

Et kurs i Rytmmorfologi, Lidén and Mulder, Tangboka, Hilde Methi, Neil Cahoon, Annette Wolfsberger (redaktører), utgiver Nordnorsk Kunstnersenter 2020

A course in Rhythmorphology, Lidén and Mulder, The Kelp Congress, Hilde Methi, Neil Cahoon, Annette Wolfsberger (editors), published by Nordnorsk Kunstnersenter 2020



The Tidal Sense by artist Signe Lidén is a trajectory of works that emerged from one of the four LIAF 2019 research residencies. The work was first conceived as a large-scale sounding canvas stretched through the intertidal zone on the shore of Ramberg, a fishing village on the Flakstad island of Lofoten. Over several weeks, this 28-metre long canvas performed as a recording instrument that researched the relationships between the tide, rhythm, sensing, and long-term thinking. The Tidal Sense was later installed within the LIAF 2019 exhibition as an 8-channel sound sculpture that played back recordings from the intertidal zone at Ramberg through the canvas membrane. By initiating the work, the artist was asking: ‘How could “the tidal” make sense as a figure of long-term thinking?’ and ‘What would constitute a “tidal sense” in itself?’.

These questions were also the starting point for various recorded conversations between the artist, sixth-grade pupils in Ramberg school, and scholars Grace Dillon (Indigenous Studies and Literature), Arjen Mulder (Biology and Media Theory), and Geir Olve Skeie (Neurology and Music) – a compilation of which formed a podcast work produced by Peter Meanwell.

The following text, A Course in Rhythmorphology, co-written by Signe Lidén (SL) and Arjen Mulder (AM), continues these conversations...

AM: In your podcast for The Tidal Sense, Grace Dillon refers to the importance of acknowledging the personhood of the ocean and tide. During the time spent in the tidal zone at your residency at Ramberg, Signe, do you consider the tidal surge as a person?

SL: Maybe not as a person but with personhood, does that make sense? Perhaps because of the sense of singularity of a person, whereas I experience the tide as a multitude, a force where multiple beings meet in rhythmic relation. Thanks to the length of the residency, I was taking part in that tidal rhythmicity over days, weeks and months. It was such a sensory experience, quite hardcore some days when the wind and waves were fierce. Then I regretted the idea of stretching a sonic sail through the intertidal zone. At the same time, the dimensions of the sail, or the recording membrane as I call it, pushed the human “horizon” of experience because one can listen to the whole length of the zone at the same time, both under and above water. A colleague described the experience as a scaling. I think scale is a really useful conception with reference to maps, measurements and music. So in a way the recording membrane widens the human scale into the tidal ... into the tidal person. Here you go.

AM: The more I think of it, the more I am convinced that the tidal surge is a person. During our conversation when you were in Ramberg, I picked up on your question ‘How can “the tidal” make sense as a figure for long-term thinking’ and I used Tim Ingold’s idea that making is thinking. What the tidal surge thinks are the algae and the animals that live there on the coast. The rhythms of the tide make them in a play of external forces and internal counterforces. The tidal zone is the long-term conversation of fluid and solid. The tidal zone is a person because it thinks. It’s the old Cartesian Cogito ergo sum – you can only think if you are. The tidal rhythm is a form-finding force. Would it make sense to you to talk about a tidal harmony or melody?

SL: I approach rhythm both in a sensual and a conceptual way. During a presentation once, I described it as to ‘decompose dualism into rhythmicity’ and although I had meant to create an anonym to the musical sense of ‘compose’, I liked the earthliness of the mistranslation. Liquidity carries an embedded rhythmicity. Having been interested in the relations between sound, thinking and language for a while, the encounter with Grace and the Anishinaabe Nibi’s language was so inspiring because it is ‘infused with water’ as Grace puts it. Thinking through water and thinking through sound can generate fertile alternatives in the way one can understand one’s surroundings. The tide inhabits the rhythmic relations between liquid, the earthliness, atmosphere and magnetism. Calling these relations ‘harmonies’ or ‘melodies’ does not make sense, I think. Circadian and circatidal are great words because of the non-mechanic connotation of ‘circa’. They withhold recognition of the constant negotiation and tuning between life and its environment. Geir Olve Skeie, who is a neurologist and musician in Bergen, said something very interesting about the circadian rhythms. He said that if humans were not exposed to daylight and could sleep and be awake as they wanted, they would have approximately a 25 hour cycle, like the tide or lunar day so to speak. We all know the menstruation cycle follows the lunar month. So this embedded circatidal inner clock in our body makes total sense when we think of the amount of liquid we have in our body mass. If we return to the question ‘how can the tidal make sense as a figure for long-term thinking?’, what does it mean to be paying attention to embodied circatidal clocks? Now I was thinking from a human perspective, but what about plants, seaweed, or kelp? How are the circadian and circatidal rhythms in plant or macroalgae persons?

