in the cage was experimental; it was based on attuning moment to moment to changes in the atmosphere. Moreover, SRT has directed me to things one cannot fully grasp through its special feature of evading linearity and expectations, allowing unexpected things to emerge as if out of nowhere, leaving a sense of wonderment. SRT has encouraged me to approach the unattainable, as happened in the cage, although responses to the technique vary in multiple ways depending on the practitioner. Basically it is a dance technique designed to improve bodily alignment and the letting go of tension as a way towards the goal of effortless movement (Skura 1990). Furthermore, the spatiality of corporeality, e.g., the cave-like spaces or valleys formed by the hips, intertwines with one’s surroundings, and thus my corporeality offered a spatial field for exploring and experiencing the nature of the cage and its environs alongside the written memories. SRT has led me to an attention to the self that requires abandoning the known I that occupies the (non)ground in the endless process of letting go (cf. Heimonen 2020a). Thus, SRT has enabled the openness of corporeality to also perceive the unperceivable. And although my lived experiences can only be partially inscribed, they have an affect beyond the rational.

After ritualistically leaving my belongings – rucksack, phone, wallet, keys and spectacles – near my bicycle, I hung my watch from my belt, ducked and entered the cage. After the first day, my scribbled working notes end with the question: “What will emerge from this simplicity?”

A certain discipline characterized the event, and the score was reminiscent of the resistance to and denial of spectacle displayed by Yvonne Rainer in her performance Trio A (Banes 1987:41–54). While Rainer’s style of moving – matter-of fact, direct, unexaggerated – demonstrated a new way of moving and perceiving movement, her aim of resisting spectacle failed, since watching her dancing became a shaking experience for the audience (Albright 1997:20). In the walking cage project, the sudden appearance of this strange construction, and viewing an ostensibly easy action turned out to be almost unbearable for many of the co-walkers who dared to enter the cage. It was far from being a spectacle, and perhaps that is what drew people and evoked their curiosity.

For me, the constrained simplicity of walking in the cage led, first, to even the tiniest details being corporeally experienced, even to the extent that I felt imprisoned by my own thoughts and their circulating patterns; exhaustion quickly followed from paying that level of attention. Furthermore, during moments when there were no people around, my sense of nakedness and vulnerability increased. From that state, of being allowed to be seen yet seen by nobody, which differs from the state of being seen and being aware of it, I found a relation to the trees around me, as described below.

*I did some walks with individual trees, with a birch tree, a bird cherry, and a spruce. To approach and retreat, move forwards and backwards while keeping the whole tree in sight. At times, my intense orientation to verticality and to each selected tree was interrupted as the sea invited me to turn my head: the reflection of the sea captured beautiful hues through the foliage; instant and continuous change. These encounters with the trees prompted thoughts of other walkers, the so called mentally ill patients of the past, since they too might have seen these particular trees, walked on this very same part of the earth. I fall into the fractures of time and site through the spatiality of corporeality.*  
(Working notes 20.5.2019)

Alongside perceptions arising from within and around me, human and more-than-human, the historical context was with me in each step. During the first day, the thought of an exhausting eternity powerfully appeared to me bringing feelings of anxiety, even though, rationally, I knew I could leave the cage if needed. Below are some notes related to the experience of the passing of time:

*Time drags on, the last hour is plain suffering, aching spreads like fire all over, and one thought circles around and seizes my attention: to be obliged to stay in the mental hospital in perpetuity. Vertigo in a black tunnel. Something of this corporeality slides into a shadow, and I wander as a shadow in the steps of former patients. I walk and get nowhere. Dark cloud in and around me; the traces layered on the ground throughout the decades are awakened the moment my foot lands on the ground. Minutes crawl. Though I have set myself a period of three hours for today; I am in an endless and timeless vacuum; a void from which I cannot escape and stop the walking a minute earlier. It just was like that.* (Working notes 19.5.2019)

In the research material, the writings of a few patients express their fear, from the moment they entered the building, that the hospital will be their last place of residence. Perhaps that is an atmospheric intensity that is also embedded in the buildings of Lapinlahti. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century mentally ill patients were considered incurable (Achte 1991:50), hence it was the duty of mental hospitals and asylums to keep patients locked up, not to cure them. With patients' past memories and the history of mental hospitals and asylums hovering over me as I walked, I experienced a state of there-ness and here-ness, of somewhere in between, of the here and there.

