

BEAM

Borlänge Experimental Audiovisual Meetingplaces

Tanja Jörgensen
Dalarna University
Sweden
tjr@du.se



Figure 1. People interacting with a video projection mapped on the gates of a church in Borlänge city.

ABSTRACT

The BEAM project aims to investigate how audiovisual art in public spaces can invite and stimulate interaction between people and their material surroundings, in this case "the city", more precisely the city center of Borlänge, which has been characterized by the death of the city center due to the relocation of food and clothing stores.

The project consists of artistic research inspired by Willims artprobes [1] in the design of the audiovisual installations, in parallel with Steindorfs [2] experimental sound walks, in an attempt to establish new methods for audiovisual research. All of this in close relation to autoethnographic research where concepts of identity, place, urbanity and materiality come into focus. Questions of how the death of a city center, its reawakening and the cultural identification with a place can inspire the creation of audiovisual art are explored through the use of light and sound in

combination with the city surroundings as art materials. How the audiovisual installations in turn can stimulate interaction with spaces in the city center, interaction with the work of art and the people in the city is examined as well. The project is a collaboration between Dalarna University and Borlänge Municipality.

Author Keywords

Audiovisual, audio, visual, sound, light, materiality, place, site-specific, city, art probes, identity, interaction, artistic research

CCS Concepts

• **Applied computing** → **Sound and music computing**; Performing arts;

1. INTRODUCTION

The city center of Borlänge, which was once a lively place where people stayed has suffered from the phenomenon of a dying city center due to the relocation of food and clothing stores. On the initiative of local entrepreneurs in collaboration with the business department of Borlänge municipality, an annual sound and light walk, Kreativa Borlänge, was organized as one of many attempts to attract people to the city centre. While working on a video projection mapped on the gates of a church in the city center, it was observed that in twilight people were just passing by as they normally would do. They didn't really notice the church that they had seen so many times before. But, after nightfall suddenly there was a change in behavior as the projection of light became visible. Now People were stopping, and



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watching, some even taking pictures and in curiosity turning around to see where the light came from. This observation led to several questions: Would it be possible through audiovisual art to trigger a change in behavior, in the way people interact on a specific site? Would it be possible to alter people's view or idea about a place, and make them interact in new ways, with the city and with other people in the city? Could this be a way of reshaping the geography and meaning of urban space? In contrast to what Biserna [3] and Lindström, Jørgensen and Lindell [4] investigate using sound walks and the concept of breaking the "auditory bubble" [5], this would be a physically site-specific experience of the city. And in contrast to sound walks where inhabitants listen to music in headphones, superimposing a soundtrack on urban surroundings and thus creating a private experience of the city, their own expanded sphere at the expense of the common territory [3], this would rather be a way to create a common space for shared experiences and togetherness. A site-specific audiovisual installation in harmony with architecture where citizens are invited to find new meaning and ways of interacting, together.

2. METHOD

Under what conditions do images of light and sound materialize into an audiovisual object that welds with a surface and how is this phenomenon affected by the specific location, in terms of reverberation, ambient light, color and texture of the surface, architecture and its history and cultural connotations? And how does the audiovisual installation affect the way citizens interact with a place and with each other?

To seek answers to these questions and investigate possible ways of interacting with a place and a place-specific artwork, a series of audiovisual installations and concerts were carried out during the project period. These were intended as a way of gaining experience, similar to the sound walks that Steindorf [2] uses as an experimental method to ask questions and create artistic and scientific experiences. Willim's artprobes [1] contains

similar elements as he uses artistic work "to probe ideas about ethnography, place-making, and relations between (digital) mediation, site-specificity, cultural heritage, economy, and materiality". He writes:

To move along without having just one single specified goal is an important quality of the practice I advocate. A more-than-academic practice including art probing and cultural analysis is a meandering and even entangled process. Projects can run in parallel, occasionally intersect for a while, then once again bifurcate. The overall intention is not to move as swiftly as possible towards a given aim. It is instead to serendipitously learn along the way while reaching for an ever-intangible horizon (Crapanzano, 2004). This process can include analytic work with specific results, but the results should be seen as contextually bound and provisional. It is less about nailing a final result and more about setting things in motion. (Willim, 2017, p.212)

Willim uses the concept of art probes to describe how art and research can interplay [6] and argues that "Probes can evoke how things can be, become or transform" [1]. He describes art probes as a method characterized by serendipity, which would mean that something different or new than expected may be discovered.

