Funkschatten: a Creative Collaboration Experience

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Abstract: Creating a piece of art is a deeply personal process inspired by your surroundings, society and environment. However, collaborating with over 15 people from different backgrounds and only five days of preparation for an installation turned out to be a new challenge for most of us. In this report, we cover our approach from techniques for the creative process to organizing a workgroup.

1. Introduction

In November 2012 the 16th annual CynetArt Festival was hosted in Dresden, Germany. The INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL FOR COMPUTER BASED ART is a "recognised platform of digital culture" (CynetArt2012) and is funded by the Saxon State Ministry of Science and Art. For the first time, the CynetArt was organized to take place in different locations (i.e. festival halls, bars, clubs and on the streets) around the city of Dresden all at the same time. The KAZOOSH!–Team took the opportunity to participate for the second time in a row in this event. KAZOOSH! is a community of like-minded people with a drive to create awe inspiring installations, its members coming from very different backgrounds and thus bringing various kinds of expertise to the projects. Members of KAZOOSH! studied the fine arts, computer science or electronics, however the unique nature of this group is more complex and will be covered in depth in a future paper.

In this paper we describe the process, difficulties and the overall experience of designing an installation. First, we briefly explain the motivation behind KAZOOSH! and the installation. Second, we illustrate the circumstances and limitations of the location, the timeframe and our resources. The third section covers the process of creating the installation. The outcome is presented in the fourth chapter. We conclude with the results of the week, questions that were raised and the influence on our future work.

2. Impulse

2.1. Motivation

In November 2012 the KAZOOSH! group was given the opportunity to be a part of the CynetArt by realizing a completely new project in under one week. The main topic: *Funkschatten*, meaning the shadow area where radio transmissions are impossible, set our minds for the installation. Bringing together fine arts and new media in an installation in which the imperfections of the technical surroundings and the beauty of urban life would connect. The KAZOOSH! team was fascinated by the contrast of the digital and real world and wanted to blend these two worlds with their expertise in computer -based art, sound-installations and sculpturing. The creation process took place at the exhibition's location, which made it possible for us to work out a spatial concept for the *Club64* (Club2012), a small bar in Dresden. The connection between a specific space, the different fields of expertise and the interdisciplinary context made it possible to create a world, which mixed up real and imaginary urban landscapes. The bizarre and subtle break between daily life and a possible second world behind that reality was displayed with different media. Electrical and mechanical systems met sensual materials, such as transparent paper. Cables and light seemed to blend into organic structures, contrasted by the geometrical forms of polygons (Fig. 1). Images and situations of everyday life were mixed with sounds to create a multisensory experience that lived on the verge of familiarity and strangeness.

2.2. Time

These ideas and the motivation behind them were dampened by the dense timeframe of less than a week. Starting the work on November, 10th and opening the installation to the

public on the 15th of November overshadowed almost every part of the creation process. The short two day period of showcasing and cleaning out the location till the 17th was also part of the tight schedule. During this time not all of the KAZOOSH! members were able to take vacation days at work, which sometimes resulted in only a few attending hours per day. In addition to the temporal factor, the creative process of the group was further restricted by various limitations.

Fig. 1. Polygon structures.

Fig. 2. The rooms during construction.

2.3. Limitations

The "Club64" is a small bar with a worn down interior and a low ceiling. The team was given two of the three rooms to work with (Fig. 2). Throughout the exhibition the bartender would still serve drinks which had to be taken into consideration. The owner of the bar was cooperative but had strict rules about construction and prohibited any kind of drilling, gluing or bolting to the walls.

Further difficulties were materials and funding, yet through various channels the team raised a total of 450€. Most parts of the structures were built with recycled wood from previous installations and the CynetArt organizers provided additional lumber. Since

the KAZOOSH! Team has currently neither storage space nor a permanent workspace, most materials especially wood were returned afterwards or donated to friends, artists and the WERK.STADT.LADEN (WSL2012). Overall, the few resources and limited timeframe liberated the creative power of the team and were considered a challenge, not a burden.

