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# Setting the course for public space regeneration projects through video acupuncture adapted for architectonic structure façades

> Just as architects were demonized as the destroyers of the city, artists were unrealistically asked to salvage it.
>
> Tom Finkelpearl, *Dialogues in Public Art* (Finkelpearl, 2001:21)

## Introduction

An image is much more than a product of perception. As Hans Belting famously pointed out, it extends beyond the seen or the visible, the gaze or the inner eye, since we coexist with images (Belting, 2000: 296). While infiltrating us, images remain an inherent part of our ever-changing everyday scenery. They carry transformative and communication power, affecting the user directly in consequence. Yet once they become part of a three-dimensional artwork, once the image blends into sculpture and architecture, its message becomes considerably more distinct, conducive to activating a selected part urban quarter as a result.

The use of art in revitalisation processes is nothing new. Nonetheless, given the contemporaneous advent of new technologies, forms of communication – and options of employing it – have undergone profound revision. Visually and sensorially attractive to the recipient, dialogue between a historical structure and state-of-the-art technology espouses integration therewith. By no means a static image projected onto a wall, the video morphs into an "animated sculpture," astonishing and attention-capturing in equal measure. Video acupuncture, on the other hand, a medium involving the use of a small-size moving image on a building's façade, is a targeted activity, with potential focus on a specific building in a particular urban area and/or specific issue.[1]

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[1] In urban regeneration practices functions a term: "Urban acupuncture." It is usually described as a small urban interventions than can improve lives of city dwellers restructuring

The phrase *"acupuncture"*[2] is automatically associated with natural healing methods, the therapeutic value of art well-nigh identical. Combining the two fields and putting them to use in the context of broadly defined curative – or, in all actuality, remedial – activities offers a genuine option of improving i.a. problematic and deteriorating urban areas.

Imagery, luminous and textual projections have been part and parcel of the urban landscape for some time now, most frequently employed for advertising and promotional purposes. Festivals endorsing this form of expression have already been organised as well; consider the *Fête des Lumières* in Lyon, France. Given considerable interest in the formula, urban authorities and private companies have also begun using it, the *Medienfassade* of the *Uniqa Tower Wien* an excellent case in point. Other examples include i.a. video mapping organised to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the Prague Astronomical Clock in the Old Market Square (Czech Republic), and a video event held in the Lipińskiego Passage in Warsaw to showcase images of Poland's capital 250 years ago.

Whenever an event of the kind is held, façades become a canvas, as it were, for creative creation transforming into dynamic digital exhibits. A hybrid of cinematography, image, architecture and sculpture, this novel visual language, while ephemeral, has proven remarkably convincing. As accentuated by Andrzej Gwóźdź, "between celluloid film […] and projected film (chiaroscuro performance released from existential foundations of inscription stock through light cast by projector lamps), an area of cinematographic intoxication unfolds, making visibility a mere derivate and outcome of the velocity of luminous projection which organises the cinematographic order of things" (Gwóźdź, 1994: 141).

While open-air performances involving light, film and sound have already established their presence in promotional programmes for cultural and art venues, their potential is considerably greater, which is why artists are more than happy to make use of them as well. Architectonic mapping, laser animation, 3D projections, video art displayed on façades all change the nature of public space. While it might well seem that their impact is transient – vanished and gone once projector devices have been switched off – their actual influence is much more permanent and expansive. When employed in problematic urban environments, in so-called non-places or dead spaces, they bring visual improvement to the area, their popularity explained with entertainment value and dynamic form. The ephemerality of related projects – the surprise effect they produce – is nothing short of enchanting. Making such projects part of the particular framework provided by the city (in this case) is of importance as well, the frame constitutive to the image (even if electronic and moving), the image constitutive to the frame (Paech 1994: 154).

their closest surrounding (Morales, 2004/ Morales D. 2004 The Strategy of Urban Acupuncture: Structure Fabric and Topography Conference, Nanjing University, China, p. 55–56). Therefore, as Lurner underlines it should be applied in places that need quick and cheap recovery (Lurner, 2015)/ Lerner J 2014 Urban Acupuncture, Washington, DC: Island Press/Center for Resource Economics, USA, p.160–163.

[2]  Acupuncture: "a treatment for pain or illness in which thin needles are positioned just under the surface of the skin at special points around the body"; https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/acupuncture (27.12.2022).

## Connecting Visual Arts to Architecture in the Revitalisation Context

*Art becomes architecture. Architecture becomes Art.*

Vito Acconci[3]

Revitalisation – an effort to reclaim urban quarters and bring them back to life – is multifaceted, the focus shifting in each case. Revitalisation implements potentially include art which supports as well as initiates space renovation processes. Popular solutions include introducing institutions of culture to revitalised areas. Permanent artistic interventions – monuments, sculptures, murals – are becoming widespread as well. Soft projects reaching out for existing social, public space, and/or historical architectonic resources are also relatively frequent. Once applied – to reference Jane Jacobs and her choice of words – to so-called dead urban areas, vacant premises or infrequently visited historical monuments, they help restore attraction and life (Jacobs, 2014: 275).

