

Workshop Brief

Une chasse aux rumeurs – the city as a rumour mill – die Stadt als Küche der Geräusche – geroezemoes in de stad – pettegolezzi – zvonurile

This year the Belgian pavilion at the Venice Biennale presents work by the artist Francis Alÿs. The space is inhabited by a series of videos taking the visitor to situations in Mexico, Afghanistan and Syria, showing children performing and playing games: throwing a round object – a ball? – across the water plane of a lake; beating a ball up and down a street; playing a game of appearance and disappearance in an unfinished building site, or a ruin, of a settlement in a barren landscape. Rules are set and followed, communicated in words or not, associations are formed and dissolved.

The videos each also involve a registration of how the urban (or non-urban) locations become spaces of performance. Few words are spoken, but there are the noises of action, which establish a sense of communication, with each other and with the surroundings. The ball hitting the water surface produces a short, momentary, sound. The movement of the players in the deserted town is silent, and the silence has a precise acoustic presence. Sounds move around like muffled rumours, producing another story that is not to be heard and, yet, all the more powerful tacit communication.

The pavilion is a site in itself, with its own acoustic realities. It is set in a garden (that is public and, yet, not, as an entrance fee is charged), where the movement across the gravel paths is an omnipresent rumour. Before seeing another person, one becomes aware of their bodily presence through the sound of their feet (well: two feet, four feet, wheels etc.). The city outside the walls of the garden is a soundscape itself, a rumour mill, a projection plane of noises: the sound of oars hitting the water, of waves hitting walls, of steps of pavements, of voices and songs. Venice is not Naples: it sounds vague, diffuse, elegiac, melancholic, still. (Boats do not sound like cars, after all.)

This workshop engages with the pavilion, taking the videos of Francis Alÿs as inspirational experience, and the experience of the space as a starting point for an examination of the city and the exhibition through sound and noise. It may start from the periphery of the islands, or from the bowels of the city. Or from the shore where the city meets the sea. The task is to register and find a notation through the means we know best – probably drawing.