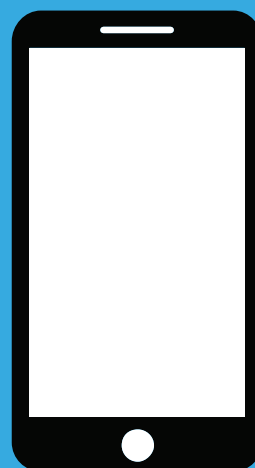


KLAXON 8



KLAXON 8

The Augmented City

(when art lives in town)

URBAN EXPRESSWAY

The Augmented City

Antoine Pickels & Benoit Vreux

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URBAN EXPRESSWAY

The Augmented City

Antoine Pickels and Benoit Vreux

Life teaches us on a daily basis that public space is no longer limited to streets, squares, or even “public” buildings, but nowadays also comprises where we roam on the Web, our digital exchanges, as well as our technological prostheses that steer and find us. For those born in the last decade of the 20th century and afterwards, it is even a dimension whose absence would be hard to imagine. Geo-location, in its multiple applications—guiding, commerce, entertainment, security—is one example of this shift in paradigm that public space is no longer confined to physical space, as is the co-existence between our urban social life and those networks we refer to as “social,” as well as changes in our mode of remote contact, transformed as much by the Internet as by the smartphone’s ergonomics.

Klaxon’s 8th edition zeroes in on this proximity between the digital world and the physical world, specifically in the urban sphere. We begin with a weighty contribution by the French philosopher Olivier Razac, who, as a critical heir to Michel Foucault, contributes a highly perceptive take on the new territorial control mechanisms. He dissects how the logics of Pokémon GO and electronic bracelets operate in non-concomitant spatial “layers”, parallel spaces, but at the same time very concretely confiscate territorial space, hindering the freedom of one or the other in the name of logics over which we citizens have no grasp.

The British collective Blast Theory has for some time already seized this “augmented” reality, whose evolution we note in our daily lives, as a tool for its multiform artistic approach. In its thirty years of existence, Blast Theory has invariably been a step ahead, each time mutating as technology evolves, propelling it very quickly into outdoor space. Critic Mary Brennan reviews some performances and interactive art from their impressive body of work, which, while playful, are never complacent, and always confronts the spectator-participant with the freedom of choice in the face of technology.

This sense of freedom is found at work in *Landline*, the very benevolent performative arrangement by Dustin Harvey and Adrienne Wong in which they invite perfect strangers, thousands of miles away, to get in touch for a shared, parallel, and simultaneous walk in two different cities. Here, far from imposing the itinerary, the technology is the passport for *roving* inspired by the situationism; instead of isolating, it offers the opportunity to meet the other and have an intimate exchange, ever before getting to know each other face to face.

In *First Life* by Ici Même [Paris], the duly informed participant willingly agrees to the invitation to partake in a more critical and constraint-based experience. An experience of duplication, where participants enter the skin of an “other” via a smartphone, a hyper-realistic sound device, as well as live actors they come across in urban space. The researcher Samantha Maurin’s synthetic analysis lays bare how this deliberately disturbing experience, in which a dual-I created between the smartphone puppet, which the participant agrees to be, and the spectator, which he/she continues to be, has an unsettling effect.

The experiment *X-Terr* that Teatri Oda created in the form of work-in-progress in Pristina is also critical in tenor, but in a political-fiction mode. While it, too, makes use of audio and visual technologies, it positions the core of its message in an already old, albeit ubiquitous technology: the car. It is from a car that spectators experience a trip into another territory—in this case a very monitored one, whose techno-fictional dimension occurs through actions, and rather artisanal sets and props. This political-fiction unfolds in a concrete location replete with all its urban chaos and societal problems: Pristina, where the Kosovar activist and philosopher Rron Gjenovci precisely situates the work, thus exposing other issues related to the city.

If digital questionings are permeating the arts worldwide, some cities are hotspots. Košice in Slovakia, recently designated UNESCO Creative City for the Digital Arts, is a prime example. In her article, Ivana Rusnáková, curator of *Biela noc* – the highly popular local *Nuit blanche* – highlights digital works created by Slovak artists. Electronic fireworks self-managed by citizens, visual installation extended by augmented reality, lighting perspective modifiable by a passer-by or a device to encourage dialogue between humans, plants, and computers by touching a shop window: the projects intelligently play with the potential technologies offer, often eliciting the passer-by's free will.

As you may have remarked, each contribution in this issue at some point grapples with the question of freedom. Whether it be a matter of coercive deprivation or insidious reduction that digital developments have facilitated; of a critical perspective of the grip of our technological crutches; of the privatization of urban space; or, by contrast, of the freedom, which, if well used, these very same tools make possible to discover new sensations in an augmented city. For these artists working at the intersection between urban space and the digital world are not blind to the risks we run with these paradigm shifts. Their works make us aware of them, by deconstructing their defects. And, they invite yet other uses, which might well inspire those extolling the Smart City model.

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MAIN STREET

The Virtual Colonization of Territorial Space

Olivier Razac

Listen to Olivier Razac's intervention (in French) bit.ly/2ARFTeu

We are currently undergoing the long-lasting implementation of a climate of ultra-security policy in “our” part of the world, in this case in a highly controversial way in Belgium and France. These policies of repression, control, surveillance, but also propaganda, are certainly to be re-situated in a period of threats of attacks, but also of criminalization and increased repression of social disputes. Disputes focus on these policies that increasingly generate intolerable violence, nationally and internationally; to hasten matters and avoid misunderstandings, we could call these policies neo-liberal capitalist.

Our relationship, however, to security practices and repression, our interpretation and our evaluation of these phenomena, remain largely obsessed with their material manifestations and, to be frank, by their brute force. Firstly, because they are simply more visible, then because of the pain, even though merely perceived, engages a direct physical reaction, while the psychic suffering, the indirect constraints, the threats, the pressures, the manipulation of desires and opinions inevitably require a process of perception, analysis, and evaluation that is not obvious.

Our relationship, to security practices remain largely obsessed with their material manifestations.

And so, when we think of how this security power manifests itself in our living environment, especially in urban spaces, we conjure up soldiers armed with assault rifles patrolling public space, the closing of spaces to carry out controls (e.g. station platforms or kettling used as a tactic in controlling demonstrations, for example, in Paris), the images of special forces intervening, the militarization of the “forces of order,” as well as the excessive use of tear gas, flash balls, and explosive grenades that mutilate and kill. This brutalization of the security power has also been interpreted as “colonial” or “neo-colonial,” transposing repressive and neutralizing techniques that were wrought upon the populations in the colonized territories.⁰¹

01. On this point refer to Mathieu Rigouste, *L'Ennemi intérieur. La généalogie coloniale et militaire de l'ordre sécuritaire dans la France contemporaine*, Paris, La Découverte, 2011.

The point is by no means to euphemize this brutality or relativize its on-going proliferation. The essential point, however, may not be evident in terms of political violence. This ostensibly physical violence, whose political function is to intimidate, is only the tip of the iceberg of a generalized and saturated takeover of our daily environment, a power which largely passes through dematerialization, discretion, an automation of its procedures based on new technologies; in short, virtualizing the control of space thus enabling what one could call a “total” colonization.

From Virtualization to Incorporation?

We must straightaway clarify what is to be understood by this notion of “virtualizing” power over space. And, above all, to immediately eliminate the idea that this “virtualization” could be summarized as a kind of dematerialization, alleviation, and therefore mitigating the execution of power and its ramifications. It’s quite the opposite. Indeed, contrary to our focus on physical pain, we tend to think, or feel without really thinking about it, that a largely immaterial power, invisible, and, above all, that most often captures our interest, is less oppressive, and more acceptable, even desirable. This is especially so, for it is extremely difficult to perceive all its mechanisms and effects and thus to make a correct ethical and political evaluation.

To clarify this point, we can start from a triptych describing the evolution of methods used to demarcate space: the fortress, the electronic bracelet, and barbed wire⁰². With the fortress, and more broadly the wall, power over space is fully made a reality in frozen matter. The fortress is, for the most part, massive, immobile, rigid, ostensible, and passive. Barbed wire already constitutes a form of a virtualized wall. It retains only the minimum of material, like a skeleton of a wall — and thus easily movable, and adaptable according to the needs of the moment — its resistance doesn’t rest any more on a rigidity that pushes, but rather on a plasticity that bends but doesn’t break — it can on demand be discreet — and, above all, it cannot only be passive any longer. The balance between massive passivity and a need to defend the wall, in spite of everything, must be reversed here; what is no longer fixed in matter must be converted into a capacity for surveillance and potential defence reaction, but with a decisive tactical economy, this expenditure of power will take place only when necessary, and corresponding to precise information concerning the surveillance.

02. I touch upon this point in my book: *Histoire politique du barbelé*, Paris, Flammarion, “Champs”, 2009.

Finally, with the electronic bracelet, there is the potential to seal off a particular space, by moving a minimum of material. In France, placing someone under electronic surveillance (what is known in France as *placement sous surveillance électronique*, i.e. PSE) is a method to execute a penal sentence, which nevertheless concerns about ten thousand people at any given time. Based upon a rather basic technology involving radio frequencies, it can detect the presence or absence at home of a convicted person wearing the bracelet around his/her ankle. Essentially, the PSE is an electronically verifiable curfew, for the convicted person is constrained to leave and return from work at specific times, in the evening and at night. This type of technology both extends and maximizes the inversion of the use of space already represented by barbed wire: lightness, mobility, plasticity, discretion, and potentiality are at their maximum here.

With the electronic bracelet, there is the potential to seal off a particular space, by moving a minimum of material.

On this level, while we can imagine that barbed wire is no less violent than a wall, it remains much less obvious that the electronic bracelet does not indicate diminishing the power apparatus’s violence over space. To understand this, we need to bear in mind at least three arguments:

1. The electronic bracelet and, in general, the virtualized forms of the exercise of power haven’t replaced their more brutal and archaic forms; they are an addition to or are contingent upon them. The bracelet has not been put into use so as to empty prisons, or even to enable a reduction in the number of prisons; instead, it has toughened

penal sentences on the outside. Cameras, infrared terminals, and multiple electronic sensors facilitate surveillance where it hasn't been possible to seal off a particular space or make regular patrols, but these technologies can also be added to a fortified enclosure to increase permeability. Hence, this does not constitute a transition to a dematerialization of power, but rather an extension of its immaterial grip.

