REFLECTIONS ON SHAPING AND REALIZING AN ART PROJECT.

Managing Nuclear Factories

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A thesis for the Degree of Master in Fine Arts with specialization in Digital Media.

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Managing Nuclear Factories

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Summary

Managing Nuclear Factories: reflections on shaping and realizing an art project

by Anastasia Melekou,

In this paper, I reflect upon my ideas on the subject of dreams and how eventually the subject led me to my final thesis project. I present and explain my thoughts and how I transformed them into an art context. The paper is divided in three sections, the context, the approach and the outcome. In the first section I present, in detail, my subject of lucid dreaming and my personal interest in that specific subject. In the second section I talk about how I approached an art project related to the context I explained in the previous section. I talk about the decisions I made and why I thought they were the best way of proceeding with my practice at the time. Finally the last section is mostly a critique on my outcome, explaining problems I faced and how I handled them.

Keywords: dreams, reality, lucid dreaming, sleep, participation, fine arts, installation, waiting room, consciousness
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Managing Nuclear Factories

Notes on strategies and principles by
1 Introduction

Managing nuclear factories is the title used on the cover page of my personal notebook. Since I’ve been writing down my thoughts in that notebook for the past three years, I thought it could be a quite suitable title for my masters thesis dissertation, considering the content and context of this paper.

In the next pages you will be able to track the path that I followed as well as the thoughts, influences and decisions I made in order to finish my final master project. I will try to put together everything in a straightforward manner that a reader can follow. As you will notice by reading the thesis, I tend to use long quotations and I do so deliberately. This is because this masters thesis is mainly the result of a compilation of snippets of text I have read, or projects and opinions I found and considered as interesting or relevant to my own ideas and practice. Using these “snippets” of text unaltered, always accompanied by my reflections on them, makes it easier for the reader to follow my process and thoughts as well, as helping to support my point of view.

In my text I am focusing more on my process and my subject rather than the exhibited final masters project. I didn’t manage to get adequate material in time, so I decided very late to change what I would exhibit. Because of this very late decision I discuss about my final master project only at the end of this text and not as extended as my initial online project.

My intention for this paper is not to accompany, complete or explain my project in any way. My intention is simply to show where I started from, how I proceeded and processed information, what I decided to do and what came out of it all.
2 Context

From the beginning my projects have always had a starting point in experimentation. Trying out new things, techniques or media always led to an interesting idea being written down in one of my notebooks and at times later realized. I usually can visualize the project right from the beginning. I see all the details even when they were about to be changed or shaped differently. This intuitive approach has worked quite effectively for me so far.

This year I decided to attempt a different approach in realizing my project. It was a challenge for me to see if I could begin with a project by simply choosing to work along a single theme; an area that interests me. Instead of starting from something very specific and working towards a more general idea, I would do the opposite.

For quite a few years now I have been interested in dreams, and especially lucid dreaming. Lucid dreaming\(^1\) is a term used to describe the situation during which, while in a dream, a person is consciousness of the dream state and thus can take control of the dream. I have been doing research in this area; studying sleep and it’s phases, brain activity while dreaming, and investigating the possibilities of taking control over your dreams in different ways. I also started experimenting - taking notes of dreams and recording myself sleeping.

I always wanted to work with dreams but wondered how someone could approach such a wide and unclear subject. This master thesis was an opportunity for me to take this chance. Even with a narrowed focus on specifically lucid dreaming the subject was still so general that for quite some time I felt lost in my own thoughts, not knowing where to begin. It was necessary for me to narrow things down in order to be able to start working on an actual art project.

2.1 Dreams and reality

In researching the project there is no better starting point than a definition; a framework - the first associated thoughts and connections to the subject. So what is it that we call a dream and when do we refer to it?

A dream is defined as:

\(^1\)Green, C., and McCreery, C. Lucid Dreaming, the paradox of consciousness during sleep. Institute of Psychophysical Research, 1994.[4]

Lucid dreams are those in which a person becomes aware that he is dreaming. As he realizes this the character of the dream changes, and as long as he remains aware of his state, he continues to be in a lucid dream. A lucid dream differs in many ways from an ordinary dream; it may be extremely realistic and provide the dreamer with a strikingly convincing imitation of waking life, and it’s emotional tone is often positive, sometimes to the point of elation.
2 Context

▷ a series of mental images and emotions occurring during sleep; "I had a dream about you last night".