Over the years, artists have been using assorted visual techniques designed to capture the viewer's attention, prolonging his or her contact with art pieces. Total artworks, also referred to as "total works of art," were one of the many propositions. In 1690, for example, Andrea Pozzo turned St. Ignatius' church in Rome into a space of fantasy and optical illusion, fake architectonic components intertwining and mingling with architectural details and actual sculptures. The viewer is drawn into a game, as it were, surrounding scenery the ostensible main actor. Yet the work itself is immobile, all dynamic generated by spectator motion only. Athanasius Kircher (1601–1680) attempted to animate images by projecting them onto a wall in a pre-designed way. Having invented the so-called magic lantern, he fitted it with a rotating disc allowing rapidly changing images of figures and objects to be viewed on the wall (Jewsiewicki, 1953: 79). Towards the late 17th century, once the mobile magic lantern had been constructed, it became a popular source of entertainment throughout Europe. Robertson's phantasmagorias were the next step in image animation, viewers additionally surprised by sound or light effects, some leaning towards magic (Jewsiewicki, 1953: 100–101). Over successive centuries, visual art began steadily creeping out of the hermetic setting of museums, cinemas and art galleries. Modernism opted for the need of art permeating with reality, an attempt at devising the "total work of art" notion. Consequently, architects would be responsible for creating a building's structure as well as its interior, all furnishings included. Examples include the Tugendhat Villa in Brno (Czech Republic), a joint project by Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich. The development is considered a "total work" – each and every one of its components, external structure to interior *décor*, was designed by the van der Rohe-Reich duo. Defining buildings as abstract images, on the other hand, was a post-modernist proposition. Space created by postmodernists eluded unequivocal interpretation. Poised at the intersection of arts, it resembled a dynamic setting, at once alluring and astonishing. The surprise effect phenomenon has never ceased fascinating authors or recipients. Comprising lines, structures, planes, colours, textures, light and shadow, urban space

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[3] "Art Becomes Architecture Becomes Art. A Conversation Between Vito Acconci and Kenny Schachter, Moderated by Lilian Pfaff," (Springer, 2006).

is in itself as deeply moving as it is intriguing. Once walls become space for manifestation, the spectator impact increases.

The union of video art and architecture breeds extraordinarily creative dialogue, offering new perspective and a unique view of existing buildings – and occasionally of entire districts. Once interaction with the recipient is added to the mix, a conglomerate of opportunity and chance is born. As pointed out by Magdalena Rembeza, artistic interventions in revitalisation projects influence the vitality of local space by enhancing social involvement (Rembeza, 2016: 327).

Especially when introduced to public space, moving images engage in a process of continual opening to and before the viewer while producing a new and engaging aesthetic experience in contrast to traditional artwork reception imprinted with static, objective specification and peculiar distancing. Multimediality, on the other hand, encourages interaction and polysensory reception, going as far as to allow "immersion" in a world wherein reality is freely infused with state-of-the-art technologies. Produced in an electronic setting, aforesaid immersiveness shortens the distance in artwork reception, engages awareness, and absorbs the electronic matter-immersed object (Sidey-Myoo, 170).

Such relationship between architecture and cinema affects recipients in categories of shock, resembling a missile "shattering the passiveness of perception, forcing one to fashion new entireties from crumbs of the world" (…) (Zeidler, 1994: 55–56). Both architecture and film generate an alluring sequence of episodes in the viewer-recipient's mind, ones Koolhaas believes combine to form a spatial montage (Toy, 1995: 170). Such fusion may be interpreted as a visual event (Mirzoeff, 2002: 6). This is how the viewer is lured into a performance wherein matter in the guise of architecture mingles with vanishing images. Viewers will prolong their experience of a thus devised entertainment form, closely resembling a commercial clip.

Video art reaches problematic and degraded urban areas directly and with enormous force of influence over the spectator, usually one rarely reaching out to institutions of culture and art or their offer. At the same time, temporary and ephemeral, it does not aspire to appropriating space, allowing recipients to get used to art peacefully and on their own terms. This makes video art a safe solution in public reception context. Such introduction of art while injecting it into urban space has been a success in multiple revitalisation projects, as proven by the case study of Gdańsk (*Culture for revitalisation*. 2010: 17) or the artistic courtyards of Łódź.