2. The violence of virtualized boundaries predominantly shifts from the body toward the "mind" or the psyche. They do not render getting about impossible, but they do operate forms of threat that shift the site of the balance of power of confronting bodies toward confronting motives and effects (of fear, of longing) in everyone's mind and body. They operate a permanent interest calculation (albeit more or less conscious) where calls to order, arguments for or against, fears of threats, attraction toward promised pleasures, and so on clash. Thus, unacceptable movement is not so much blocked, or even prohibited; this doesn't arise because of a subject's self-control, and who has internalized the surveillance, the threats, and the promises. Hence, the conflicts, the coercion, and the violence haven't disappeared, but rather the "battlefield" has been "spiritualized."
3. Where things become somewhat complicated is, of course, that this power does not remain on the level of ethereal sphere of electrical impulses of surveillance or detection apparatus or cerebral activity; in return it is renewed in an effective control, all that is more material, displacements. First of all, we must consider that this "virtualized" power, effectively digitalized in its operations, is nonetheless based on a technological, industrial, and possibly globalized hardware infrastructures (in the case of satellite surveillance or the Internet, for example). And then, this power never acts directly from the machine on the mind. It's invariably a "social" power that takes possession of a living environment and impacts interactions between individuals (cameras in the street or at a shopping centre, the role of the entourage in the electronic bracelet). Finally, it hinges upon "material references" that have a growing importance in our lives (the bracelet around the ankle, the mobile phone, the inter-connected watch). Referents who immediately "corporatize" this power — sitting in front of a computer talking to someone on the other side of the world, doesn't mean being dematerialized; it is to prefer one form of physical activity over another possible form.

From Pokémon GO to the GPS Bracelet

Two concrete examples will enable us to better understand the functioning and the effects of this power over space, in particular of this continual shuttling between hardware updates and electronic virtualization. On the side of a rather repressive power apparatus, the electronic bracelet GPS — and on the side of a rather incentivizing power, the augmented reality game Pokémon GO.

Let's start with the "lighter" of the two, Pokémon GO. In fact, its nimbleness is only an appearance that must be overcome. First, this game has not come out of "nowhere," nor does it derive from the childlike spirit of a creator of pleasures. Niantic, the company that created the game, was a subsidiary of Google. Its founder, John Hanke, directed Google's geographic division (Google Earth, Google Maps, the world's most widely used mapping software). Prior to that, he led Keyhole, a company specializing in mapping and spatial visualization, whose clients included the US Federal Government, the Ministry of Defence (the Pentagon), as well as its intelligence agencies.

Two months after its launch (6 July 2016 in the United States), the game had already been downloaded five hundred million times and was present in one hundred countries. Not to take such a phenomenon seriously, under the pretext that it is "simple" trade or "low popular culture," is to indulge an elitist cultural prejudice that obscures the major political ramifications of new forms of "cultural goods," and not only industrialized ones. These

goods have been industrialized for some time now, but more recently they have become especially ubiquitous and interlaced with everyday life due to a burgeoning cybernetic interlacing of our lives.

How does the game function? It is based on mapping and GPS location in real time. The player directs an avatar on a virtual map by actually moving about with his/her smartphone. This map features creatures to capture, as well as points of interest containing resources and arenas to conquer with the captured creatures. Elements of virtual reality are added to this geo-localisation operation, for the creatures appearing on the map can also appear superimposed on the image of the reality filmed by the smartphone. Points of interest in the game are also often points of interest in reality (monuments, places of interest, places of assembly, etc.).

The game covers the entire territory, whose meaning and value it reconfigures for the players.

What can we infer about this for the moment? Theoretically, the game covers the entire territory of the world, whose *meaning and value* it reconfigures for the players. That 12th century fortified tower, for example, imbued with a historical sense and heritage value, also has, or in lieu, the sense of being a site to conquer in the game and a value that is contingent upon its level as a scene of action. The interest of this square dramatically modifies whenever the game has a particularly rare creature appear there. In other words, the players' use of space and their actual movements depend primarily on the meaning accorded to them by the game's virtual layer. We will later more precisely touch upon the consequences of this "virtual colonization".

Despite these arguments, the overriding tendency is not to take measure of this virtualization's challenges from these kinds of devices and to resort to the modality of "playfulness." How the game operates, however, perfectly describes the technological and political principle of a new type of power over the territory as it is also at work in a multitude of other devices, including "security measures" for "dangerous criminals" based on the GPS electronic bracelet, or being placed under mobile electronic surveillance (PSEM) in France⁰³. Essentially, this measure is added to the penal sentence handed out to individuals whose "dangerousness" has been "assessed" (an evaluation as rigorous as peering into a crystal ball), that is to say, the risk of taking future action. On these grounds, those sentenced are required to wear for a highly variable or even indeterminate duration, a geo-location device comprising an ankle monitor, as well as a GPS/GSM unit attached to the belt. We need to distinguish this "mobile placement" from the previous one, which could be described as "fixed" in contrast. The GPS bracelet concerns a lot fewer persons (currently about sixty in France). Still, we should realise that this technology has become the norm in the United States, with about four thousand devices being deployed alone in Florida in January 2015.

03. On this point, refer to my research report: *Le Placement sous surveillance électronique mobile: un nouveau modèle pénal?*, CIRAP/ENAP, Ministry of Justice, 2011 (The report can be downloaded from my website:

bit.ly/2s4cL1E

Making "compliant" moves which don't attract the suspicion of a "look" all the more significant because it is distant, mysterious, and infallible.

This device operates three types of controls: Prohibiting someone to visit certain places (victim's home, "criminogenic" sites, and so on); obligating someone to remain in certain places (work, therapy, home); and managing risks by using a "movement log" analysis. Here, we are also dealing with a virtual layer of meaning and value that has the power to control people's actual movements to a certain extent. Here, the threat of prison makes it possible to amplify the "discouragement" to operate such or such a move (as the promise

of the rare creature is, on the contrary, an encouragement). In such a way that without changing the subject matter of the territory, we can effectively forbid someone from entering or leaving certain areas and, moreover, force them into making “compliant” moves, that is to say which don’t attract the suspicion of a “look” that is all the more significant because it is distant, mysterious, and infallible.

Superimposing Layers

We are in fact dealing here with various “colonisations” of every domain following the same model: control of the satellite map and the geo-localisation of the “mobiles” that are traversing it. It is finally a case of developing the already classic GPS guidance and the most recent “augmented reality.” Our navigators’ maps can already indicate to us sites of practical, cultural, or tourist interests, and indicate the best way of getting to them. Early attempts at “augmented reality” have already made it possible to roam through urban space by following points of interest and by visualizing information and multimedia enhancements that have been embedded in the image of reality of our screens.

We have to detect the development of a new type of power over space.

Consequently, we shouldn’t stop at this or that example, which, in themselves, will always seem trivial or partial; we have to detect the development of an already well-installed new type of power over space, but which is still only in its infancy. This power is characterized by the ability to produce like “layers” that are superimposed on the space actually travelled, coming to reconfigure meaning and value, hence spatial practices, even though this particular space can remain physically identical (although it is necessarily modified by the tremendous moves of the guided bodies). This “new dimension” of space and its control entails several outcomes:

1. *Creating an additional dimension* of the space over which the power implications are specific. Here, we need to call on metaphors, for strictly speaking it’s not a case of “vertical” dimension of layers, of one on top of the next. These layers are at once distinct and yet overlap by forming a single layer. Notwithstanding, the owner of the layer can exert a particular power over this layer with great independence vis-à-vis the physical space and the other layers. He is master of his own castle. Hence, the economic model for Pokémon GO has already evolved. If, at the outset, most revenue came from the players’ purchases of game materials, they will over time gradually be found in the sale of positionings of virtual interest on real space. A commercial brand, a city, can pay for the game to place a point of interest, thus increasing footfall according to a precise marketing calculation. Theoretically, the game holds complete power over its layer, as is the case for any designer and layer manager. In the same way that the judge responsible for executing sentences, theoretically makes all the demarcations he considers appropriate to the risk profile of the displaced person wearing a GPS bracelet.
2. *Spatial extensiveness* (horizontal axis). The “GPS” territory indeed covers the entire world. Theoretically, it eludes physical limitations (what is a mountain range or an ocean?) and political frontiers. More precisely, this virtualized control enables a qualitative leap and not merely a quantitative difference in terms of the costs of exercising power. All that is required is a few mouse clicks to demarcate prohibition zones for the bracelet wearer. Above all, the cost is identical regardless of the scale of this area (a building, a city, the remainder of the territory) and the number of areas. Further-

more, its costs almost nothing to alter these areas, as it does to insert or remove points of interest. Modifying computerized space, and thus the influence it has on the actual practices in space, are freed from heaviness, inertia, and energy costs related to physical matter.

3. *Intensifying power over space* (vertical axis). Furthermore, we need to imagine the superposition of a multitude of computerized *layers* coding space differently, in such a way that a particular place has virtually a plurality of meanings and values. Given, however, that each layer's configuration has repercussions on actual practices in space, these acquisitions of power could come into conflict with the more classical material power, but also between different devices wielding digital power (they can encode incompatible meanings and values, or those in tension). With the electronic bracelet, this could give rise to Kafkaesque quandaries. Hence, this "dis-placed" person, who is forbidden to enter the city of L., still has to take the ring road to get to work, as a provision of his penalty. Pretty contradictory injunction. To make this paradox possible, despite everything, the probation staff has pushed the device to its limits by operating like the entire cut-out of the curve of the ring road. They have framed the itinerary as closely as possible with multiple rectangles in such a way as to prohibit entry into the city but not the route. As for Pokémon, several institutions (countries, memorial sites, military bases, educational institutions, municipalities) have asked for the removal of creatures or points of interest from their "territory."⁰⁴ The game's website features a withdrawal form that seems to produce swift results. For all that, a strange inversion of property rights has emerged. The layer's virtual status enables the institution controlling it to have, theoretically, full authority power over it and, in this specific scenario, a de facto property right on the layer (but that which "happens" on the layer impacts real space). Hence, it is only after-the-fact that the property owner can ask the "first" to withdraw⁰⁵. Of course, there is nothing fundamentally new about this. Cartography has always been a major power issue, particularly with regard to the nation state. And, as we know, the land map is not the territory. Title deeds (virtual in the form of paper and, even more so, of legal semantics) could already encode physical space in incompatible ways. Just as we all have representations of space (cultural, social, political, aesthetic) that influence the way we move through space. And yet, we need to insist on the industrial (hence capitalist), globalized, automated, and retroactive dimension of these layers. What we are really talking about is millions of people equipped with devices operating space using maps controlled by multinationals or by nation states. Maps that steer millions of people at the same time, all while adjusting to all these individual itineraries in real time. It is difficult to claim there is nothing new about this, and it's even unsettling.

