

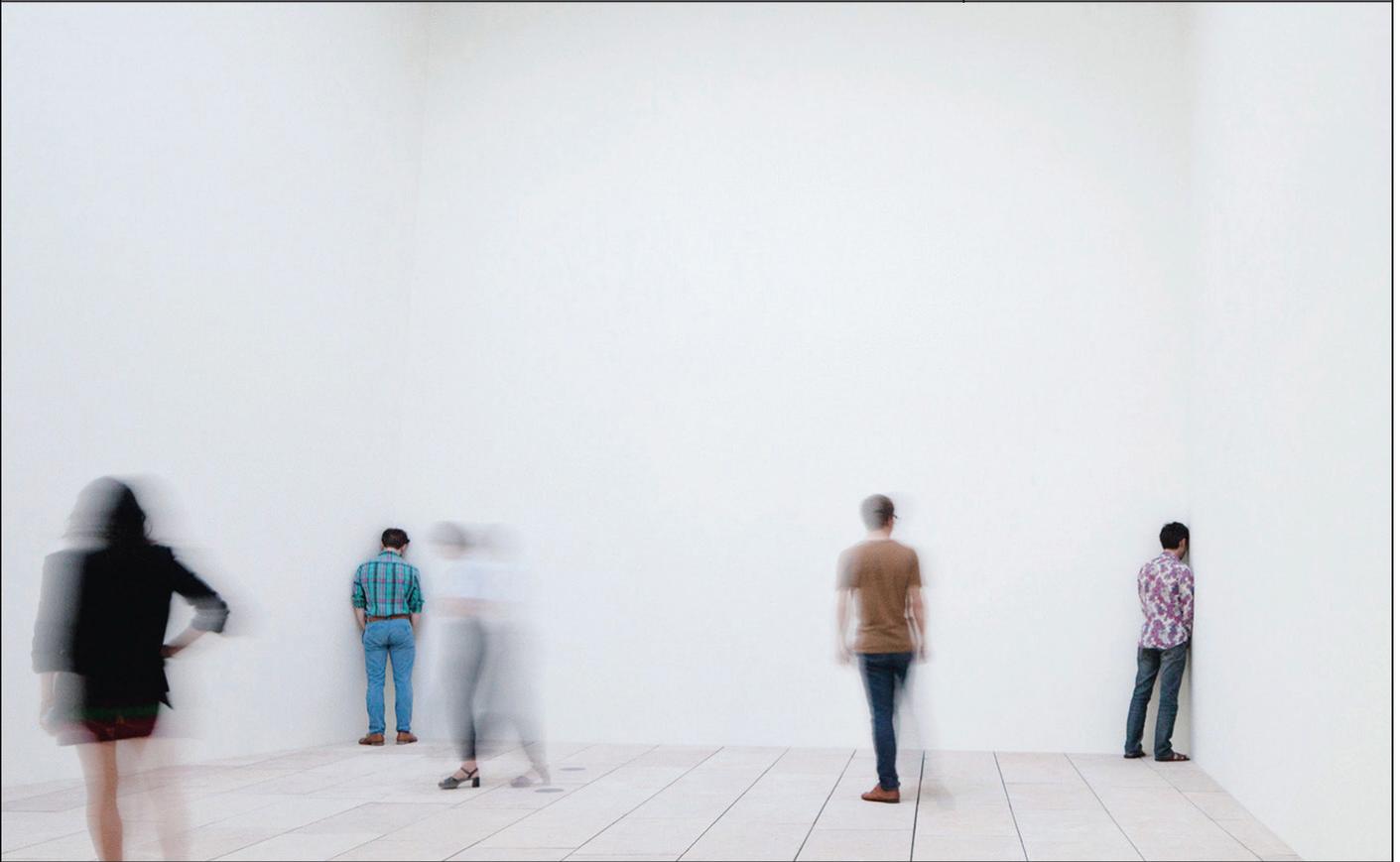
# SUPERPOSITION: Equilibrium & Engagement

## Oliver Beer

*Composition for Tuning an Architectural Space*, 2012/2018 at Sydney Opera House. See also *Composition for Mouths (Songs My Mother Taught Me) I & II*, 2018, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales

21st Biennale

of Sydney



*The Resonance Project*, 2014  
architectural acoustic performance  
Installation view at Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, London  
Photograph: Oliver Beer

Over the past ten years, Oliver Beer has developed a body of performance and film work called *the Resonance Project*, which investigates architectural space through sound. The dimensions of each space determine its resonance, which we might think of as its capacity to amplify the vibration of sound. Each architectural space has its own unique sound that brings into being this amplification.

In Sydney, Beer has worked with four singers to create a live vocal performance that will take place in a Sydney Opera House stairwell, with sounds that will cause the spaces to resonate and turn the building into a musical instrument. The audience is invited in small groups to experience the architecture through sound in a usually unseen, unremarkable space within the Opera House.

While the work draws our attention to relationships between the body and architecture, there is also a clear reference to the function of the Opera House in this iteration of the work.

## Questions for Discussion

1. We are used to thinking of art as a largely visual way of understanding the world, but what other senses give us information when we experience an artwork? What information to our senses provide in our everyday experiences of the world?
2. Historically, art has been understood as a set of disciplines that produce and display objects such as paintings or sculptures or photographs. More recently, we have come to think about art as our experience and interaction with these objects, and our interpretation of the ideas those experiences communicate. Do you think sound can be an artwork?
3. What do you think this work might communicate about the Opera House? About human experience? About the body?

## Reference Points

Beer uses musical theory to turn architectural spaces into musical instruments. His work asks us to think deeply about the relationship between the body and architectural space. By using the human voice to activate the inherent resonance of the space, his work demands that we experience the physicality of the building in a new way, but also that we understand the meaning of the building in new ways also.

Artists who have worked with sound, drawn from the history of the Biennale of Sydney, include: John Cage (1990, 2008), Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller (2002, 2008, 2014), Luisa Cunha (2004), Brian Eno (1982, 1988), Cevdet Erek (2016), Bill Fontana (1973), Nathan Gray (2014), Derek Kreckler (1990), Sonia Leber and David Chesworth (2014), Malcolm McLaren (1986) and Susan Philipsz (2008).

## Practices and Processes

There is a long history of sound work in art practice. Many previous editions of the Biennale of Sydney have included this kind of artwork, which asks us to think about the role of space and our movement through place, differently. In a way, the whole of the Sydney Opera House becomes the work of art in this version of *Composition for Tuning an Architectural Space*. When trying these activities, think about the way the sound is the material of the work, but the experience of the work takes place in a particular space. All sound work challenges the importance of seeing in our culture.

### Sound experiments

Visit different architectural spaces – a bathroom, a hall, a museum, a shopping centre. Close your eyes and register what you can hear. Using a phone or tablet, make some recordings of the everyday noises of different spaces. When you play them back, can you change the speed of the sound? What happens when you slow down or speed up your recording? How does it affect the feeling you get from the sound?

### Sound portraits

Try your own voice out as a medium for artwork – record a whisper, a shout or a song in a number of different places – how do they sound different? There are many variables when recording sound that will affect your work. Think about background noise and echoing spaces when you choose where to record your voice.

### Sound work

Devise a script that you can repeat, perhaps a story that is set in the space where you are recording. Record the script a number of times. Create an artwork where the sound guides your listener through the space. If you work in a group, and each of you record the sound, try playing the recordings back simultaneously. Experiment with starting the sound at different times so that there is an echo effect in the group work.

**Subjective frame:**  
personal response to the world, personal experience