3. ETHICAL STANDARDS

To ensure that accepted principles of ethical and professional conduct have been followed it was decided to omit observations such as 360° recordings in public spaces except where it was dark enough to be unable to identify any person. No informed consent was needed as no interviews were conducted and the decision was made only to publish images that had already been published by others in social media. Sources of funding: IKUD University of Dalarna and Borlänge Municipality.

4. AUDIOVISUAL INSTALLATIONS AND CONCERTS

The church doors at the Baptist Church (Figure 1) became for me perhaps the most central place as this was where the idea for the project arose, and the place where the most iterations of an installation have been completed. In order to direct the light onto the church gates, I installed a projector in the house opposite, and during the first implementation of this installation, the Jussi Björling¹ Museum was housed in the building. As I carried the heavy projector through the house, I was greeted by photographs and paintings of Jussi Björling everywhere and saw many of the costumes he wore performing in famous opera houses around the world. There was this magic feeling like he was actually present in the building, and I felt very connected and embraced by this place. I was also greeted by a picture of the doctor couple who once had their practice in the building. The janitor, who was made redundant after the museum was shut down, showed me how to turn the alarm on and off. The following year, when I did a second iteration of the installation, I was instead met by the staff of the building company NCB, working with the construction of the new campus for Dalarna University right next door. A five-story building in the very heart of the city. During the third iteration, after a phone call, I picked up the keys to the building at the reception of the real estate owner Hushagen. By this time the building was completely empty. The place had lost much of its magical character after the Jussi collection was moved out, but somehow, I could still feel the presence of Jussi and the doctor couple. Now instead I was met by a moaning drug addict outside the house, and the graffiti tag on the front door made me think of the creator and who that might be. But through the upstairs window I could still light up the gates of the Baptist Church across the street where the light from my projector reached out as an outstretched hand touching the doors of the church. This was perhaps a similar phenomenon to the

auditory bubble [5,3,4] but rather a visual bubble where I expanded my personal sphere, not at the expense of the common territory but rather in tune with the site to offer a kind of renewed place for the city's inhabitants to interact with.

All in all, these experiences of the place constituted an encounter with what once was, what is, and what may become. The past, the presence and the future.

The religious connotations of the church gates gave rise to visual ideas of radiant energy through a portal where passers-by could be observed being lured into the light and even approaching the projection surface to touch it and on some occasions moving in a similar way as the movements in the video projection. I felt the place and the installation for me personally had a strong appeal which gave the idea to make further installations inside the church. This was later implemented in two different concerts in the church, with one year apart, and with different fellow musicians. The first concert was a collaboration with another research project conducted by Evans [7].

The second concert was a collaboration with a fellow musician and audiovisual artist from Finland. This became for me a way to investigate a spiritual place. During this period a friendly relationship was developed with the priest and some of the members of the congregation, but also a close connection with the place, its architecture and acoustics. Here, too, the religious connotations of the place came to influence the artistic expression to a fairly high degree, without becoming intrusive or conventional, but rather investigative and experimental. This was the place that touched me the most, which for me personally was the most transformative and immersive. Both thanks to my fellow musician and the spiritual space, the personal meeting with an audience, the friendly reception from the congregation, and the meeting with the site-built church

¹ Jussi Björling, a famous opera tenor, born in Borlänge. Lived between 1911 and 1960.

organ. This was used as a musical element during the first concert and as an important visual object for abstract video projections during the second concert. Even though the projections were perceived as surreal by some parishioners, a service was held inside the church hall where they asked us to turn on the video projection, which gave me the impression that they enjoyed being in the light and the elevated mood that the projection seemed to evoke (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Audiovisual concert performed by Mikael Södergrann and Tanja Jörgensen with the church organ used as canvas for the video projection.