04. While Iran has prohibited the game on its territory, Thailand seems to appreciate its touristic appeal (in 2016).

05. On this issue, refer to an interesting article posted on the blog of a jurist: Lionel Maurice, "Pokémon GO et la quatrième dimension de la propriété," 15 August 2016 (last consulted 19 June 2017). Source: bit.ly/2yWGIEA

We live in the same world as bodies that live on other layers than us.

4. *Destroying communal space*. Moreover, these layers have contrasting accessibilities. Some are confidential (military mapping), others depend on an individual and/or community wishes (games, augmented cultural reality in museums or cities, and/or commercial conditions), while others hinge on practical needs (route guidance, or outdoor guidance for athletes), still others are constraining (the above-mentioned PSEM, GPS for children, dependent people, wild animals...) In any event, the access and use of these layers of information alters the space practices of groups using them. This generates fragmentation and potential inequalities in the constitution of shared space⁰⁶. A shared space that is already largely fractured due to typical reasons such as ghettoization and differential accessibility. But, we are dealing here with an immense and largely unnoticed fracturing of the conditions of possibility of this shared space, by virtual conditions of impossibility.

06. Sur ce point voir l'analyse de géographie sociale très fine sur le blog Pixels du journal Le Monde. Morgane Tual, Damien Leloup et Jules Grandin, « Pokémon Go »: les multiples facteurs des inégalités géographiques, 12 août 2016, Source: lemde.fr/2auGliC

And yet, we will increasingly come across, more so than encounter, “mobiles” following the virtual signs of a space to which we don’t have access, because we don’t know it, don’t want it, or cannot afford it. So, it’s not enough to say that we’re not affected by layers we don’t know, for we live in the same world as bodies that live on other layers than us (just as it’s absurd to say that we’re not personally concerned about mass spectacle because we don’t have a television or a computer). As for our children playing with Pokémon GO, we are obviously concerned about its layers, irrespective of our patronizing attitude to this “passing fad.” We can finally reflect on the scenario of this person at home (PSE) who would go to his next-door neighbour for a drink, but who now did not want to tell them that he was wearing a bracelet. His repeated refusal to accept the invitation thus provoked a twofold violence, mutually ignored. The person under surveillance was the only one to perceive the virtual enclosure that prevents him from going out. As for the neighbour, he felt the violence of an inexplicable refusal. If we formalize the above example, then we have a person who cannot or, on the contrary, wishes to make a particular move because of the “world” which is accessible to him, but without the industrially generated “meaning” of this move being accessible for another person who does the same thing, and so for everybody else. This is the unprecedented structure, notably in its scope, of a progressive destruction of any shared space.

bit.ly/2BRGDRd

Translated from French by John Barrett.

BIOGRAPHY
Olivier Razac



Olivier Razac is a philosopher and senior lecturer at Université Grenoble Alpes, pedagogic lecturer of the SHA license (Applied Human Sciences) and member of the scientific committee of the journal *Champ Pénal/Penal Field*. His areas of research cover ecology and bio-politics, spectacle, health, ethics and medicine, as well as surveillance, confinement and probation. He has published *Histoire politique du barbelé* (Flammarion), *Avec Foucault, après Foucault* (L'Harmattan), *La Grande Santé* (Flammarion). He also publishes on his website of "plebeian philosophy": bit.ly/2BRGDRd.

Photo: © Nada Zganc

REMARKABLE EVENT

Blast Theory

Ahead of the Curve

Mary Brennan

There's a wonderfully maverick, chameleon, quality to Blast Theory, the UK-based group of artists who first came together in 1991 and – by drawing on a consistently broad-based mix of talents – are still creating radically provocative work some twenty-five years later. Scan through the company's back catalogue of projects and performances and you swiftly catch a sense of how an energising curiosity has sparked material changes in the delivery of productions together with a willingness to adapt existing methodologies across art forms. Sitting cosily and complacently on old laurels isn't how this group sustains itself.

Across decades of award-winning initiatives, Blast Theory's shape-shifting has embraced live presentations, film and art work, and then – as advances in technology offered new possibilities – forays into a sphere of interactive engagements where audience connections could be forged worldwide, and yet also retain that special immediacy of personal involvement. As mobile phones have got smarter, so Blast Theory have explored the involving allure of games and apps but at no time do you ever get an impression that their mastery of gizmos and techno-whizz-wizardry is done in a spirit of showy one-up-manship, or gimmickry. Rather, what emerges from their astute use of digital media is a very human dynamic of listening to, and observing how, participants react to online propositions. Insights gained from those responses filter into subsequent work where the surreptitious crossover between reality and fiction is like magic dust to the imagination, encouraging it to fly – to infinity and beyond, or maybe to Never-Never-Land.

Recent scenarios have seen Blast Theory's flair for thinking 'outside the box' demonstrate a kind of gut instinct for what it is audiences would like to experience in the moment, and reflect on, afterwards. Not every company is as willing to share the responsibility for creating work – and work that will be documented and aired across various platforms – with strangers who volunteer to join in. Blast Theory have made a virtue of this potentially volatile involvement, seeing it as integral to the issues of power, control and risk they consider in their work.

What governs the techniques of crowd control in various contexts or confrontations?

At different times over the years, the group's leaders, Matt Adams, Ju Row Farr and Nick Tandavanitjk, have spoken about specific influences, starting points and intentions. Popular culture has been a recurring stimulus. So too has the kaleidoscopic nature of 'the crowd.' How do individuals behave when en masse in a confined space, or on the streets in a demonstration? What governs the techniques of crowd control in various contexts or confrontations? The group were also drawn to the mental, physical and emotional states that being in a crowd induced in individuals. That sense of liberation, for instance, that was part of going clubbing: of being 'in your skin' but in a heightened, ecstatic way – and how that euphoria could also exist when shoulder-to-shoulder with others on protest marches, even if that feeling of being alive, asserting your views at a moment in history, was more than likely allied to the stress of being scared. Things might turn ugly, you might get hurt even... It's adrenaline in a nutshell! Analysing the underlying psychology that nudges people to crave risks, or be something other than their routine selves, helped Blast Theory to push other "hungry-for-excitement" buttons in their participating audiences.

Hybrid Experiences

Luckily, the mobile technology was in hand — along with the public's burgeoning appetite for role-playing games — to allow Blast Theory to develop hybrid experiences such as *Kidnap* (1998). Two randomly-selected volunteers were kidnapped in real-time, and their 48 hours in captivity streamed to a website — it would later be distilled into a 30 minutes film. The initial impulse for *Kidnap* had been the Spanner Trial in which consenting sadomasochists were convicted and sent to prison. The word “consent” triggered a creative response in members of Blast Theory, a response that took a forensic, questioning look at the social mores, the legalities and media-driven opinions that dictated the limits of “consent” when certain kinds of behaviour come under scrutiny. Who categorises what is held to be transgressive? Did it seem perverse to want to be kidnapped? If so, why? Almost twenty years on, there are no cut and dried answers to those questions. And Shock! Horror! Newspaper headlines are still in the business of dishing up vicarious thrills to readers who can then assume positions of censorious moral superiority without necessarily knowing all the facts — a topic that was also intrinsic to the workings of *Kidnap*.

Meanwhile, following on from *Kidnap*, Blast Theory were on a learning curve that would lead them, and their participants onto the streets. And if those who, armed with mobile phones, were up for the chase — caught up in adventures where the teasing, thrilling, unknown could be lurking round the next corner — back at Blast Theory base, there were risk-assessors, gamesters, psychologists and a whole host of associate artists keeping a watchful eye on proceedings, absorbing the stuff of interactions between strangers who weren't necessarily meeting in the same location or time zone.

In *Can You See Me Now?* (2001), a chase game played out online and on the streets, where the flesh and blood runners were members of Blast Theory. As the chase got under way, online players engaged with a virtual runner and the competition took on the urgency of genuine pursuit. Audio-streaming between runner and online player fostered a persuasive intimacy, the sophisticated graphics — where a virtual city overlaid the physical one — brought the action together in a shared time and space. It was escapist adventuring by proxy: no couch potato, sitting at a screen, was harmed — although feedback suggested many were shaken and unnerved by the unleashing of competitive forces.

As for Blast Theory, and their collaborators, the games-play highlighted how the internet could dissolve distance, re-define locations, forge relationships between people who might not actually be who they say they are — a whole realm of make-believe where perceived truths can deceive, and a degree of authored manipulation can coax you into free-fall trust, risk-taking and acting out of (cautious) character. The possible inconsistencies of who is in control is quintessential Blast Theory terrain.

Blast Theory responded by taking everything outdoors, and making work in public places where there was a degree of unforeseen ambiguity.

As more and more people got caught up interactive on-line gaming, the same technologies coloured people's expectations of live performances. Settling down into a plush-covered theatre seat, being a passive onlooker from behind the fourth wall, no longer had guaranteed appeal — especially when compared to the impact of a well-crafted immersive experience. Blast Theory not only identified this trend, they responded by taking everything outdoors, and making work in public places where there was a degree of unforeseen ambiguity. Was that passing ambulance, all sirens wailing, part of an unfolding narrative? That man loitering by the children's playground, was he a parent or a player in a plot-line

where audience members might be called upon to make decisions about what should happen next – maybe even intervene, personally?

Testing the Limits of Audience Agency

There's a paradox in the way individuals behave – they can be very bold on-line, but shy and risk-averse in real-time. Can you lure them into abandoning that reserve? Does being in a crowd dissolve away a reluctance to act? And what if the questions that are being threaded into the event-experience are tied into matters of caring and conscience? When is it not just right, but essential, to get involved? With each subsequent foray into interactive live experiences, Blast Theory kept testing the limits of audience agency and re-jigging the balance of control. The company would put in place a matrix of necessary safeguards – agreeing terms, conditions and licences with local officials and so forth – thereafter allowing audiences to take over the shape and outcomes of the piece. The emphasis was always on putting participants at the heart of the matter, their ability to make choices and negotiate consequences a vital component of their having a worthwhile experience. And, hopefully, a fun one.

In 2017, this approach saw Blast Theory plunge into their most ambitious, complex and large-scale endeavour with *2097: We Made Ourselves Over*. The inhabitants of two cities – Aarhus in Denmark and Hull in England – were invited to imagine the future not just of their home towns, but of a world that most of them wouldn't live to see. Workshops in schools, and sessions with the young, middle-aged and elderly alike, accumulated source material that subsequently informed five short sci-fi films that featured three young girls, each faced with making a decision that would affect their entire city. 2017 has been Hull's year as UK City of Culture while Aarhus is currently European Capital of Culture. If these roles had already prompted both communities to re-assess the status and identity of where they lived – perhaps rediscover strengths of infrastructure, amenity and 'character' that had been diminished by everyday familiarity – becoming flag-bearers for cultural enterprise had also triggered an enthusiasm for curating re-generation.

