

# Watergait:

## Designing Sense Perceptions for Individual Truth

Esthir Lemi, Marientina Gotsis, Vangelis Lympouridis<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** *Watergait* is an experimental meditation in the form of a sonified experience of walking with shoe sensors that translate shifting foot pressure into sound within an aural environment. This experiment was collaboratively designed by three artists, Esthir Lemi, Marientina Gotsis and Vangelis Lympouridis, influenced by different yet complementary theoretical, aesthetic, and technical domains. The quintessential adage for all three artists is best summarized by the sentence: “all sense perceptions are true” and a mutual adoration of water-related themes and design minimalism. Perhaps not by coincidence, our mutual ethnic backgrounds kept bringing us back to implicit knowledge and shared context of history and experiences that informed our design and pre/post discussion of the experiment.

In this essay, we explore Epicurean tradition, holistic design models, empirical dialectic systems, historical uses of water as a playful theme, and its implications in human computer interaction. The instrumentation of *Watergait* depends on some “objective” truths that had to be measured and be agreed upon. The sensing array of the shoes measure pressure. Placed right below the insoles and imperceptible to the wearer, the pressure sensors send data to the computer via Bluetooth technology. What follows is a philosophical perspective of design on how sensing and art intersect through human-computer interaction, and why some contextual bridge between the two is needed.

The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus advocated for the awakening of the senses through mindful observation of the felt and sensed experience (Letter to Menocoes and Herodotus). For Epicurus, relative and absolute truth can coexist while trying to make sense of the world from a human-centered point of view as he presents one of the first integrative viewpoints of psychology and perception, placing value in how belief influences perception and thus introducing the placebo effect as a quantifiable unknown that produces an effect and contributes to one’s own perception of reality. This type of discourse is legitimized through everyday habits toward the pursuit of happiness. While manufacturing happiness, or pleasure, does it matter what the signal is or does it matter more what it is being perceived as, or does it matter at all? We, the artists of *Watergait* wanted to immerse participants into a simple narrative fantasy through the

aural environment and to enable them to follow a path that can excite their imagination through the senses. Making the apparatus simple makes it more prone to several interpretations, and therefore more successful to stimulate the imagination.

Lastly, we discuss the manifested coincidence of summoning our mutual “otherworldly” experience within water: an encounter with whales, which started in the virtual and happened in real life.

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<sup>1</sup> Creative Media & Behavioral Health Center, Interactive Media & Games Division, USC School of Cinematic Arts, 900 W 34 ST, SCI 201U, Los Angeles, CA, USA. Email: (Esthir Lemi) [lemi@esthir.info](mailto:lemi@esthir.info) (Marientina Gotsis) [mgotsis@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:mgotsis@cinema.usc.edu) (V. Lympouridis) [vangelis@lympouridis.gr](mailto:vangelis@lympouridis.gr)