In such cases, art gives prominence to historical though potentially derelict structures or social issues. Bożek points to the aforementioned as well, by emphasising that artistic interventions in space do not necessarily have to be showcased as autonomous artworks, the actual point being that of introducing a specific problem to public discourse (Bożek, 2017: 23–24).

While encouraging conversation, reflection and assorted actions, video art primarily makes any given location considerably more attractive. The perception of the venue undergoes subtle change, producing interest in – and, at a later stage, care for – local surroundings. Outcomes may include the emergence of services, for example, ones modifying the local dynamic. Under such circumstances, the overall sense of safety

improves as well, a phenomenon characteristic of numerous art projects developed in the public space of degraded neighbourhoods, as it were (*Bringing the New to the Old*, 2016: 515).

In his book *Invisible Cities* (1972), Italo Calvino further suggests that digitised images and projections in urban space may serve to emphasise the neglected or the well-nigh invisible, allowing the city to be better comprehended and experienced with its wealth of history, variations, secrets. Once revitalised, specific properties of the given urban area are rediscovered or reformulated, the process affording a particular quality to the "non-place place," according to local residents. Discovering such distinctiveness may genuinely produce an entirely new approach to space, even one formerly perceived as undesirable. As Piotr Winskowski remarked, the very fact of artists, authors, architects, outsiders taking interest in and/or showing appreciation for a specific urban area may result in attitude changes in the local community (Winskowski, 2010: 66).

Examples include the annual *Kinomural* initiative in Wrocław,[4] a project bordering on cinematography and visual arts, and transforming one of Wrocław's dilapidated problem areas into a large-format art gallery. Various films – time-lapsed, animated, abstract, experimental, 3D-animated – are projected onto walls of several tenement houses, the moving murals unexpectedly bringing buildings to life. As one of the concept's co-authors Bartek Baros says, viewers "are transported into an audiovisual microcosmos wherein once darkness falls, tenement house walls turn into giant canvases covered in moving paintings, thousands of people travelling into magical dreams, immersed in blissful trance. The futurist expedition offers a giant endorphin shot, morphing with time into everlasting memories" (*Tuż po zmroku* [*Once Darkness Falls*]... 2021: 15). The event in question does more than draw Wrocław residents' attention to a particular area of town – it invites them to experience it under the pretext of using a new medium. The high number of publications promoting and reporting on the *Kinomural* project is in turn conducive to improved recognition of the Nadodrze district, and thus a greater number of visitors, for example. The significance of the phenomenon ties in with the fact that the district had been considered a dangerous neighbourhood for years because of disregard, degradation and vandalism. While efforts to revitalise Nadodrze have been made since the early 1990s, the area remains problematic and challenging, mainly for social segregation reasons.

Multiple art and multimedia groups – such as *Urban Screen*, *NuFormer*, *Macula*, *Apparati Effimeri*, *Visualia*, *AntiVJ*, *Obscuradigital* and *Konic Thtr* – are in the business of projecting moving images at uncharacteristic venues. *Konic Thtr* merits particular attention; making human beings pivotal to all activity, the group explores them in creative dialogue with rather than in separation from the space occupied. *Konic Thtr* developed one of their most interesting audiovisual compositions in Girona, Spain, combining symbolic elements of a specific edifice with historical motives associated with previous ways in which the building had been used and employed. Yet this was no small-size video intervention; this was a large-format project designed to point to the value of the structure, its identity in urban fabric, and the broader context of life and death.

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[4] http://www.kinomural.com

Aforementioned groups and realisations are all large-format projects requiring considerable financial outlays. Yet there are other, smaller-scale options of making use of the moving image and contrasted light and shadow effect, video acupuncture the perfect solution. While allowing works from the video art family (laser animation, 3D etc.), venue selection is of key importance: video acupuncture has to be a targeted action pointing to a specific issue and/or reaching a specific recipient group, however small. Illuminating specific space in a revitalised area makes it visible, the spectators' attention a potential first step on the path towards creative, often as not successful communication, opportunity for change the next stage.

Luminous intervention may involve text projected into the wall of a building, for example, the move justified in that – as Italo Calvino famously said – literature communicates a variety of things, "not only avoiding any opacity of differences but accentuating them, as expected of the written word" (Calvino, 2009: 55). Illuminated quotations on buildings are used during literary festivals, or – as in case of Cracow – to promote UNESCO Cities of Literature. The *Multipoetry. Poems on Walls* project comprises bilingual (Polish and English) poetry projected onto the Potocki Family Townhouse at No. 20, Main Market Square,[5] the outcome having evolved into a tourist attraction popular with foreign visitors and the local community alike.