Could memories be transferred from the dying to the living as ink droplets in a glass of water?

Blast Theory came in on the crest of this self-aware wave and fast-forwarded civic pride into future aspirations. Transport systems. Climate change. Food supplies. Health care. All of them present concerns. Dreaming now – acting now – could make a practical difference. But Blast Theory also introduced notions that wouldn't look out of place in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Could memories – the essence of experiences and learned wisdom – be transferred from the dying to the living as ink droplets in a glass of water? Could molecular harvesters destroy cities and rebuild them as places where people could live happily and with dignity?

The bedrock of research and expertise, the network of connections that brought ordinary people into the creative process, the sheer scope, accomplishment and outreach of the artworks and films that resulted from *2097: We Made Ourselves Over* are both inspiring and humbling. There is something truly joyous and uplifting about how Blast Theory empowered the people of Aarhus and Hull to criss-cross between reality and fiction in a spirit of optimism. This visionary, immersive work has already touched the hearts and minds of thousands who – when all the phone boxes suddenly started ringing at the same time – answered a call to imagine change. If, maybe, you think that artists are the conscience of our society, and that the art they create is like the vitamins and trace minerals that keep humanity

healthy, then you will warmly recognise that in Blast Theory we have ground-breaking talents who can make where we live tell us who we are – and who we want to be.

bit.ly/2Bqsiz3



Kidnap
Blast Theory

Architecture Foundation, London, 1998

© Blast Theory

bit.ly/2zl2imj



Can You See Me Now?
Blast Theory

Festival b.tv, Sheffield, 2001

© Blast Theory

bit.ly/2jdyT4L



Can You See Me Now?
Blast Theory

Festival b.tv, Sheffield, 2001

© Blast Theory

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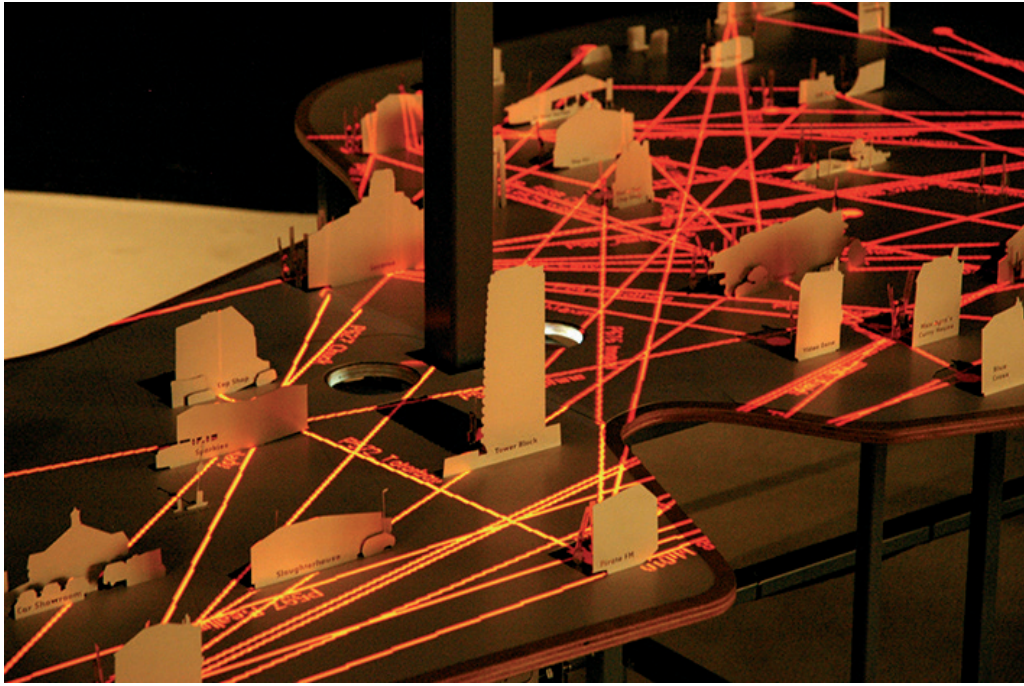


Uncle Roy All Around You
Blast Theory

ICA, London, 2003

© Blast Theory

bit.ly/2CXVivc



Day of the Figurines
Blast Theory

National Museum, Singapore, 2006

© Blast Theory

bit.ly/2CUcCl3



Ulrike and Eamont Compliant
Blast Theory

Biennale, Venice, 2009

© Blast Theory

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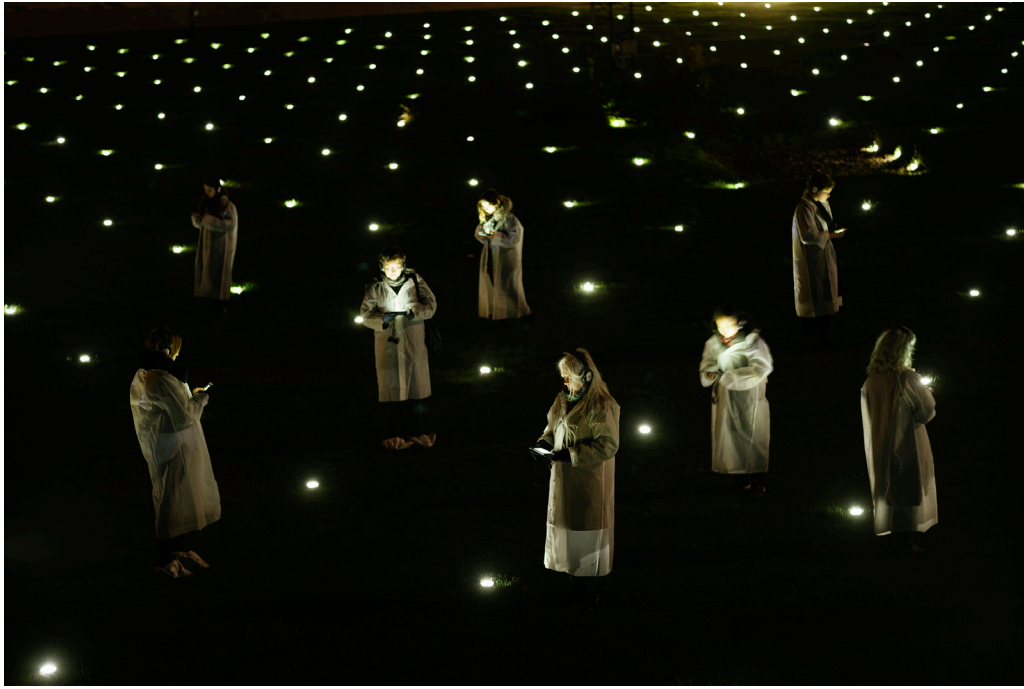


I'd Hide You
Blast Theory

FutureEverything, Manchester, 2012

© Blast Theory

bit.ly/2kGHeOo



2097: We Made Ourselves Over
Blast Theory

European Capital of Culture, Aarhus, 2017

© Asbjørn Sand

bit.ly/2kGTA9p

BIOGRAPHY
Mary Brennan



Mary Brennan is the dance and performance critic for *The Herald* newspaper, Scotland's leading quality broadsheet. During her time as an arts journalist she has written about many aspects of national and international performance, and was privileged to be in Glasgow during several of the National Review of Live Art showcases curated by Nikki Milican. She has written programme notes for dance companies as diverse as Grupo Corpo (from Brazil), Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo (from New York) and her own 'home team', Scottish Ballet. She also runs workshops in critical writing for school groups and others.

Photo: © Nikki Milican

STROLL

Landline

Un Unlikely Rendezvous

Dustin Harvey

I believe in the ways art can celebrate a community's history or a particular site, inspire people to look at their environment in a new way, and bring creativity into the ordinary places usually ignored or walked past. With this in mind, connection, intimacy and locality are essential principles of how I see the shared experience of theatre. In a recent work I co-created with Adrienne Wong entitled *Landline*⁰⁷, we explored these principles not just in the exchange between strangers, but also through participation strategies that place the viewer inside the work. This shift represents an evolution in my practice toward forms that allow for audiences to be in direct contact with each other, and without a performer. This participation matters because it brings an aspect of liveness to the experience, and endows spectators with a certain amount of agency as well as creative risk-taking necessary for discovering new things.

07. *Landline*, created by Adrienne Wong and Dustin Harvey. Sound Engineer: Shawn Bisson. Music: Brian Riley and Elling Lien. Produced by XOSECRET (Secret Theatre, Halifax). The project was developed with support from Newworld Theatre and Secret Theatre in collaboration with the Canada's National Arts Centre. *Landline* has been presented at festivals and venues in Wales, Scotland, Iceland, and across Canada. It has also been translated and presented in French.

I met Adrienne Wong in 2011 in Vancouver while she was presenting her work *Podplays* as part of the PuSh Festival. I was immediately struck by the coincidence of another person on the other side of the country doing a parallel thing. I remember meeting Adrienne and talking about the possibility of working on a new piece together that pushed beyond the headset formats we had been working on, and played on notions of serendipity and coexistence.

Six months later we began working on *Landline*, a shared experience for two strangers on opposite sides of the country. The piece used city streets, cell phone technology and poetic suggestion to engage audience members in an unlikely game of rendezvous. Technically the way the piece worked is simple. The audience-participant arrived at a starting point, and were given an *iPod* and a headset. Each *iPod* was synched through a countdown in real time by Adrienne and I using a video chat. Once synched, the audio was in essence playing simultaneously over both headsets. The audio track contained a set of directions urging them to drift through the city, and conjured a place thousands of miles away. The audio guide asked them to scout locations to become the backdrop for scenes, and prompted them to text stories and memories to a number they were given at the beginning. The participants' own mobile phone acted as a bridge between the two cities. When it came time for interaction, for sharing text messages, the audio track prompted the listener to engage with their phone, and accommodate for the time to respond. Participants were instructed to scout their own locations for scenes alleviating the need for us to develop a guide or map to follow. An incoming text message completed the exchange, and two strangers were in dialogue with each other. Finally the spectators were guided back to home base in their own cities. They encountered a table set for two. They sat and discovered the face of a stranger via a video chat. In the final movement, the city disappeared, leaving two individuals — at once the performer and audience for the other — in a simple moment of brave theatrical intimacy. The success of this last moment, Adrienne suggested, depends on the participant's ability to overcome the distance, to humanize the other, to use technology for the purposes of bringing us closer together in the here and now. By establishing a carefully choreographed sequence of events, the project encouraged people to enjoy a stroll together through an imaginary space, while the real cities moved around them without notice.