3. Process

The week started with a meeting to set up the organizational structure for the upcoming days. Keeping track of a group of 10 to 15 people, everybody with different assignments and personal schedules, is the key factor for a successful cooperation. Exchanging telephone numbers, scheduling a rough timetable or clarifying transportation can be time-consuming at first but enhances efficiency during the project week. Furthermore, voting for a contact person and/or spokesman on behalf of the entire group is often needed and makes communication with other teams or, in our case, the administration of the CynetArt easier. Actual work started on the second day, with a session in which every member of the team pitched in three ideas for the installation. This way, we gathered everything from technologies and materials to feelings and moods, we wanted to convey with the installation. Based on these various topics, we established five working-groups of two to four people. The groups were called: 'sounds&mechanics', 'projection', 'origami', 'sculpturing&construction' and 'video' and consisted mostly of members with a lot of expertise in that field. In contrast to the usual goal of a workshop, where participants are introduced to a concept to broaden their skills or mindset, this project facilitated personal growth for every member of the team by leveraging their abilities. Within each group, we brainstormed (Fig. 3) for more detailed concepts on how to combine hardware, interaction concepts and new media to illustrate the gap between the digital and urban world.

Fig. 3. Brainstorming.

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Fig. 4. Group meeting.

Fig. 5. Final construction.

To make sure the final installation would still be a coherent concept, we set up two 1-hour meetings (Fig.4) and a few presentations, bringing together the working results of all the groups. Every meeting was attended by at least one representative from each group to facilitate meaningful decisions while still allowing for flexible scheduling. Naturally, some groups were more connected from the beginning, and needed to work closely together throughout the entire week. For example, the construction and the projection group had to find a material which was easy to sculpt and could still be used as a projection screen, while being illuminated from behind. Such material tests and early prototypes began during the third and fourth day. The last days of the process were surprisingly well organized due to the compartmentalization of tasks, as responsibilities were distributed among every member of the team (Fig. 5). All this previous planning, continuous feedback and every meeting throughout the week helped to finalize the installation in the end.

4. Final Stage

The resulting installation consisted of two worlds and the question about the foreign in between the usual. We tried to connect reality and fiction in our concept inside the *Club64* by working with new media as well as custom software and hardware solutions: The room, which was used as a bar during the exhibition, was the border between the well-known and the subtlety of the alien within. The video above the bar showed feet of

passengers in everyday live with the difference that these feet walked on the height of the visitors' heads. Additionally, we transformed reality into something foreign as the sounds of the city resonated quietly from the seats. Small piezo-discs transmitted the sound waves to the wood of the seats. The visitors sitting there had the chance to individually hear that sound. A sound, which is so common and omnipresent in our lives, that we usually would not notice it.

The interactive polygon (Fig. 6) in a sidearm of this room was one of many paper-shaped sculptures. As it was touched an alarm activated a projection where digital life forms fled from the sculpture as if they were flushed out of their nest.

Fig. 6. Interactive polygon.
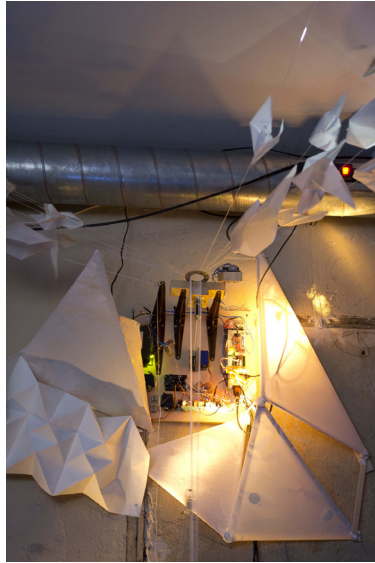

Fig. 7. Large sculpture.

Fig. 8. Visible electronics.

Fig. 9. Moving origami structures.

The second room was one coherent installation. A large polygon structure grew from the edges into the room (Fig. 7). The construction of wooden slats was covered by different types of paper, which formed the background of a multisensory projection reacting to the audiences' movements. The forms of the sculptures represented abstract cities and were lit from inside, referring to the luminance of real cities. Furthermore, this installation combined movements of mechanical objects and virtual projection. Paper, changing LED-lights and the analog sounds caused by electric motors formed a hybrid atmosphere. The aim was not to hide the technical background but to make it part of the final product (Fig. 8). Cables, motors and pulleys were noticeable inside the polygons and added their sound to the digitally produced atmospheric tunes. The electronics moved the origami-structures throughout the room creating an impression of living processes (Fig. 9). Artificial sounds coupled with the movement and the semi-technical appearance caused associations with natural organisms.

5. On our way

During the week the process of working as a team (Fig. 10) of different people was a central aspect of the installation. Structures within the group, decision making and communication are as important as the final product. The symbiosis of analog and digital ideas and media are the common ground of the exhibition and the principles of KAZOOSH!. Different people, broad interests and a specific location define the way we work. The installation as such was finished within one week but the outcome for KAZOOSH! were the experiences and inspirations we took home. We think of this piece of art as one step of a developing process which sparked new ideas and fields of interest in each member of the group.

Fig. 10. Final installation with several members of the KAZOOSH!-Team.

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