## Atmosphere



Figures 4–5: Encounters. Courtesy of Saara Jäntti.

Some months later, the event was re-lived as described below:

*In that moment, through a gesture of the head, an instant change in attention occurs, and the habitual way of being retreats. To be simultaneously in a trap and to be safe, to be inside and outside, to be seen and to see, subject and object; glances permeate and touch, lightly or firmly, the skin. Polarities wave, they overlap, at times becoming more object-like or subject-like, and momentarily the boundaries of the self are absent, leaving one just breathing the layers of history of the mental hospital and specific memories of these. Cameras intrude, they are felt to be insolent; I become an animal to be stared at, and this is intensified on days when large groups of people swarm around the cage. Surrounded by trees, birds, people and their glances, grins; sun, heat,*

*shadows, rain, wind, humidity, coldness; smells: newly cut grass and freshly baked buns, dust; sound and noise. Overwhelming possibilities for the paying of attention. And yet, restricted movements in a tiny cage for several hours on this site test the capability of this corporeality: it is overwhelmed by the atmospheres that grip, stir, permeate, oppress, and threaten it. This porous corporeality carries, mediates, and transforms atmospheres. I become shaped by them; I am inseparable from them.*

*Is it mostly due to the somatic practice of SRT that the willed and the known have started to disappear? Have the porousness and the spatiality of corporeality erased the contours of corporeality so that the atmospheres of this place can evade and permeate this corporeality as easily as the wind touches the cheek? (Working notes 24.8.2019)*

Atmospheres may be indistinct, and their existence perpetually questionable, yet one encounters things, other people, and sites through them. Dufrenne (1973:168) illuminates the nature of atmosphere by comparing it to a forest that is “seen only through its atmosphere”, referring to a quality of shade. The chicken wire created a possibility that guided attunement in a particular way.

*The chicken wire was odd: one can see through it, and yet it formed an obstacle, it labelled everything I looked at. At times all I could see was the wire, at times both it and the plants around it; finally, it travelled through the spatialities of corporeality, imprinting a pattern on the flesh. Am I becoming the materiality that surrounds me around by exposing myself to it? (Working notes 20.5.2019)*



Figures 6–7: Attuning to the environment and weather conditions. Courtesy of Pietari Karppinen and Saara Jäntti.

To be attuned and intertwined with one’s surroundings and its materiality is far from being a metaphorical notion: the historical environment permeates corporeality such that I become part of it and, at the same time, become a stranger to my own corporeality (Heimonen 2019). Atmospheres are never still, but emerging and transforming, forming, and deforming, appearing, and disappearing. The indeterminable nature of the notion of atmosphere is not a defect; it merely goes beyond rational thinking and stresses the singularity of each atmospheric situation: something is, and it affects the certainty of that which is lived, although it escapes determination, leaving space

for corporeality to be attuned and breathe in each emerging situation. In the same way as atmospheres disappear and appear, images and states of corporeality in the practice of SRT are also in continual flux, and it is this property of SRT that has brought me to a state of instant readiness and steered my perception and awareness of new realities.

The nature of atmosphere described by Dufrenne (1973: 168, 178) is vague and ambiguous. Böhme (2014:43) likewise describes how atmospheres fill spaces creating “a spatial sense of ambience”, something that exists between subject and object, and how they emanate from things, from constellations of things and persons. In and around the cage, the various elements were suspended in the air, and walkers were affected by them and led to confront themselves in different ways.