AM: What you just said reminded me of the comments made by the schoolgirl from Ramberg whom we heard in your podcast, and her definition of the tidal sense. That it is the ability of ‘the tidal’ to sense the surrounding world, to think about it, and to ‘remember everything that ever happened and will happen in the ocean’. I think that is brilliant.

I read this in an old book called Biological Rhythm Research: ‘All living organisms are set in the solid framework of the physical world, the structure of which pulses with an abundance of “external rhythms”: diurnal, tidal, seasonal, solar, sidereal. The capacity to follow them, to oscillate, enhances the survival and developmental potential of a species. In the tide the 25 hour cycle of the lunar day is combined with the 24 hour cycle of the solar day. The sun determines the rhythms of photosynthesis and respiration of the plants, and the exposure to the sun gives the algae in the upper part of the tidal zone a rhythm of drying out and inunda-

tion. Algae hardly photosynthesize when they fall dry’. So two external rhythms translate into the lifeform of the algae.

SL: And then there are all these other environmental rhythms, like air pressures such as wind and sound, vibrations with different wavelengths ... what more?

AM: I just got the idea to create a new study. It would be named ‘rhythmology’, a study of the external and internal rhythms that create and produce life forms. It would be a sort of applied ‘Rhythmanalysis’, as Lefebvre describes in his great manifesto. The layered rhythms of the tide are forces that form matter into living organisms. A new kind of biology, or morphology, becomes possible. In this new science one doesn’t talk about the molecules that make the organism. Form is not a function of the content of the cells, the DNA and proteins and that sort of stuff, but of the influences of and interactions with the environment of the cell and the body they are part of. The rhythms of the tide make the membranes in the cell pulse. They synchronise the rhythms within the living body. So this new science studies the rhythmicities that make the form and functioning of the living body.

SL: What about rhythmorphology? I would like to enrol as a student!

AM: I think you should teach the course too. And Grace too of course.

SL: So what would the course plan look like at the Academy of Rhythmorphology?

AM: Ok, let’s make a course plan ...

ACADEMY OF RHYTHMORPHOLOGY

Faculty: Rhythmorphogenesis

Department: Tidal Sense Studies

Course: Rhythmorphogenesis of Intertidal Persons

Workshop I: The Rhythmorphogenesis of a Filamentous Green Algae

Duration: 6 months

Workshop II: The Rhythmorphogenesis of Oystercatchers

Duration: 6 months

Workshop III: The Rhythmorphogenesis of Coastal Human Persons

Duration: 6 months

Workshop Location: Academy of Rhythmorphology’s institute in the intertidal zone in Lofoten.

Workshop I: The Rhythmorphogenesis of a Filamentous Green Algae

The first 3 months of the workshop will consist of theoretical presentations, observational experiments, reading groups, body movement, and listening sessions. The sessions will be structured into themes:

1: Sensing Tides

2: Rhythms and Form

3: Feedback and Memory

We will study the typology of algae in the tidal zone, and the spatial principles they use to organise their bodies into larger assemblages, filaments, thalli and macroalgae. We concentrate on the filamentous green alga *Enteromorpha flexuosa*. These algae make carpets consisting of long, simple, branching threads, both incredibly strong and utterly flexible. Liquid design.

We will examine the different external rhythms on the position of the green alga in the tidal zone. In the lab we will study the different internal rhythms of *Enteromorpha*. We will combine what we found about both the external and the internal rhythms in the experimental setting and the field, to give an exact account of how the tidal rhythms allow the green alga to find its form. The dialogue between the non-living rhythms in the tidal zone, and the living rhythms within the body of the algae.

The last 3 months will be centred around applied oscillation structures and instrument building.

The students will be creating instruments, a device, a performance or a composition. The process will be accompanied by group tutorials, improvisations, and access to the Rythmorphology Lab. The lab is fully equipped for electronic rhythm analysis with technical staff.



From the seminar *Thinking tide, Sensing Scale*, LIAF 2019, co-curated by Signe Lidén and Hilde Methi and the curator team of LIAF.