Landline largely takes its inspiration from a Situationist game called a "possible rendezvous", an accidental meeting in a public place. In a "possible rendezvous" you make a

telephone call to someone who gives you a random location for a meeting a stranger. After you arrive you wait for the person to show up. The intention alters how you perceive the location you are in, and prompts you to engage with it differently. We took the “possible rendezvous” as an elaborate metaphor by asserting that a far-reaching yet intimate connection is, on some point of comparison, the same as the theatrical event. We intended *Landline* to evoke the idea of the shared experience, to get people to discover similarities and differences, and to see participation as a crucial part of global citizenship. We were inspired by the playful idea of drifting around urban environments and wanted to make the city come alive through public engagement. This is particularly important for theatre today because it reflects an audience that requires a certain amount of agency, and inclusion if it is going to matter to them personally. *Landline* offers individuals an opportunity to be part of a parallel experience in a distant city. As theatre, the performance challenges the notion of a shared space.

Since the premiere between Halifax and Vancouver in 2014, *Landline* has been presented at festivals and venues in Wales, Scotland, Iceland, and across Canada. It has also been translated and presented in French ⁰⁸.

08. A previous version of this text was published in the chapter entitled Make What You Need in the book *In Defence Of Theatre: Aesthetic Practices and Social Interventions*, edited by Dr. Kathleen Gallagher and Dr. Barry Freeman, published by University of Toronto Press in 2016.

bit.ly/2yWqPxD

bit.ly/2khDYsB

Landline
Dustin Harvey et Adrienne Wong

Video, 5', 2014

© Millefiore Clarkes / One Thousand Flowers Production



Watch the video here: bit.ly/2Czl4nA



Landline

Dustin Harvey and Adrienne Wong

A double sided map with partner cities placed back to back is given to each player at the beginning of the experience. The starting point for each player is at the centre, and the circle represents where you can walk in ten minutes, approximately. The players can chose to follow it or not, to walk the streets of the other city, or not, or to ignore it altogether.

Map of Reykjavik

Iceland, 2015

Drawing © Colleen MacIsaac



Landline

Dustin Harvey and Adrienne Wong

Cory, an audience participant, walks the city streets listening to an audio guide.

Halifax, 2014

© Mel Hattie



Landline

Dustin Harvey and Adrienne Wong

Jacinte, an audience participant, listens to an audio guide and explores the streets of Halifax.

Halifax, 2014

© Mel Hattie

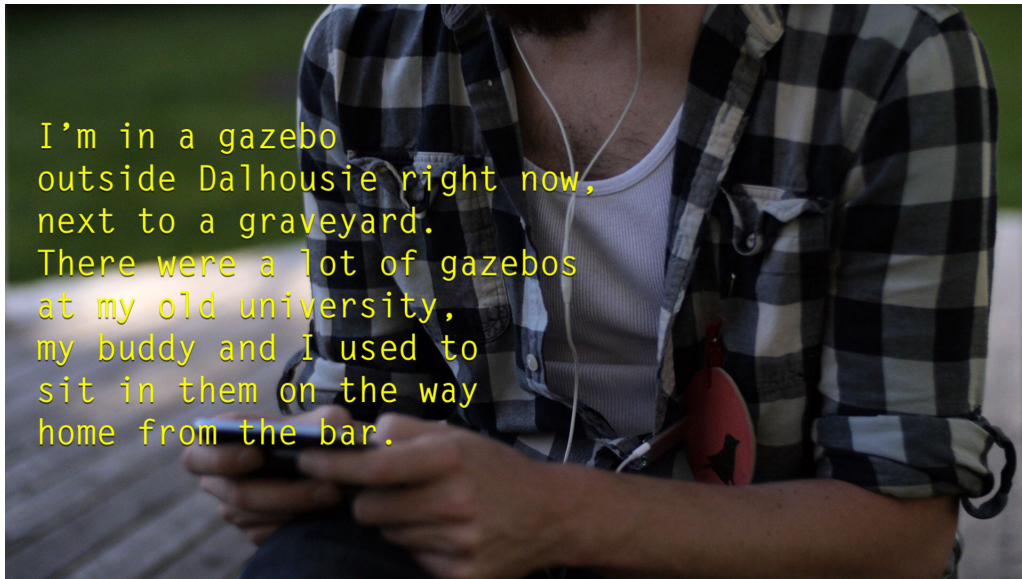


Landline
Dustin Harvey and Adrienne Wong

Chelsea in Vancouver and Ben in Halifax text each other, prompted by the audio track they are both listening to on the headset.

Halifax/Vancouver, 2014

© Millefiore Clarkes



Landline

Dustin Harvey and Adrienne Wong

Ben in Halifax texts his scene partner in Vancouver.

Halifax/Vancouver, 2014

© Millefiore Clarkes

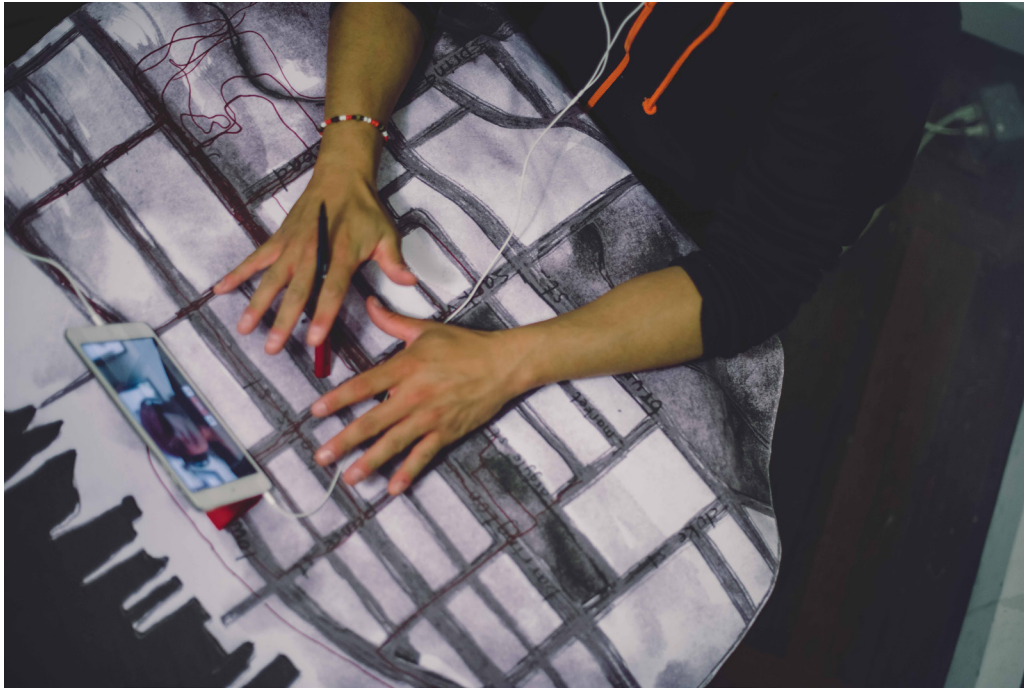


Landline
Dustin Harvey and Adrienne Wong

Peter in Vancouver and Mel in Halifax drift through the city together but four thousand km apart, promoted by the synched audio track.

Halifax/Vancouver, 2014

© Millefiore Clarkes



Landline

Dustin Harvey and Adrienne Wong

At the end of the experience, Cory, audience participant in Halifax, meets his scene partner in Vancouver via a video call.

Halifax/Vancouver, 2014

© Mel Hattie

BIOGRAPHY Adrienne Wong & Dustin Harvey



Adrienne Wong asks audiences to make connections with the environments and people who surround them by “re-seeing” the familiar and re-imagining the everyday. Works include a series of site-specific audio plays (*PodPlays*), a participatory show for kids about city planning (*Me On The Map*), a live, analogue Facebook (*Placebook*), and curating the research wing of SpiderWebShow.ca. Adrienne is based in Ottawa.

@AdrienneWong88

Dustin Harvey’s recent projects include theatrical walks with the help of iPods, live film experiences, site-specific performances, and responsive audio installations. Most of his work is collaborative in some way, and connected to XOSECRET (Secret Theatre, Halifax), a project led initiative that focuses on principles of creativity, technology and public space related to new practices emerging within the contemporary theatre milieu. His writing has been published by *Canadian Theatre Review*. He is a member of ArtsHalifax – an advisory committee to the City of Halifax, on the national advisory board of *Canadian Theatre Review*, and board member of Nova Scotia’s Masterworks Art Award.

@dustinharvey

Photo: Dustin Harvey © Mel Hattie. Adrienne Wong © Matt Reznick.

ITINERARY

First Life

Hyper-reality according to Ici-Même [Paris]

Samantha Maurin

Ici-Même [here-itself], a Paris-based group founded by Mark Etc in 1993, produces a wide range of theatrical interventions and urban scenographies that question our relationship with our social and urban environment. After having established a reputation for itself, and being recognized for its agility to infiltrate reality and to mystify, Ici-Même has adopted a diametrically opposed approach in its recent creations, by placing spectators at the core of the narration, and, in the unequivocal words of Mark Etc, “are now at ease with inviting the general public.” After an initial attempt of a “video-guided tour of the city” in *Allo Ici-Même* in 2010, *First Life* was launched in 2013.

Ici-Même defines *First Life* as an augmented reality show for a sole spectator. Based on the principle of the spectator being video-guided by a film uploaded on a smartphone, *First Life* sets out to embody the hero of a fiction that takes places in those very sites to which the spectator is guided. Fictive spaces superimpose with the immediate environment by means of video. The ensuing sense of unease is augmented by the 3D sound environment in which the spectator is immersed, by the illusionist scenography, as well as by the intervention of live actors who reinforce the friction between reality and fiction.

Generating new paths

Most *First Life* spectators spontaneously use the word “experience” to describe what they’ve undergone. Each experience is unique – a spectator who takes the same itinerary twice would not experience each in an identical fashion. The personal and almost intimate nature of this experience contributes to the confusion created between fiction and reality. The spectators’ emotional state at the outset is decisive and predisposes them to more or less embracing the experiment. Upon completing the experience, some are moved to tears, while others float in the air for a while, taking the time to “go come back down” and gather their wits. That which transpired in their bubble during the spectacle becomes a part of them.

The rule of the game consists in agreeing to play the puppet.