The ways in which people sensed and thought of *Walking Cage* were multiple. During its construction and afterwards when walking in it, passers-by sometimes asked questions: “Is that going to be for chickens? “Is this a cage treatment?” “What have you done to end up in there?” Such questions indicate perceptions of the cage as an enclosure for confining domesticated birds, for treating patients, or as a form of punishment. A person who had been gazing at me for a long time approached me after having a picnic nearby and asked: “What are you guarding?” This question led me to think about the whole event, and of corporeality as the carrier of memories and atmospheric intensities. Furthermore, by carrying these memories I was acting as a monument, or more accurately, my corporeality acted as medium and site for a performative mode of enquiry and manifestation as well as for the (often) painful history of mental hospitals and the treatments used in psychiatric care.

I was caught up in changing atmospheric qualities that did not originate only from the people around, but also from the weather, the vicinity of the former mental hospital and the state of this corporeality within its spaces, since although atmospheres emanate from humans and more-than-human phenomena, they are not reducible to them (Anderson 2014: 159–160). The experience is ambiguous, entailing non-intentional components, just as the notion of atmosphere is ambiguous. In this way it offers a space in which something is experienced yet cannot be put into linear form, explained by or reduced to the elements surrounding it. In a similar manner, Levinas (1996:52–53) refers to the French expression, *il y a*, something is, but one does not know what it is, it is impersonal, and Levinas calls it the noise of silence. However, something comes into being, something that was not there to be experienced before emerging in encounters like those described here. The cage acted as a generator by offering people a possibility for attuning to atmospheres.

### **Threshold and limit**

Stepping into the cage was to enter an unknown reality, which (somehow) evoked the walking yards and the living conditions of past patients in the history of mental hospitals. Each moment was intertwined with read and imagined histories, passers-by, birds, insects, plants, and weather conditions, adding different strands to the lived atmosphere. By lowering my head and passing over the threshold, something immediately changed; it was as if I had become a stranger to myself and was both temporally there and somewhere else in the history of mental hospitals. The philosopher Martta Heikkilä writes about Nancy’s notion of art as a matter of strangeness: art is the unanticipated coming into presence with its own boundaries that are unknown and strange. Art never reaches its limits, yet the tension toward itself exists. (Heikkilä 2007: 202, 300.) The temporal tension in the cage tested the boundaries of corporeality, yet what can be known about this?

Upon entering the cage, I was taken up each moment by its atmosphere, and presumably the co-walkers who entered the cage had a similar experience. Nancy writes about the experience of viewing a painting, *Death of the Virgin*, by Caravaggio, and places the spectators in the position of being on a threshold. The painting is “our access to the fact that we do not accede – either to the inside or to the outside of ourselves”, and thus it “paints the threshold of existence”. (Nancy 1994:61.) Both death and the painting as a work of art constitute a threshold for Nancy (1994:57–68); here, the cage offered a threshold in which the expectations of walking were thwarted, and something beyond language became affective.

Nancy refers to spectators viewing a painting as being on the threshold; it was more than just that for the co-walkers in the cage when they stepped into the artwork: they affected and were affected by it. Ostensibly a simple act, opening the door and walking in the cage created multiple unforeseen reactions. Some co-walkers found it hard, almost unbearable, to be in the cage, and most reported feelings of disorientation, anxiety or being lost or the need to escape quickly after entering. Many passers-by told me apologetically that they were simply unable to enter. On the other hand, those who found being there agreeable, seemed to have a purpose in mind before entering, e.g., to engage in meditative walking, or to tell me of their experiences related to mental care as a nurse, patient, friend of a patient or as the daughter of a psychiatrist. As the information sheet on the door indicated, the cage was also available for walking when I was not there, as a psychiatrist who entered it in my absence told me: “I did not enjoy being there”.

