
SHORT REVIEW

Routes to What Is Not There

Irina Gheorghe

TU Dublin, IE

irina.ghe@gmail.com

The work consists in a series of instructions which guide the reader's movement on invisible paths through any given space. It can be any kind of environment, from an art exhibition to a domestic space, public space or another outdoor location. Through the instructions, the experience of that which is present is shaped by that which is not, while the imagination of things not present is confronted with the awareness of the physical space around. Where does one place oneself in relation to what is not there and how precise can this placement be? How can distances be measured if visibility cannot provide support? Through the movements of the participants, the routes drawn through the text become embodied actions, drawing new trajectories in the room. The work is part of the project 'Preliminary Remarks on the Study of What Is Not There', grounded in long-term investigations into the idea of a reality not accessible to observation. This reality is increasingly central to current discussions around realism in the philosophy of science, as a result of the growing presence of unobservable objects in scientific research, challenging the empirical foundations of the natural sciences established at the beginning of modernity. Equally, the idea of a supersensible reality, existing in itself, independently from the way it presents itself to sensibility, is returning to the centre of debates in contemporary philosophy, as part of a new realist turn. The project questions art's relation to these other fields of knowledge in exploring its own metaphysical grounds. The series of instructions 'Routes to What Is Not There' can take the form of a text script or an audio guide. It is complemented by the other works in the project: 'Preliminary Remarks on the Study of What Is Not There', a performance which takes the form of a guided tour amongst all the things not present in the space where it is presented, 'All the Things Which Are Not There', a site-responsive installation which maps the invisible maps or previous locations in which the performance took place, and 'Methods for the Study of What Is Not There', a series of medium format photographs which introduces actions of measuring, classifying, dividing, belonging to the process of scientific methodology, but faced with an absence.



Figure 1: Irina Gheorghe, *All the Things Which Are Not There*, installation and *Preliminary Remarks on the Study of What Is Not There*, performance, Project Arts Center, 2020, image credits Senija Topcic.



Figure 2: Irina Gheorghe, *All the Things Which Are Not There*, installation and *Preliminary Remarks on the Study of What Is Not There*, performance, Project Arts Center, 2020, image credits Senija Topcic.

Hi everybody, thank you very much for being here. I'm really glad to be with you today, even in this form. And I must say that I'm really sorry I can't be with you in person, that was the original plan but unfortunately it didn't work out. But in any case thank you very much for coming.

I am absolutely delighted to be able to share some of my work and research with you. The reason why I'm here with you today is not to talk about the things which are actually here, as that's not an area I have any authority in, so I can't really contribute. What I'll be sharing with you today are rather some remarks about the things which are not here, as this is really my field of expertise, if you wish. You can say that I specialise in things which are not here.

So I would like to start immediately with my proposal for today, which will hopefully give you a bit of an introduction in the nature of things which are not here. And I will have to ask for your help to do that, as I can't be in the space with you. But hopefully that will be ok.

So the first thing we need to do is divide the space you are now in into two parts. Actually, we will eventually need three parts, but we have to start with these two, we need to do it gradually. So I would like to invite you to have a look around, and get a sense of the space in its entirety. Have a look at its general size and shape. And ask yourselves: if you were to divide it into two parts, where would you draw the division between these two parts? Let's say you were to draw one line that divides the space, where would you draw it? Are the two areas more or less equal in size, or is one of them much bigger than the other? Is one of them much much bigger than the other? Or just slightly bigger? Or are they, in fact, exactly the same size? Move around the space a bit more, and take a moment to reflect on where you place this division in the space.

And then when you have a clear idea of how you might do it, I would like to ask you to find one of the ends of this line, and place yourselves on that precise spot. It might be against a wall, or near a door. Walk towards that point, and place yourselves precisely on it.

And from this point, if you look back at the whole space, you will see very clearly the two areas in which you divided the space, one on your right, and one on your left.

And at this stage we can introduce the first lesson I would like to share with you from the study of things which are not here. And this is that in the area you separated on the right hand side of your line there are all the things which are not here, which are, and in the area you separated on the left hand side of your line are all the things which are not here which are not.



Figure 3: Irina Gheorghe, *Preliminary Remarks on the Study of What Is Not There*, performance, Project Arts Center, 2020.



Figure 4: Irina Gheorghe, *Preliminary Remarks on the Study of What Is Not There*, performance, Project Arts Center, 2020.

So you can already see that some of the most important questions appear at this stage. For example, are there more things which are not here, which are, on your right, or things which are not here, which are not, on your left? Is the division between them exactly where you initially placed it, or do you need to move it a little bit to your left, or a little bit to your right? If you need to move it, now is the time to do it, in which case you also have to move yourself to the new end point of your revised division. Pay close attention to this spot, as you will need to come back to it.

Once you have done this, what I would like to ask you to do next is start walking along the line, but while doing this look towards your right. In other words, concentrate only on the things which are not here, which are, on the right hand side of the line. Observe them carefully, and try not to miss anything.

It might happen that as you follow the line, you encounter an obstacle of some kind, in which case you can't continue to walk straight. Find a way to move forward, keeping the direction of your division in mind. And always concentrate on the things on your right, which are all the things which are not here, which are.

Once you reach the end of the space on the other side, turn around, and observe your division once again. At this stage, the things which are not here, which are, will be on your left, and the things which are not here, which are not, will be on your right. Take a moment to observe them from this point.