The "Making Cities Interactive" project by architects Anna Grajper and Sebastian Dobiesz of LAX laboratory (for architectural experiments) involves interactive artistic installations, users doubling as recipients and authors.[6] The work *URBANIMALS* explores passageways and pedestrian crossings, venues that usually do not encourage stopping. By introducing a notion of fun and without investing in reconstruction or other physical change, the architects embarked on a journey of making such spaces more pleasant. Their proposition included interactive images; projected on road surfaces and façades of buildings, they depicted moving animals responding to the touch and motion of pedestrians as well as to encountered structures, such as urban furniture, each animal responding in a different way. Ultimately, 26.000 individuals interacted with *URBANIMALS* as part of the Playable City project in Bristol, United Kingdom.

A similar user integration-centred approach was applied by ORTLOS Space Engineering, designers of an enormously interesting audiovisual project: the *Responsive Public Space* (RPS) in Graz, Austria.[7] An interdisciplinary community of authors (architects, artists, composers, IT engineers) created an environment users could enter, move around, and experience a variety of sounds and images in. An incandescent structure suspended overhead analysed every user move and behaviour, transforming it into sound and light in a simultaneous signal of encouragement for visitors to join shared fun and interaction. Users were invited into a magical world of the multimedia promoting relationships and closeness, both leading into the greater beauty of sounds and luminous images.

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[5]  http://miastoliteratury.pl/program/multipoezja-wiersze-na-murach [1.11.2022].

[6]  https://futurearchitectureplatform.org/projects/750cfb4c-6993-4480-976e-9f97616fe467/

[7]  https://ortlos.com/projects/responsive-public-space/

While in graffiti format, light was also part of a project by Antonin Fourneau: his "Waterlight Graffiti" was shown in Poitiers.[8] The interactive installation of thousands of LEDs are illuminated when in contact with water. LEDs can be touched, used as interactive canvas, sprinkled, or even doused with water. Inviting participation, fun and creativity, the project surprises and encourages interaction – yet not appropriating space in any way, it can be moved to a new location at any time.

*Prismatica,*[9] a project by the Canadian architectonic studio *RAW*, is somewhat similar. While devoid of a video component, the installation does use light and colour. It comprises mobile, rotating prisms made of dichroic film-laminated panels allowing transmission of every visible colour. At nighttime, they produce subtle coloured light which, when shed on passersby, gives them a gentle glow. Combined with a soft sound of bells, the play of light, colour and reflections on different surfaces encourages people to stop, take photos and play. While in this particular case, the installation has been designed to occupy a major section of the *Quartier des Spectacles* public space in Montreal, the introduction of one such component into a revitalised urban area could become a seedling of change by triggering interest, attracting the local community or prompting conversation. The annual *Luminothérapie* festival in Montreal involves many other multimedia solutions, including video installations on buildings, allowing local residents rediscover selected architectonic structures and city quarters. The projected works have also become a pretext for exploring themes related to revitalisation and presence of art in public space[10] while showcasing the extraordinary potential concealed in artistic interventions organised in urban areas.

## In closing

Research and study conclusions allow a suggestion that mobile images projected onto architectonic structure walls can serve to foster revitalisation. Firstly, they affect the way public space is received – then they proceed to influence behaviour. It turns out even minor video acupuncture interventions to building façades in problematic areas can spark multiple positive changes. As a result, local residents can be proud of their neighbourhood which takes on new dimensions, gaining unique characteristics and becoming recognisable, triggering a domino effect. Local residents begin casting a more favourable eye on their surroundings – and tending it. A sense of safety grows as vandalism dwindles. While video acupuncture is a considerably smaller project that video mapping, it can match its effectiveness as a revitalisation implement. It carries remedial potential within, backed closely up by a form of social dialogue. Art thus ceases to be something akin to a privilege for a selected few, making its way into public space and engaging a broad local community.

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[8]  https://www.digitaltrends.com/web/water-light-graffiti-spock-vs-spock-and-more-in-this-weeks-staff-picks/

[9]  https://theinspirationgrid.com/prismatica-public-art-installation-by-raw/

[10]  https://www.quartierdesspectacles.com/en/event/290/luminotherapie-12th-edition/

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**Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to examine the role of video acupuncture transferred to architecture in the context of revitalization processes. It provides analyses of this phenomenon and several examples of video acupuncture in different cities. All serve one purpose: The attempt to paint a profound picture of the exceptional potential of this kind of public art in problematic urban areas to induce urban regeneration. Methods used in the research are based on multidisciplinary literature studies. Data is collected from various literature and site observations. This paper will help readers obtain an understanding of how such moving pictures can be beneficial to the revitalization process and how such strategies can revitalize the neighborhoods of the city. The findings of the research show that moving pictures transferred to architecture have a significant impact on the revitalization area thanks to its catalyst transformation potential on people.

**Keywords**: Urban acupuncture, revitalization, video mapping

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