One of the most sudden, strongest and strangest reactions was that of a walker who reported having no idea that walking in the cage would be such a unexpected ordeal and felt about to faint, heart racing, after just a couple minutes, adding: “This is about limits, they’re not for me.” The co-walker’s state was sudden and visible: face pale, steps faltering. According Nancy, the notion of the threshold in art takes spectators to the limit, to something that is absolutely inaccessible. Moreover, he describes the presentation of art not only as a threshold but also as a blackout which shows spectators their limits and at the same time the space opened up by the artwork (Nancy 1994:57–67; Heikkilä 2007:170.) By being exposed to sensing also the insensible, the spectators – here participants – are at the threshold of a presentation that is formed around blackout and the inaccessibility it reveals. Something encloses and simultaneously unfolds new possibilities for corporeal attunement while eluding determination. Limit also refers to the point beyond the sayable, to the inaccessibility of meanings. Entering the cage was to face something strange around and in oneself, and as a process of artistic research *Walking Cage* offered a state in which one’s being darkens. This supports the idea of art as a way of bringing things back in their fundamental strangeness (Bruns 2002:220).

The need of participants to give meaning to the event was evident, and their suggestions or questions were also a way of embarking on a dialogue with me. In the cage, the intimacy between us grew, some hugging me before departing; only one other person at a time was in the cage with me. Something about the way of being in the cage, of being available for exploration, resembles the notion by Nancy (1994: 18) that art forces or isolates the moment of the world as such, offers a fragment of the world that is taken as being-in-the-world, an exposure of its way of being in the world. Shades or ghosts of heaviness were present in the cage, and as Dufrenne (1973:149) describes it, the work of art is pregnant with a world of its own. Odd feelings in the cage, finding some (non)sense in it, and, ultimately, nausea, were induced by the unique ways in which the walkers – including myself – went outside themselves and transcended their limits.



The cage formed a boundary from which intimate encounters took place that concerned the walkers themselves as well as mental health issues. I realized that this form of communication could be used, for example as a method for gathering further research material on memories of mental hospitals – taking cognizance of ethical issues – since the atmosphere orientated participants and co-walkers, even unasked, to share their thoughts about psychiatric care. In sum, the limited space offered a site for pausing, encountering and listening – after all, it is from the boundary that “something *begins its presencing*” [italics by Heidegger] (Heidegger [1954]1971:152).

### **Alterity, the artist as mediator and ethics**

The former lives in the mental hospital were hovering around in the air, and I was enveloped strongly by them along with the constantly changing environment. Each moment in the cage, with the view distorted by the chicken wire and the diverse encounters with passers-by, was unrepeatable, singular, and unpredictable. Moreover, the notions of alterity and strangeness that prevailed throughout the process were intensified with the amount time spent there. In this state, hovering between past and present, as perceiver and perceived, I became unknown to myself.

Attunement to the event in the context of psychiatric history shifted my role away from that of an artist towards that of a mediator, whose actions were somehow guided by the atmospheric intensities I experienced. Dufrenne (1973:31), in turn, delineates the role of an artist as that of a mediator when he describes artists as those who answer the call when something wants to come into being. This resembles my feelings of being haunted, induced by the notion of the cage in others’ memories. Furthermore, *Walking Cage* showed me that the artist’s only way of getting to know the work of art is in the act of making it (Dufrenne 1973:34). However, it is important to stress that this act of walking in a restricted site was not about representing patients’ memories from mental hospitals, since attuning to the event was to surrender, to expose myself at each moment to the unknown, and to wonder at the possibilities of corporeality also to perceive the unperceivable in the choreographic process. Attuning to atmospheres is a compositional process of dwelling in spaces, in which things matter not because of how they are represented but because they have qualities, rhythms, forces, relations, and movements (Stewart 2011). Thus, the event belongs to a diverse group of non-representational methods that seek ways to cope with more-than-human and more-than-textual, multisensory worlds. Rather than reporting and representing, “non-representational work aims to rupture, unsettle, animate and reverberate” (Vannini 2015:5).