Once you've done this, now I would like to ask you to walk back, following once again the direction of your dividing line, but this time only concentrate on the things which are not here, which are not. In other words,

once again you look to the space on your right, but this time on your right there are all the things which are not here, which are not. If you need to make your way through various obstacles, you will need to be flexible this time as well. You will need to negotiate at every stage if you can actually go through or not, and if you can't, you might need to deviate from your straight line. But the important thing is to keep the general direction, and try to find a way to get back to the original point I asked you to mark and remember, on the other side. And while you are doing that, pay close attention to all the things which are not here, which are not, now on your right.

Once you get back to your initial point of division, turn around and look at the space once again. Now you can say you already have some preliminary knowledge about both the things which are not here, which are, and the things which are not here, which are not.

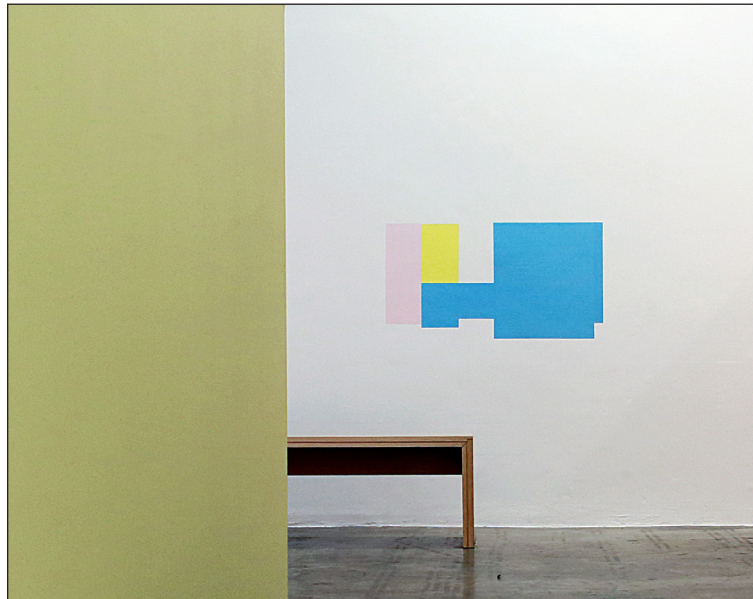


Figure 5: Irina Gheorghe, *All the Things Which Are Not There*, installation, Project Arts Center, 2020.

And our task would maybe be easier if we could stop here. But there is one more line we need to draw, and with it one more area we need to delineate. And I must say, this is the most difficult to define precisely.

So you will have to decide where to place it, as I can't help you unfortunately. Will this line be parallel to the line you already have? In which case it will either take some space from the things which are not here, which are, or it will take some space from the things which are not here, which are not. Or do you draw this second line, the one which marks your third area, at a right angle to the first line? In this case it will take some of the space of the things which are not here, which are, and some of the space of the things which are not here, which are not. Whatever way you do it, I would like to invite you to place this line now, and position yourself at one of its ends.

And now, as a last task, I would like to ask you to walk along this new line, as you did the other, and observe this new area you have delineated. In this area you have all the things which are not here, of which we cannot say whether they are or they are not, we do not know. Once again, you will have to negotiate your way in relation to the objects you encounter. Can you go through them, or do you need to deviate? How much can you deviate while retaining your direction?

Once you follow this last line all the way, and once you have observed carefully all the things which are separated by it – all the things which are not here, of which we cannot say whether they are or they are not, we can say that you have completed the introduction in the nature of things which are not here.

From this point on, I will say good bye, and you can continue to practice freely. You can move at your own pace through the area of things which are not here, which are, through the area of things which are not here,

which are not, and through the area of things which are not here, of which we cannot say whether they are or they are not. You can observe carefully all the things placed in these area. You can pay close attention to the boundary sections: what are the things you had thought were on one side of a border, and in fact turned out to be on the other side?

Thank you very much, enjoy your time in the space, and until next time, good bye.



Figure 6: Irina Gheorghe, *Methods for the Study of What Is Not There*, series of 10 photographs, 2019.



Figure 7: Irina Gheorghe, *Methods for the Study of What Is Not There*, series of 10 photographs, 2019.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

Author Information

Irina Gheorghe (b. Târgoviște, Romania) works primarily with performance, in combination with installation, collage, photography or video, to address the tensions inherent in the attempts to speak about things beyond our possibilities of observation, from extraterrestrial life to hypothetical planets. Irina has also been working with Alina Popa (1982–2019) as part of the artist duo The Bureau of Melodramatic Research to investigate how passions shape contemporary society, as well as our affective relationship to an unhuman universe. Since January 2019 she is also part of the Psychedelic Choir. Her work was shown at Project Arts Center, Dublin (2020); Swimming Pool, Sofia (2019); Changing Room, Berlin (2019); Zona Sztuki Aktualnej, Szczecin (2018); CCA Derry~Londonderry (2018); Chapter Thirteen/Glasgow International (2018); TRAF0, Budapest (2017); Pratt Manhattan Gallery, New York (2016); Times Museum, Guangzhou (2016); National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest (2016); HOME Manchester (2015); Salonul de Proiecte, Bucharest (2015); Contemporary Art Centre Vilnius (2014); BAK, Utrecht (2014); DEPO, Istanbul (2013) and Galeria Posibila, Bucharest (2009); among others.

Irina Gheorghe studied painting and photography at the National University of Arts Bucharest and is currently in the last stages of completing a PhD in artistic practice at GradCAM, TU Dublin, for which she was awarded a scholarship through the Fiosraigh Programme.

How to cite this article: Gheorghe, I. 2020. Routes to What Is Not There. *MaHKUscript: Journal of Fine Art Research*, 4(1): 13, pp. 1–6. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/mjfar.85>

Published: 20 November 2020

Copyright: © 2020 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

 *MaHKUscript: Journal of Fine Art Research* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Ubiquity Press.

OPEN ACCESS 