

(This essay was originally written in 2009 for an artist book which was never published)

Corporeal Calligrapher

Roger McDonald

I saw him in Naha, Okinawa, writing with chalk on the floor of an old disused discoteque which was about to be demolished. Stooped low, he slowly worked his way around the space, moving between people and furniture. All the way the chalk marked the surface of the space, a strange, automatic writing without punctuation, which seemed to grow like a fast growing ivy, attaching itself to the place. It was a writing that was hard to read, as one would a book. Rather it seemed intimately related to a more generous understanding of the human body, and how it's movement in space is also a kind of writing, an inscribing, and also a concomitant reading. He seemed lost in the labor, fixed on the immediate surfaces in front of him as a child is when lost in the reverie of play.

I saw him again at a talk he gave at AIT, at which I interpreted into Japanese. He presented images from around the world, showing him marking surfaces, bodies and places. A wandering scribe, he seemed to be constantly traveling. Each place and event was carefully documented and archived by him, and can be seen as a kind of meta-work on his extraordinary website. I remember feeling a perceptible sense of distance between my experiences and those of cultures far from my own, of which I had little or no knowledge. I felt a sense of camaraderie with his seeming rootless-ness, his errant wanderings, being someone from two cultures. There is, paradoxically, also a non-physical rooted-ness in what he does, that can be called a practiced commitment to human energy and greeting. I imagine that it would be miserable to do what he does if one did not hold a sense of trust and open-ness to differences and to turbulence.

Some time after that, he invited me to participate in a locker project in central Tokyo. He had asked fellow artists and curators to contribute objects and thoughts which would be placed inside public digital lockers, opened by mobile telephone numbers and the insertion of a ¥100. Contrary to the direction of an enlightening public museum, this project was about invisibility and intimate connections. The works inside the lockers reminded me of the cat in Schrodinger's quantum mechanical experiment. Until the viewer opened the door, there was no way of knowing if there was something inside. It could have

been stolen, broken, abandoned. Each participant contributed on these conditions, a truly wondrous thing.

What strikes me as decisive in Eric Van Hove's practice is the fact that he is almost always there, present. He is an artist who tends not to make something in a studio, after which it is presented in pristine, odorless galleries. Like a caretaker, he remains close to what he initiates, spending time speaking with people who live and work there or repairing or maintaining things. His priority is to the felt experience of the body in specific places, times, temperatures and emotions. In the midst of a totally designed world space, where every conceivable surface, both exterior and interior, seems to be available to the caprices of capital, Eric Van Hove insists on inscribing the world around him through an ongoing corporeal calligraphy.

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