Perhaps then *Walking Cage* served also as a mediator of past events to passers-by and to my co-walkers when, in pausing and listening its (non)knowledge, they came face to face with their corporeality. If this is the case, what are the ethical conditions and implications of this approach of attuning to memories and sites through one’s corporeality? Levinasian ethics was present throughout this artistic research, in which respect for the otherness of the other, both human and more-than-human, is embedded in corporeal attunement. The other cannot be known or thematised (Levinas [1961] 2005:172). However, these ethics will be present in each encounter, in each breath, and each time anew. Through the practice of SRT and by letting the known I disappear, even momentarily, and loosen its constraints, is an ethical act that provides space for non-knowledge (Heimonen 2020a) and prevents one from taking over others’ memories.

To underline the point, while I do not claim to know the past experiences or responses of others, or even my own, since corporeality entails the uncontrollable and unknown, by corporeally attuning to

both written memories of mental hospitals and to the site of a former mental hospital, something may arise that can be discussed. SRT cultivates the receptivity, suppleness and spatiality of corporeality, and – realising this only later – I have enabled some memories from mental hospitals to influence and dwell in the spatiality of this corporeality; ethics is lived in the sensibility of embodied exposure to the other (Critchley 2002:21), in which vulnerability towards the other happens “on the surface of the skin, at the edges of the nerves” (Levinas [1974] 2000:15).

Moreover, one might ponder whether such immersion into often painful and traumatic memories of others makes any sense or whether it is even healthy, and also how the vulnerability of corporeality in the choreographic process can be protected. As already mentioned, the spatiality of corporeality allows memories to move, so that one is not stuck in or over-burdened with them. However, the memories inspiring *Walking Cage* have been insistent and haunting, and have offered an opportunity to visit other realities, for which I am grateful. Some of them are inscribed in the corporeality, marking conquered territory: I simply live with them. Exposing myself to those memories, walking in the grounds of a former mental hospital and writing with them has been about moving and looking *with* madness, not *at* madness (Harpin 2018:12–13), about pausing and breathing the intimacy of others’ memories and the layers of the historical site, while acknowledging corporeality as processual and relational: it becomes a spatial-temporal milieu through which events pass. The known I disappears in those moments; this process is not about personal issues or gratification, and the sensibility of this corporeality has been greatly enhanced by SRT. Attuning to the historical atmosphere of a specific site and the resulting sensibility this induce in one’s corporeality was also possible for others – passers-by and co-walkers – in the *Walking Cage* project. This choreographic project is far from conveying, instead, it shows something singular that resists propositional knowledge and closure. It resembles Levinas’ notion of art as understood by Dieter Mersch, who states that art is “based on *entering into a relationship*” or remaining in a “relationship with an alterity” which is not indifferent to us. Like ethics, this kind of engagement is “a matter of *being responsible for something*”. [italics by Mersch] (Mersch 2019:78–79.)

As an artwork, *Walking Cage* proposed something and called for a response (Levinas [1990] 2019:39) from me and the participants. Moreover, being enacted on a public site meant that ethics was intertwined with politics. Levinas brought ethics into the political realm, since one must respond to more than the One, the Third, and establish a relationship with three or more people, thereby dragging the individual “out of its selfish lair”. This relationship between ethics and politics is a never-ending oscillation, in which politics is founded on ethics. (Simmons 1999.) In this artistic project, the demand of responding has reached back to the lived history of others and atmospheres that can (only) be imagined and attuned to through corporeality. It proceeded in largely uncharted territory with multiple ethical-political dimensions and issues pertaining to educating and adopting somatic movement techniques and choreographic procedures. For instance, my corporeality has been heavily influenced by SRT and its notion of a particular social-cultural body (cf. Dean & Nathanielsz 2017) and has become (almost too) perceptive and sensible to the human and more-than-human to the extent that it has become a stranger. In order to appreciate the otherness of others one needs to face oneself: “Alterity is possible only starting from *me*” [italics by Levinas] (Levinas [1961] 2005:40).