With *First Life*, spectators are aware from the outset that they will be steered by a narrative over which they have no control. The initial instructions outline how the video-guidance operates; the spectators agree to play along: *the rule of the game* consists in agreeing to play the puppet. They are not hoodwinked, however, by the experiment to which they lend themselves. “We are in the habit of controlling the smartphone, yet here, it is the smartphone that steers you; well, it may even be the case in real life!” remarked one spectator,

while another admitted: “That’s what’s unnerving, we’re in a position to film though we don’t film. We’re supposed to be the ones in control, whereas in fact we are the ones being controlled.” Ici-Même have taken the precaution of explaining this agreement to each spectator individually, reassuring him or her of the benevolent nature of the experiment. This reassurance has the effect of creating a symbolic safety net, enabling spectators to relativize the risk, all while appeasing or containing doubts induced by the posture of the “dual-I” they must assume from the beginning to the end of the adventure: they are at once bystanders and participating characters: they observe themselves assuming the role of a character. By underling the benevolence of the performative arrangement, Ici-Même also ensures the spectator’s collaboration. The performance’s success is contingent upon this mutual good will. “Immersion is not the means to turn the spectator into the experimental guinea pig. It’s more a way to touch without being touched, without leaving a mark, to touch as closely as possible something that would be deemed untouchable” explains Mark Etc, evoking our perception’s mechanisms that consciousness doesn’t control.

Disturbing, confusing, surprising, strange, unique, unprecedented, hallucinating, staggering, mesmerizing are but some of the terms spectators employ to describe *First Life*, thereby expressing the pleasure they experienced in playing the game. It’s a case of accessing a fictive space, in an interstitial dimension, a way of realizing the fantasy of penetrating the screen. “It’s complicated to explain, you have to do it, you’re at the heart of things, it’s to be experienced,” confided one spectator at the close of the performance. “We go along with something that isn’t us but which is supposed to be. We have a twofold view. By desisting the smartphone (of the eyes) a little, we have true vision. We’re caught between the two; we don’t know where we are, who we are, or where the film will lead us” was how another spectator described the experience. The script and staging reinforce this “dual-I” effect throughout the adventure by organizing discrepancies and coincidences as connecting points between fiction and reality.

The spectator’s physical involvement plays a fundamental role in this experience of ubiquity. The fundamental rule of play is that of the analogy of the gesture between the spectator and his/her avatar, opening a kind of doorway to fictive space: spectators cue their movements to the way their avatar moves in space, to the rhythm of its gait, to its dexterity, to its breathing patterns. Obvious differences (age, gender, body size and so on) entail spectators finding themselves in the skin of an other, and yet remaining themselves, thus engendering empathy. In this respect, the mirror is a powerful artifice. Mirror games superimpose fiction and reality, generating a world within worlds between fiction and reality: who is filming whom? Who is watching whom? At times spectators can even see their avatar’s reflection in a car window, or on a computer screen, without their character being aware of it.

Generating Confusion

Those localities that *First Life* visits are rarely unknown to the participating public. But the scenography involved forces spectators to question where they find themselves, compelling them to delve behind the scenes or adopt a new point of view about a place, which they thought they were familiar with. In order that spectators can orient themselves without getting lost, the shooting and scenography has ensured that fixed landmarks are highlighted. The staging will generate confusion between fiction and reality by constantly fluctuating discrepancies and coincidences around these permanent features. Whenever during the performance Ici-Même seize a workplace or living space frequented by its habitual users – a retirement home, a town hall, a shopping mall – the discrepancies are subtler and the ensuing confusion is accentuated by fortuitous coincidences between the avatar’s filmed environment and the spectator’s immediate environment.

Ici-Même also plays with fiction codes to generate surprise effects. Hence, an opening door enables, just as an ellipse operates, an abrupt transition to another universe. Stepping

through the door enables one go back in time or to be suddenly teleported elsewhere: the nursing home turns into a boarding school for young high-school girls, the swimming pool becomes a nightclub; the apartment squatted by migrants becomes a police station; the gym becomes a polling booth; the disused apartment transforms into mountainous landscape, and so forth.

Unlike images that preserve their fictional status from beginning to end, the soundtrack completely replaces the spectator's natural sound environment. Given spectators wear their headphones throughout the adventure, one spectator commented: "Virtual sound becomes the real thing." The 3D audio effect plunges spectators into an alternative reality, or into hyper-reality as Mark Etc characterizes it, meaning that it seems more true-to-life than nature itself. The sound recording is binaural, i.e. the sound recording device enables one reproduce natural three-dimensional listening, as a product of our auditory system, more so than a conventional stereophonic sound recording. This renders the virtual sound all the more realistic and credible. Thanks to 3D sound, *First Life* spectators can wander in "real" space all while remaining completely immersed in their avatar's subjective sound environment.

Real space and fictive space coincide.

Finally, and this represents an extra notch in the organized disorder between fiction and reality, certain characters materialize in "real" space, they take the opposite path to that of the spectator and emerge from the screen. Actors intervene live and challenge spectators who no longer know whether they're supposed to play their avatar's role, and thus respond to the actor, or to remain in their place as a bystander. Real space and fictive space coincide, thus further upsetting this ambiguous assignment of the spectator as someone between participant and bystander.

First Life does not put a spectator in a position of performing vis-à-vis other spectators, and yet affords him/her the opportunity to more or less get involved without the storyline being interrupted. Given the performative arrangement is designed for a single spectator, everyone can adjust their level of engagement, based on what they feel they are willing to do, trusting in their intimate cursor of letting go rather than possibly being coerced by the way in which others spectators look on. Even if the actors' live intervention questions and addresses spectators directly, and disrupts him/her in their position as spectator, this does not necessarily lead to an exchange. This is the particularity of the in-between state generated by the ensuing effects of the confusion between fiction and reality. Moreover, it is a sign of this classic spectatorial convention known as the "fourth wall" which, despite everything, spectators are accustomed to observe. It is also a sign of the critical and aesthetic distance spectators preserve while not fully yielding to the control and the force of the immersive dispositive.

bit.ly/2yWfVli

bit.ly/2jHVQxE

Translated from French by John Barrett.



