**Ground Floor**

***All of a Tremble (Conducted Lines)***, 2021

The title of *All of a Tremble* derives from the English expression “all of a tremble”, suggesting a sudden tremor that carries an element of surprise.

There is yet another circumstance for it, going back to the very beginning of synthetic speech; “all of a tremble” were the first words ever spoken artificially by a synthetic voice.[[1]](#footnote-1) *All of a Tremble (Conducted Lines)* explores the relation between the malleability of matter and the physicality of sound, in the juxtaposition between two modern-day standards. Concrete seeps into the gaps where the wooden panels come together to give a board-formed wall its typical pattern of horizontal lines. As the parallel lines approach the location where a wallpaper-printing cylinder is positioned, some fragments shift up and down as if a compelling force in the cylinder’s template was gradually luring them.

The vintage roller has been converted into a music box, in combination with a purpose-built steel comb whose reeds have been individually tuned according to preselected musical tones. With the roller continuously rotating around its own axis[[2]](#footnote-2), its metallic template – raised in relief above its surface – streaks against the reeds of the comb to produce clouds of spectral sounds, all evolving around the same tone. It’s as if the inner dynamics of sound were imprinted into the pattern of the concrete wall.

The tone is A-440, the commonly used frequency that designates the modern pitch. Likewise, it can be argued that concrete is the trademark material of modern-era construction. Coincidentally, they became the prevailing standards at about the same period, as if to validate history’s penchant for serendipity.

1. They were the successful outcome of experimentations by E.A. Humphries, a young British physicist working in the early 1930s, as an acoustic engineer for the British Film Industry. In order to replicate speech by means of a synthetic voice, Humphries set to analyse the sound of the words that he wanted to reproduce until he could establish which wave pattern belonged to each word – starting from finding the graphic correspondence to each phonetic component, and combining them together in a sequence that corresponded with the required word. He was able to carefully draw shapes on long cardboard strips that could be optically read by a machine and transformed into a voice, uttering: “all of a tremble”! [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Thanks to customised motion-control software, the speed of the rotation varies according to a definite composition. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)