How to write is also an ethical issue. I attune to the event through corporeality and the read material steeped in the history of mental hospitals, and let the writing happen through my corporeality, meaning that it is only in the act of writing that one gets to know what one knows, and how corporeality writes through learned and practiced movement techniques. Writing is a process of

seeking ways of relating, aligning with memories, communicating even the uncommunicable by trusting words and language to affect the reader through its non-personal intensity. Nonetheless, ethics cannot be explained away; it disturbs, haunts, perplexes; it means being unsure of responses or effects yet letting ethics guide artistic actions and writing through corporeal exposure and engagement with alterity.

## Disappearing traces

The term parergon also reveals other features of the event. Etymologically, the term derives from a Greek word meaning beside the main subject, subordinate. A parergon is an accessory to a main work<sup>10</sup>. The origin of *Walking Cage* was incidental, unexpectedly prompted by a tiny, intriguing fragment of writing in the research material. The way in which one is selected by a theme can be seen as a feature of a parergon, and in this case the site, the theme, and the research approach can be viewed as subordinate to the main subject. The site of the mental hospital was on the outskirts of Helsinki when it was constructed, since it was common practice to locate mentally ill patients on the margins of society; and still today, despite the expansion of the city, the hospital site exudes an atmosphere of being in a fringe area of the city. Interest in mental patients' experiences of asylums and their silenced destinies, particularly from the perspective of artistic research, is not mainstream. And the fact that due to a misunderstanding in communication, *Walking Cage* was not advertised – which eventually led to pondering about the incidentalness of the encounters – stresses the nature of the work of art as a parergon beside the main subject or interest. Thus, the flow of information about the event proceeded indirectly; for example, one walker came straight towards me to stating: “I was told you’re here.” The blurring of the notion of limit is also present in the term parergon, since it is neither the work or outside the work, neither inside or outside, and thus it disconcerts any opposition, yet “it *gives rise* to the work” [italics by Derrida] (Derrida 1987:9). In this way it comes close to the notion of atmosphere.

The nature of the work discloses atmospheres accessed through my experience of walking in a restricted space and in intimate encounters with passers-by, individual co-walkers, and trees, leading me to ponder the notions of alterity, limit, and threshold. Being in the work of art as being in a kind of darkness escapes further determination, as attuning to atmospheres is a non-representational form of communication. Walking in the cage was about dwelling in the vague intersection of temporalities, there-ness and here-ness. It was about breathing each unfolding moment and meandering in the past, somewhere where the steps of (imagined) patients in the history of mental hospitals met mine.

And then, suddenly the exploration was over. I faced one kind of alterity immediately after the dismantling of the cage, as I drifted around the area, realizing that the intimate possibility for some further kind of knowledge was now over.

*Once again, I walked the area in both directions, yet without the cage. And when the red van carrying away the materials of the cage for recycling left the park on that Sunday morning, I took in the last images of the traces on the lawn: the circular pattern tamped on the grass. The grass around had grown high in a week and the lilac bush near the building was flowering. I continued lingering in the area, saw the site of the cage from different sides, from the nearby hillock, from next to the sea, from the corner of the building. My pace was slow, as if leaving all this for ever, never to return.*

*I walked my bicycle up to the gate, walking in the middle of a lime tree alley, all that greenness and desolation. Wistfulness, tiredness, exhaustion. And gratitude. A channel had been opened, and it will soon to be concealed in the layers of the flesh.* (Working notes 26.5.2019)

The notion of the “walking cage” awoke something in this corporeality, a gut feeling, and the resonance of the word amidst the research material further awoke in me an atmospheric intensity which took over and led to the exploration of walking in a cage. This exploration was mediated by the corporeal method of SRT, in which the spatiality of corporeality creates unknown domains linked to the sites and atmospheres around one (cf. Heimonen 2020a). The attunement and releasing processes of SRT has led me to a way of being in which certainties have faded, rendering me available and ready to expose myself to encounters in the world, with their ever-changing atmospheres. Each time I stooped and crossed the threshold into the cage, I became a stranger to myself; I experienced a kind of blackout resembling the notion of art proposed by Nancy. I became saturated with the ambient atmospheres and was enveloped by them. My connection to the human and more-than-human, the environment, and to past events related to exercise yards and walking cages constructed for mental hospital patients emerged from the state of vulnerability and openness achieved by a long process of letting go through the practice of SRT. Alignment of the corporeal evolved into alignment with the world, to be of and in the world, to search for a connectivity in which the known I is diminished and corporeality acts as the mediator of atmospheres. Through this artistic research, corporeality is understood as processual and relational: it becomes a spatial-temporal milieu, an atmosphere through which events are channelled. To conclude, while the notions of atmosphere and attunement do not enable determinations or clear answers, they offer potential ways of knowing and relating through one’s sensuous corporeality.

