Taking the Pulse, 200 Hearts at a Time

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s Pulse Park, 2008, NYC

BY EMILY BAUMAN

In 1947, Ralph Ellison famously wrote, “Without light I am not only invisible, but harmless as well; and to be unseen of God’s heart is to lose a soul.” There is a feeling that this state of marginalization described in Invisible Man has become pervasive in contemporary society. We battle on a daily basis to make our existence matter and to record our presence upon our landscapes, but rarely do we take the time to appreciate the fleeting and momentary beauty of our lives.

In late 2008, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer installed a work titled Pulse Park in Manhattan’s Madison Square Park. A point of view, the Pulse Park was a grid through which a filter of an old textile factory in Mexico was inspired by alter his urban children’s heartbeats when the wife was pregnant with his current child. He became interested in “amplifying intimate readings” because it offered a form for something what makes us unique.

In its first version, participants could follow their own heartbeats as it moved sequentially through the room, either tracking the registration of presence or choosing to get lost among the similar signs of other lives. Pulse Park replaces Pulse Room’s concept on a larger scale and explores this option of participant self-absorption, which disconnected individuals from one another is becoming mixed in the specificity of their own rhythm. Immediately, the singular representation is introduced in a synaptic that comes together as a hyper, in which the beholder can no longer track how—or for how long—their personal rhythm participates as an eccentric note in the greater neurologically composition.

In Pulse Park the vanishing point of representation becomes temporal and responsive (interactive)—rather than linear, material, or traceable. The representation of presence becomes synecdochic since light represents the singular being and its uniqueness, as well as a general human quality of temporality and existentiality.

“In Questions For a Worker Who Reads” (1935) Bertolt Brecht wrote, “Inert hands is full of spiritual archives / Who cooked them? / In the end, no one knows.” This line, Lozano-Hemmer keeps in mind that dominant narratives pass over the everyday, making our lives seem like invisible existences that dissipate into time. As Brecht wrote, narratives of power are played out in and inscribed upon the landscape of public spaces through ceremonies, monuments, and architecture. Lozano-Hemmer’s “Pulse” works to reclaim, for a short time, a certain range of the public sphere, making it celebrate and commemorate the momentary and fleeting: the present moment and its passing because they are the singular and eccentric elements that make up a society.

Pulse Park was on view Oct. 24-Nov. 17, 2006, as part of Bla. Sq. Atr. For a video of the work and of others related projects by Lozano-Hemmer visit www.blazono-hemmer.com.