First Life
Ici-Même

Théâtre Paris-Villette, 2016

© Ici-Même



First Life
Ici-Même

Fontenay-sous-bois, 2015

© Arthur Milleville



First Life
Ici-Même

Fontenay-sous-bois, 2015

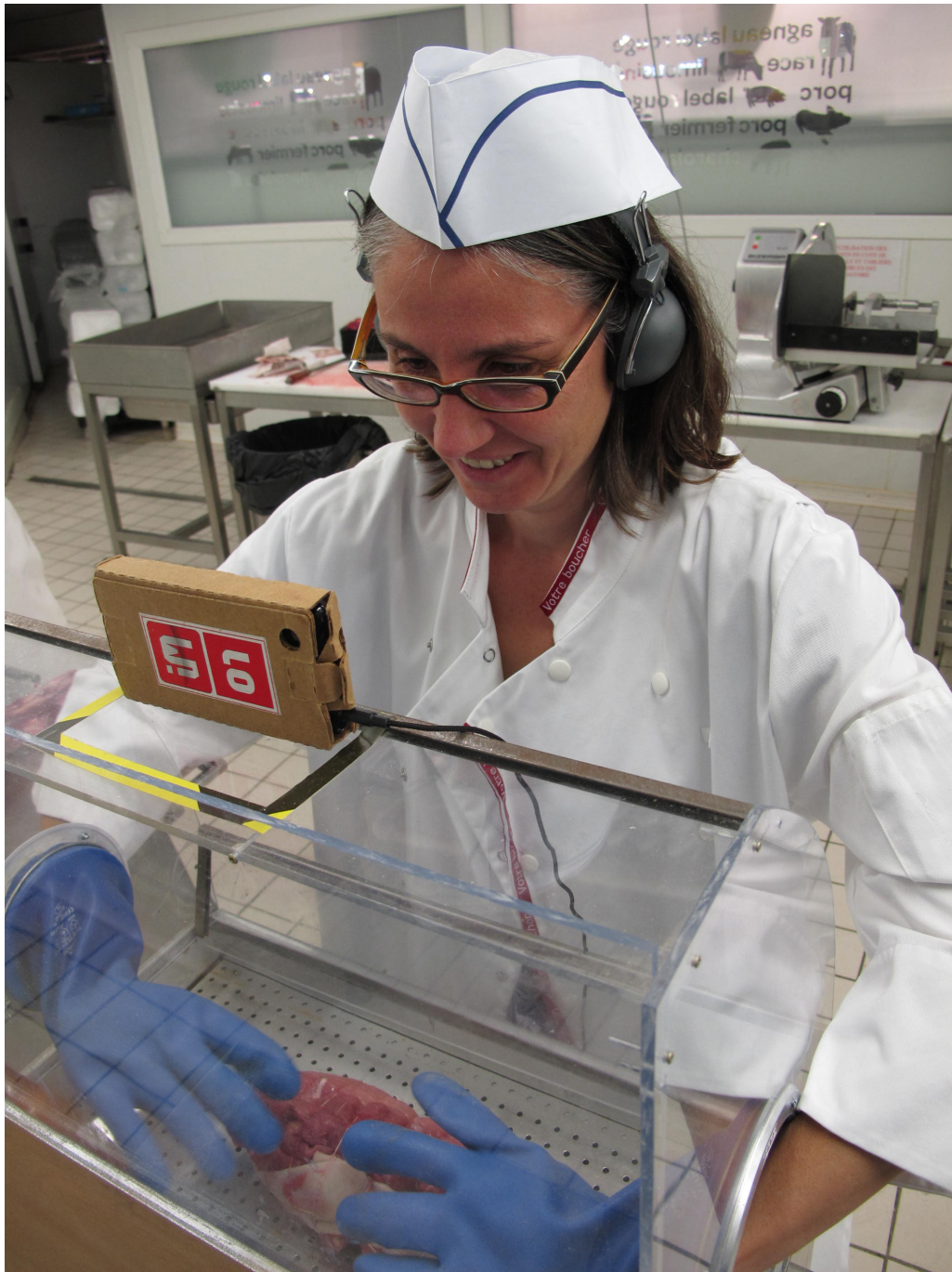
© Arthur Milleville



First Life
Ici-Même

Montbéliard, 2014

© Ici-Même



First Life
Ici-Même

Actoral (Marseille Provence 2013), 2013

© Raphaël Joffrin



First Life
Ici-Même

Fontenay-sous-bois, 2015

© Ici-Même



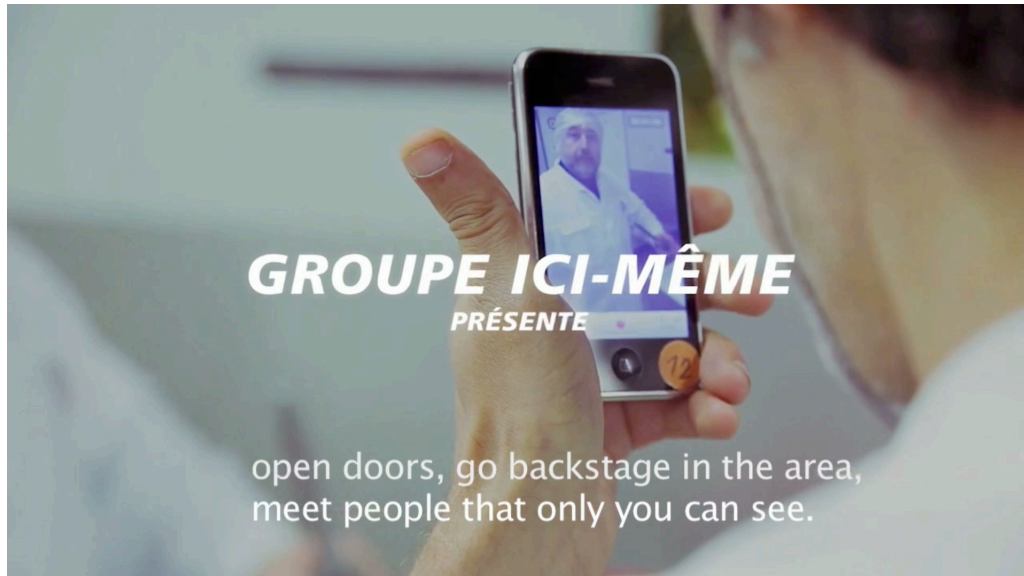
First Life
Ici-Même

Théâtre Brétigny, 2016

© Ici-Même

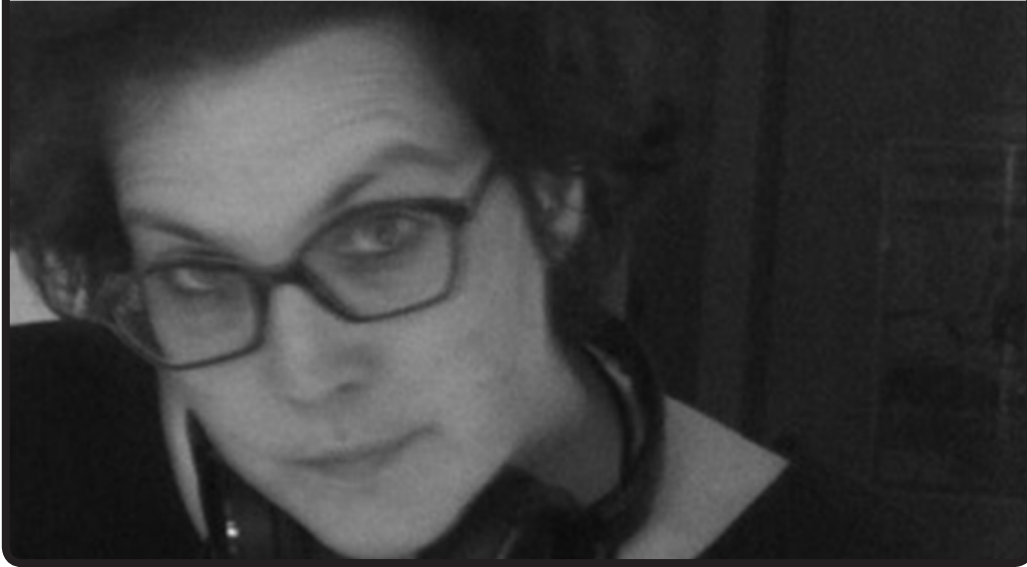
First Life, Adventures in (very) augmented reality
Terence Meunier

1'



Watch the video here: bit.ly/2keVJtr

BIOGRAPHY
Samantha Maurin



Samantha Maurin is a musician and sound engineer who has been working for ten years as a technician and editor assistant for Radio France and RFI. She created the soundtracks of several fiction films and documentaries. After having written and directed radiophonic pieces and her first documentary film, her route led her to become communication officer for several NGO's. She recently coordinated the creation process of the immersive audio creation piece *In Between Wars* for Doctors Without Borders, which was presented in Paris, Dubaï, Doha and Amman between 2015 and 2017. As a collaborator of the company Ici-Même (Paris) in 2017, she has just completed a research exploring the writing of perception in immersive processes, based on the case of *First Life*. This work was published as part of the *Cultural projects in Public Space* Master at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University.

Photo: © Céline Jani.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Ex Pristina, X Territory

Rron Gjinovci

The convoy of cars is ready. The sun is about to set, as instructions are given for the starting time. Over the special radio frequency we hear the latest safety instructions. The galvanizer starts moving, other cars follow. What we are about to see is a parallel universe. As the convoy drives into the centre city we see many times a day, the experience is quite different this time. We can discover new sites, not physically, but from a new perspective.

Destructive construction of Pristina — a short history of the city's atomization

New constructions can be destructive as well. We've already observed this in Pristina after the war in 1999. It seemed a normal process, for people left on the streets due to the war's destruction moved into the capital where they could either find or build shelters. What happened over the following years was an example of the most abnormal behaviour of people planning to live in a city.

Pristina is well known as the Balkan capital with the greatest number of illegal constructions⁰⁹. The current mayor of Pristina estimates that there are around forty thousands of them. How did we arrive at this situation? Kosovo was once part of Yugoslavia, a socialist country well known for its welfare system. What was once considered as public, such as public spaces, enterprises, institutions, parks, streets and so on had a "special status" in the minds of people. Public spaces were maintained and they were at the service of the people.

09. bit.ly/2Aeytlm

The war with Serbia (1998-1999) wasn't only a war based on ethnic conflict and liberation from repression, class struggle underpinned by specific ideological positions also played a role. After the war Pristina residents lost their claim to the city, for they had not engaged directly in the war of liberation¹⁰.

Some years later, the international community declared the opening of the privatization process. Every enterprise, regardless of its functionality and profit it could potentially make, was forcibly privatized. This process dismantled the public (as citizens) from what was public (as an object). An ideological narrative that sees democracy and liberty necessarily linked with privatization dominated public discourse. The main principle was set as a conditional postulate: if we wanted liberty and democracy, then we had to apply capitalism's rules — and privatization as the dominant one.

10. The Kosovo War didn't spread to the country's urban areas, for the liberation guerrilla fighters were primarily active in the mountains and villages. With some exceptions, residents of urban centres such as Pristina were not involved in the conflict between the various armed forces. After the armed conflict came to an end, (resistance) fighters were glorified in public discourse. Given, however, that Pristina residents did not directly engage in the fighting, they didn't figure among those being glorified. If anything, they were considered "cowards," and therefore were not a factor in governing policies, even on a local level.

The whole privatization process alienated citizens from what was once public.

The whole privatization process alienated citizens from what was once public. Even the entrances and the gardens of communal buildings, or the streets, were to become a no man's land. Nobody looked after them. It seemed as though they would be privatized as well. During this process, public spaces were disfigured by numerous illegal constructions, beyond any urban planning. We've seen how such construction has literally destroyed the city and its identity, while we, as residents, have experienced ourselves as aliens in the city, as atoms not linked to it.

Anonymity as a precondition for creating art

Artists were quite active in Kosovo, especially after the war. They intervened differently in what was supposed to be public space. However, in a small city of around two hundred thousand residents where everybody knows everybody, artistic work and artistic inspiration are difficult. It took almost fifteen years for a festival like HAPU¹¹ to happen in Pristina.

¹¹. In Albanian *Hapu*, means "to open up" but HA—PU are also the two first letters of the words "HApësirë PUBlike" (Public Space).

The third edition of HAPU, which took place in July 2017, opened with the performance *X-TERR*. The title is a shortened version for "X territory" (undefined territory) that describes the status of Kosovo internationally in a way. The paradox of being recognized by the majority of nations around the world but, to date, still not recognized by the United Nations, an institution comprising those nations, thus making Kosovo an X-TERR.

X-TERR was a journey in a car convoy through the city of Pristina. The convoy started its journey from the National Library parking lot during sunset. There was sufficient light to be able to see the installations, and the darkness was dark enough for the light effects.

X-TERR announced itself as "an artistic potential to transform a specific area within a 'normal' territory to be experienced by means of a drive." Audiences were invited to experience a drive through an audio-visual installation on the car's audio system. Moving through this physical and virtual territory created by galvanized objects that just happened to be around resulted in the car and its twelve cubic meters being transformed into a metaphor on wheels for individual freedom as part of collective freedom.

During the nineties, the car represented some kind of mobile embassy for conditional freedom for families.

The name *X-TERR* also derives from Kosovo's temporary international code — XK. X stands for unknown, neutral, unsolved, and temporary, whereas TERR designates territory. It was inspired by Kosovar citizens' experiences during the nineties, when the car represented some kind of mobile embassy for conditional freedom for families.

“Ladies and gentlemen, dear visitors, welcome to X-TERR! We thank you for choosing to visit our territory. Before you can enter X-TERR, we will perform a routine security check on your vehicle,” announced a man’s voice on the special radio frequency.

Galvanization — masking ugliness and a call to action

While traveling in the car through X-TERR, a galvanizing process happens. The city has galvanized both people and sites. You can observe this through the car window, while the radio host talks about his childhood memories by means of a car experience. It creates an atmosphere of a parallel Pristina. A galvanized and shiny one.

Pristina can only be “saved” if covered with shiny surfaces.

Galvanization is a process that involves covering rusted (destroyed) metals. Seen from an urban perspective, Pristina has been destroyed, and can only be “saved” if covered with shiny surfaces, so desired in post-war Kosovar society. But galvanization also means mobilizing people. And this is quite a task in a small city like Pristina. The atomizing of society by the preponderance of the private over the public makes it almost impossible to galvanize people. Notwithstanding, Pristina still “hosts” hundreds of small protests and artistic performances throughout the year. Before the war there were huge protests against the regime.

Danse Macabre

Travel with the X-TERR convoy comes to a halt. A bunch of galvanized people are running through the streets, evoking those protests for which the city is known. A galvanized stretcher is being carried through the streets while galvanized “policemen” are checking our faces with their flashlights. In the background, Camille Saint-Saëns’s *Danse Macabre* plays on the radio. *Danse Macabre* is a dance that unifies us all, as death is a universal experience. Death, however, makes a new life possible.

What happened to Pristina actually killed its identity, but a new identity is about to be born. A shining city with flashing lights and a strange architecture, free from urban planning, with an indescribable identity, one that remains unknown, an X, an X territory until the (de) construction ends.

bit.ly/2C7CHfN

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X-TERR

Dukagjin Podrimaj and Florent Mehmeti/Teatri ODA

HAPU Festival

Pristina, 2017

© Rrahman Osmani



X-TERR

Dukagjin Podrimaj and Florent Mehmeti/Teatri ODA

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X-TERR
Dukagjin Podrimaj and Florent Mehmeti/Teatri ODA

HAPU Festival

Pristina, 2017

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BIOGRAPHY Rron Gjinovci



Rron Gjinovci is co-founder of, and currently leads ORCA – The Organization for Improving Quality in Education in Pristina. He is currently studying philosophy, a member of the Board of the Association for Kosovo Philosophers and a civil society activist in Kosovo. He started his activity in 2010 as co-founder of the student movement SKV, which fought against corruption in the University of Pristina. Until 2012 he was part of the Movement for Self-determination (Levizja Vetevendosje). Rron works as a volunteer for the NGO “The Ideas Partnershipdz”, has worked as an investigative journalist for BIRN Kosovo (Balkan Investigative Reporting Network). During 2016 he worked on investigating academic corruption, revealing cases of serious violations of academic integrity principles. He is the author of reports and articles for different media in Kosovo and region such as *Prishtina Insight*, *Balkan Insight*, *Bilten* (Croatia), *Zeri* and *Koha Ditore*.