## References

Working notes 12.12.2018; 19.–26.5.2019; 24.8.19.

Achté, Kalle (1991), *150 vuotta psykiatria. Lapinlahden sairaalan historia 1841–1991* (150 Years of Psychiatry. The History of Lapinlahti hospital 1841–1991), Jyväskylä: Gummerus Kirjapaino Oy.

Albright, Ann Cooper (1997), *Choreographing Difference. The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*, Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.

Anderson, Ben (2014), *Encountering affect: capacities, apparatuses, conditions*, Surrey, England; Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate.

Banes, Sally (1987), *Terpsichore in Sneakers. Post-modern Dance*, Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.

Bruns, Gerald L. (2002), ‘The concepts of art and poetry in Emmanuel Levinas’s writings’, in Simon Critchley & Robert Bernasconi (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to*

Levinas, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 206–233.

Böhme, Gernot (2014), *Architectural atmospheres: on the experience and politics of architecture* (ed. Christian Borch), Basel: Birkhäuser.

Critchley, Simon (2002), 'Introduction', in Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–32.

Dean, Sean E. & Nathanielsz, Julie (2017), 'An action of orientation – Skinner Releasing Technique in reflexive practice', *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices*, 9:2, pp.179–94, doi: 10.1386/jdsp.9.2.179\_1

Derrida, Jacques (1987), *The Truth in Painting*, (trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian MeLeod), Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Dufrenne, Mikel (1973), *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (trans. Edward S. Casey, Alberta A. Anderson, Willis Domingo and Leon Jacobson), Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Harpin, Anna (2018), *Madness, art, and society. Beyond illness*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Heidegger, Martin ([1954] 1971), 'Building Dwelling Thinking', in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, (trans. Albert Hofstadter), New York: HarperCollins Publishers, pp. 143–159.

Heikkilä, Martta (2007), *At the Limits of Presentation. Coming-into-Presence and its Aesthetic Relevance in Jean-Luc Nancy's Philosophy*, PhD thesis, Helsinki: Helsinki University Printing House.

Heimonen, Kirsi (2020a), 'Writing about the ungraspable: silence as the spatiality of corporeality', *Research in Art Education*, Special Issue: Research in Art and experience, 1: 56–73. Available at: [https://wiki.aalto.fi/download/attachments/168087084/Kirsi\\_Heimonen.pdf?version=1%09&modificationDate=1585601874596&api=v2](https://wiki.aalto.fi/download/attachments/168087084/Kirsi_Heimonen.pdf?version=1%09&modificationDate=1585601874596&api=v2)

—— (2020b), 'Lost in intervals', *RIACT Journal of Artistic Research, Creation and Technology*. Themes: Experimentation, temporality and radical doubt, 1: 27–50. Available at: [http://riact.belasartes.ulisboa.pt/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/RIACT\\_1.pdf](http://riact.belasartes.ulisboa.pt/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/RIACT_1.pdf)

—— (2019), 'Tilallisuksien lävistys. Ruumiillisuuden kietoutuminen ympäristöön tanssimisessä', in Ahvenjärvi, Kaisa & Säaskilähti, Nina (eds.) *Kuulumisen reittejä taiteeseen* (Ways of Belonging to Art), Turku: Eetos.

Heimonen, Kirsi & Kuuva, Sari (2020) 'A corridor that moves: Corporeal encounters with materiality in a mental hospital', in Monika Ankele & Benoît Majerus (eds.) *Material and Immaterial Cultures of Psychiatry*, Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, pp. 334–353.