Another location investigated was the old shut down Café Peace & Love where a white painted wall visible through the large windows was used as a projection surface in a first installation and where the windows were covered with a veil and used as a projection surface in a second installation. The first installation in this venue was performed during a Christmas market. A web camera was rigged to enable interaction with the projected, abstractly patterned, and colorful video image. This resulted in a noticeable flapping and jumping of passers-by when they realized that they themselves were part of the artwork.

In the second installation, stills from "Save the image archive" were used with pictures from the city as it appeared around the turn of the last century and the sixties. To enable interaction with the artwork a web camera was installed to give passers-by the opportunity to

throw a shadowlike image of themselves into the projected image. Also, a contact microphone was mounted on the window to pick up sounds from outside the street, which was then added as an audio react function in the video rendering program Resolume to affect the image in different ways. This installation was never performed before an audience but gave rise to the idea of interacting with people in the images by dressing in a similar style to them and somehow dramatize the images by acting in front of the projection but also acting behind the images as a shadow play (see Figure 3 and 4).



Figure 3 and 4. Performing in front of a back projection image or throwing shadows from behind was an attempt to interact between the past and the present.

5. MATERIALITY OF SOUND AND LIGHT

With video projections of moving images that can be mapped onto three-dimensional surfaces in a space, and with sound and music, whose wavelengths always travel in space-time, a new

meaning, an audiovisual object, can be created. Since color is a combination of the characteristics of the light source and the nature of the surface the light hits - depending on the wavelengths in the light, the pigments and the texture of the surface, whether it's matte or reflective – the nature of color can sometimes act surprisingly. When the light leaves the projector and travels into space, even before hitting a surface, it becomes a possible artistic material, a volatile material. Unlike sound, which can be experienced once it has left its sound source, light cannot be experienced until it hits a surface, but both these volatile materials are dependent on the properties of the space and the surface. They are also dependent on time to exist as they are travelling materials. How do the conditions of a specific space affect the narrative possibilities surrounding an audiovisual installation or performance? Can the frozen music of architecture², independent of time, in the sense of being part of an audiovisual installation be viewed as an artistic material as well? In what way can one work with or against the connotations found in the location, architecture or history of the place? These reflections and questions rose while working with the audiovisual installations and concerts.

6. DISCUSSION

Through artistic interaction with various places in the center of Borlänge and the people in the city, I have come to shape a closeness to the city center and new contacts with people have been established. By spending time in a place and working with the place's architecture, its surface and acoustics, by interacting with people in these places and those who manage the buildings or organize the events, a lasting memory and a sense of belonging is created, as if the place has become mine. I would say that art probes [1] is a method well suited for research in the artistic field of audiovisuality, as above all the artistic process itself constitutes an important and sometimes unforeseen source of creating both artistic and scientific experiences due to the reflective thinking during the process. An early stage of the

process can be experienced as groping for something in a mysterious mist. To be able to use art as a method for asking and answering questions, you sometimes need to be systematic. However, the method is not intended to provide answers to specific research questions or quantifiable data by reducing the experiment to a controlled environment [2]. As with Steindorf's sound walks, the intention was rather to promote or embrace unpredictable moments. Sometimes it gives rise to new and interesting questions and reflections while in the process of finding answers and solutions to problems you encounter on the way. It is a more-than-academic practice to serendipitously learn along the way [1]. The most important is to be in the creative process. The process of making, gaining experience in action. Working with one project often leads to the discovery of the next. Without the first project, the second or third would not have come into existence. As Willim says, it's about setting things in motion.

Although the volatile materials of sound and light disappear as soon as the equipment is switched off, a lasting memory of a shared experience and togetherness still seems to remain. The first year the light and sound festival was arranged, it was attended by approximately 3,000 visitors. The third year it was organized, the number of visitors had risen to around 12,000 visitors. This seems to indicate that a positive reputation about the experience has spread and that a common story about Borlänge is possibly taking shape. This research project is a part of that story.

7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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