Photo: ©Fidan Mahmenti.

NEIGHBOURHOOD

Biela noc (White Night) in Košice

Technology in Slovak Art Projects

Ivana Rusnáková

Upon returning to Slovakia in 2009, after finishing her studies in France, Zuzana Pacáková was playing with the idea of establishing a contemporary art festival that had been missing in her hometown of Košice. Inspired by Paris's *Nuit Blanche*, she enthusiastically decided to enter a fascinating circle, introducing the now-renowned and popular festival of contemporary art, *Biela noc*, to Slovak audiences.

To discover artworks in public spaces, but also to appreciate everyday moments in another manner.

The festival organizers' initial sense of challenge was quickly replaced by exaltation and interest from the public and the media, which transformed *Biela noc* into the most well-attended festival of contemporary art in Slovakia, held annually in Košice, and since 2015 in the capital, Bratislava as well. The festival's goals are numerous: to promote and disseminate art, to stimulate public interest, as well as to highlight unconventional locations, or even to present familiar ones in a new light by providing a night-long magical city walk. *Biela noc* not only invites two-hundred thousand visitors every year to walk through the streets to discover artworks in public spaces, but also induces spectators to notice and appreciate everyday moments in another manner.

Art for Everyone

Since *Biela noc* was launched in 2009, it has become an art festival for the general public, attracting more than two hundred thousands visitors every year. Audiences greatly long to participate, to discover and to be part of the experience. Given this tendency, the organizers are consciously seeking to present inspirational, visually attractive digital artworks with a high degree of interactivity. The festival also offers an opportunity to expose artists' works to a layman's or a professional's critical view. That was the case with *FireWorks with Me* in 2014. The collaboration between two young Košice-based artists, the graphic designer Zana Petrovičová and the programmer Ondrej Makši, resulted in one of the highlights of the 2014 edition. With the support of a local IT company, they created an interactive projection, a digital game for the viewer, projected on an extensive screen, strategically located in the city's historical quarter where the annual New Year celebrations associated with real fireworks takes place. *FireWorks with Me*, however, enabled visitors to enjoy its digitally abstract or geometric version, controlled by smartphones. The seemingly simple principle of entering a short text or a message to the application and then displaying it on screen triggered colourful visual and sound waves, reflecting the authors' intentions. It did not take long for participants to understand how the mobile-app technology correlated with the artworks. Despite individual uses of mobile devices, the palpable companionship em-

phasized the strength and importance of the individual within the collective, and visitors could spend hours interacting with one another.

Slovak-world artists

In 2016, a follow-up was devoted to the public interest in the use of technologies and their interconnection and application in art. Monika and Bohus Kubinski's project *Level* was a successful example, and also Slovak. A spatial installation comprising several reinforced concrete balls from the Second World War placed in the basement of the East Slovak Gallery formed the artwork's material skeleton, charged with an artistic and emotive impulse. The matrix was complemented by augmented reality (AR) technology that enabled the public to enhance the perceived artistic experience. AR emphasized the natural sculptural beauty of simple ball objects and at the same time supplemented the historical context that could have vanished by placing originally non-artistic objects in the gallery. The technology present in the tablets available to visitors gave them the opportunity to "lift" parts of the work into the air; visitors could watch them levitate in different shapes, thus providing them with additional possibilities to interpret the authors' concepts.

Shift in Perspective

One of the most recent Slovak projects linking art and technology was *Perspektíva* by Braňo Bernár, a member of the Košice collective Showmedia, presented at the *Biela noc* in 2017. A precisely situated artwork in public space, on a bridge in the Zuckerman residential area near the river Danube, it consisted of regularly arranged geometric shapes — squares complemented with pre-programmed light tubes responding to data entered into a mobile app. The sprawling project could be interactively controlled, and the lights varied according to a spectator's imagination and desires, which at a given point provoked a shift in perspective, enhanced by the intensity and frequency of colour changes. Despite its playfulness, the project did not lose its artistic value and proved to be the right choice by the organizers to support the emergence of a new, freely variable installation.

Opportunities for the Young

Every year *Biela noc* offers the possibility of presenting innovative projects by established as well as by emerging artists, who often come with more progressive, imaginative, healthy and "positively aggressive" approaches — despite not being technically fully elaborated. This was equally the case with the 2017 presentation of the *BIOS* project, by the young conceptual artist Michal Mitro, created in curatorial cooperation with the VUNU collective. A site-specific interactive installation, juggling on the verge of bio-hacking, new media art and DIY philosophy, connecting computational technologies and room plants by a unifying element — the physicality of man in the most natural form of interactivity/

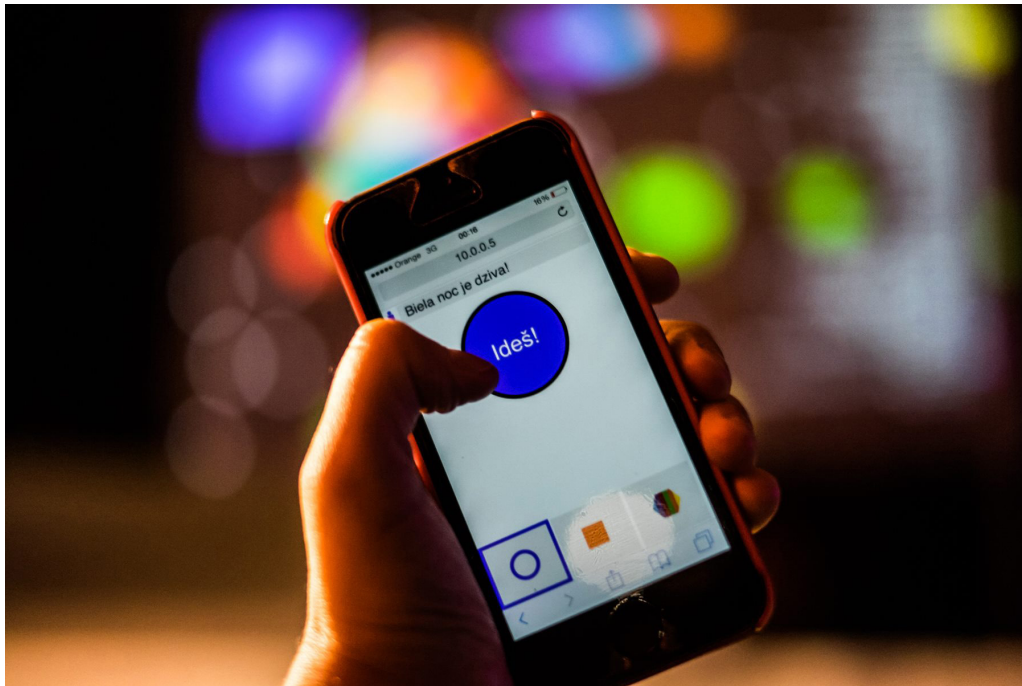
interaction, in the form of intention and touch. The project's concept rests on the realization of the basic similarities between plants and computer technologies, which on first view appear incompatible and incomparable: "The world of plants is a primitive system with inputs and outputs, where light and water constitute inputs and physical growth is an output. The world of computers is a meta-system of inputs and outputs, where inputs are zeros and ones and outputs are zeros and ones, usually configured in a somewhat more sophisticated fashion. *BIOS* stands for basic input-output system. Plants could be considered as *BIOS*. *BIOS* is also a software that boots a computer. Therefore, plants can boot a computer...? Warped logic leads either to an error or to art." Mitro's *BIOS* represented a conceptually and physically complex work, pointing to the continuity and interconnection between mankind, flora, and technologies. The artwork's interactive aspect was present due to the use of conductive tape over a shop window. The installation placed behind-the-window thus reacted directly to human touch, by light and sound.

Warped logic leads either to an error or to art.

While we could consider *Biela noc* as a relatively young festival, it is following world trends in digital art, seeking to invite well-known names dedicated to interconnecting art and digital technologies, while at the same time emphasizing the need to support creations by Slovak artists in this field that is increasingly being embraced by the general public. *Biela noc* is a unique event in Slovakia and it has been one of the factors thanks to which Košice has recently succeeded in being designated as the Unesco Creative City of Media Arts.

bit.ly/2BqGveR

bit.ly/2Bt1EoA



Fireworks with Me
Zana Petrovičová and Ondrej Makši

Biela noc

Košice, 2014

© RR



Fireworks with Me
Zana Petrovičová and Ondrej Makši

Biela noc

Košice, 2014

© RR



Level
Monika and Bohuš Kubinskí

Biela noc

Košice, 2016

© Peter Varga



Level
Monika and Bohuš Kubinskí

Biela noc

Košice, 2016

© Peter Varga



Perspektiva

Braňo Bednár / Showmedia

Biela noc

Bratislava, 2017

© Marko Erd



Perspektiva

Braňo Bednár / Showmedia

Biela noc

Bratislava, 2017

© Marko Erd



BIOS

Michal Mitro

Biela noc

Košice, 2017

© Marko Erd



BIOS
Michal Mitro

Biela noc
Košice, 2017

© Marko Erd

BIOGRAPHY
Ivana Rusnáková



A producer, performer, huge theatre and contemporary dance lover, Ivana is currently finishing her MA studies at the Department of British and American Studies in Košice, Slovakia, with a focus on Anglophonic literatures and culture. Coming to Košice in 2013 when the city held the title of European Capital of Culture, she has been experiencing a significant cultural transformation of its context. Being an active member of the dance collective Heeb.she (2013-2015), and since then as an individual, she has been performing and collaborating in various local and international projects in public space as well as on the stage. Since 2016, she has been working on the production of Biela noc / White Night festival, DAAVS (days of current audio-visual meetings) organized by VUNU collective, and lately has joined the team of Na Perone theatre.

Photo: © Píkn.

Klaxon
(when art lives in town)

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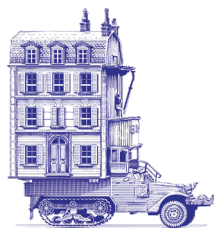
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