Jäntti, Saara, Heimonen, Kirsi, Kuuva, Sari, Maanmieli, Karoliina and Rissanen, Anu (2021), 'Engraved in the body. Ways of reading Finnish people's memories of mental hospitals', in Maria Bosca & Carla Willing (eds.), *Qualitative Research in Mental Health 7: Innovative and Collaborative Approaches*, Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

Mersch, Dieter ([1990] 2019), 'Levinas and the Ethics of the Arts. An Epilogue', in Emmanuel Lévinas, *On Obliteration. An Interview with Françoise Armengaud Concerning the Work of Sacha Sosno*, (trans. Brian Alkire), Zurich: Diaphanes, pp. 69–80.

Nancy, Jean-Luc (2007), *Listening* (trans. Charlotte Mandell), New York: Fordham University Press.

— (1994), *The Muses* (trans. Peggy Kamuf), Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Lévinas, Emmanuel ([1990] 2019), *On Obliteration. An Interview with Françoise Armengaud Concerning the Work of Sacha Sosno*, (trans. Brian Alkire), Zurich: Diaphanes.

— ([1961] 2005), *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority* (trans. Alphonso Lingis), Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press.

— ([1974] 2000), *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (trans. Alphonso Lingis), Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press.

— (1996), *Etiikka ja äärettömyys (Ethics and Infinity)*, (trans. Antti Pönni), Helsinki: Gaudeamus.

Dictionary com (n.d.), 'Parergon'. Available at: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/parergon>. Accessed 20 December 2019.

Pylkkö, Pauli (1998), 'Suomen kieli on vetäytymässä ja jättämässä meidät rauhaan toisiltamme', *niin & näin filosofinen aikakauslehti* ('on hand & other hand philosophical journal') 1, pp. 44–49.

Skura, Stephanie (1990), 'Releasing dance. Interview with Joan Skinner', *Contact Quarterly* 15:3, pp. 11–18.

Stewart, Kathleen (2011), 'Atmospheric attunements', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29, pp. 445–453.

Uitto, Teuvo (1968), 'Se kaatui sittenkin...' (It fell down, after all...), *Mielisairaanhoidaja*, 10, p. 406.

Vannini, Phillip (2015), 'Non-Representational Research Methodologies. An Introduction', in Philipp Vannini (Ed.) *Non-Representational Methodologies. Re-Envisioning Research*. New York & London: Routledge, pp. 1–18.

---

<sup>1</sup> The material was collected and archived by the Finnish Literature Society (abbreviation SKS) in 2014–2015. A call by SKS was published in the newsletters and journals of some service user and family members' organizations.

---

<sup>2</sup> The multidisciplinary research project (2017–2020) is funded by the Kone Foundation, and the other four researchers approach the same material from cultural and literary perspectives in the context of psychiatric history.

<sup>3</sup> I have practised the Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT) for over 15 years, and I am a certified teacher of the introductory level. From now on, I refer to it by the abbreviation SRT.

<sup>4</sup> The original text in Finnish: "Psykiatriset hoitomenetelmät alkoivat 60-luvulla kehittyä lääkehoitoihin ja terapiaan perustuviksi. Vankilaksi mielleyt kävelyhäkit purettiin". (SKS 246)

<sup>5</sup> The original text in Finnish: "Suljettujen osastojen potilaat ulkoilivat kauniilla ilmoilla hoitajineen aidatuilla kävelypihoilla". (SKS 514)

<sup>6</sup> I thank Anu Rissanen, a historian and colleague in the research project, for sharing this background information on walking cages and walking yards and for giving me the reference.

<sup>7</sup> I thank Tarmo Halme for building and dismantling the cage, as well as for interesting conversations.

<sup>8</sup> Lapinlahti was a mental hospital during the years 1841–2008.

<sup>9</sup> From material given during SRT teacher training 2016–2017.

<sup>10</sup> For parergon, see <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/parergon>