▷ imaginative thoughts indulged in while awake; "He lives in a dream that has nothing to do with reality".

▷ ambition: a cherished desire; "His ambition is to own his own business".

▷ pipe dream: a fantastic but vain hope (from fantasies induced by the opium pipe); "I have this pipe dream about being emperor of the universe".

▷ have a daydream; indulge in a fantasy - a state of mind characterized by abstraction and release from reality; "He went about his work as if in a dream".

▷ experience while sleeping; "She claims to never dream"; "He dreamt a strange scene".

▷ someone or something wonderful; "this dessert is a dream".

WordNet lexical database for English, Princeton University

If I was asked to personally define what a dream is I would say that it consists of three main things. Where my definition may not be as technically correct as to be contained in a dictionary, I would place it in the structured order that I believe the term “dream” is used in more often.

The first point I would make would be that a dream is whatever we experience while asleep. While this is very general statement, it could probably be broken down into smaller, more precise categories. I would prefer not to limit myself to that, and instead would like to emphasize the word experience as it connects reality with fiction and fantasy.

Second, I would define a dream as desire. For example, we often use the term “dream situation” to describe the ideal situation - the situation that we desire most.

Finally, I would firmly place the dream as part of our reality. For me this is the most interesting and intriguing perspective. The word dream is commonly, connected very closely to reality as well as fantasy. The generally accepted term is more connected to the unreal, the fictional. In the conscious world when used in everyday life it refers to unreality. For example we may say “It’s all right, it was just a dream” or “Stop dreaming and face reality”.

From my point of view the connection above is true but the “reality” is missing. Terms do come in pairs with their contraries, their complementary terms. Dreams cannot be only fictional or unreal. There is a reality to them that we could say is temporary but still exists. I can experience being a 5 meter tall man in my dream, even though I am a small woman. But for as long as my dream lasts that is my reality - I am without a doubt a 5 meter tall man. I have experienced this, and even if it happened in another reality it has still affected me in one way or another; it has become real in its own way.

2 Definition of Dream - WordNet lexical database for English, Princeton University[14]
“Dreams are real as long as they last. Can we say more of life?”

Havelloc Ellis

According to research made regarding brain activity while dreaming³ and particularly in REM sleep⁴, the brain is stimulated in the same way as in waking life⁵. In fact “the brain treats dreams as if they were real experiences, which is why we need to be paralyzed by a substance to stop us acting out our dreams”⁶. This is quite fascinating from my point of view. My dreams are as real as waking life. What I experience in my dreams is real experience. At the same time as I am active in dream, my brain protects my body by paralyzing me. It seems that even while the brain is being tricked it is also in total control, aware of exactly what is happening. So, is it real or is it not? Is a dream similar to a hallucination, and if so then how real can a hallucination be?

These questions are common and still unanswered by scientists and philosophers. Rene Descartes in his “Meditation on first philosophy” speaks about “what can be called into doubt”. He presents his thoughts on rejecting everything he thought true just to have the ability of building everything again from its foundations. He specifically emphasizes how he “found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once”. His first example to support the above theory is the following:

“How often, asleep at night, am I convinced that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire, when in fact I am lying undressed in my bed! Yet at the moment my eyes are certainly wide awake when I look at this piece of paper; I shake my head and it is not asleep; as I stretch out and feel my hand I do so deliberately, and I know what I am doing. All this would not happen with such distinctness to someone asleep. Indeed! As if I did not remember other occasions when I have been tricked by exactly similar thoughts while asleep! As I think about this more carefully, I see plainly that there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep. The only result is that I begin to feel dazed, and this very feeling only reinforces the notion that I may be asleep”.⁷

Rene Descartes

The borders between science and philosophy in this case are very close. Questions like these bother me and are likely to bother others in the future; but my intention here is not

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³Definition of Dream - WordNet lexical database for English, Princeton University[14]
⁴A state of sleep that recurs cyclically several times during a normal period of sleep and that is characterized especially by increased neuronal activity of the forebrain and midbrain, depressed muscle tone, dreaming, and rapid eye movements — called also paradoxical sleep, rapid eye movement sleep. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary[9]
⁵Waking life is a term commonly used to describe our non sleeping state.
⁷Descartes, R. Meditations on first philosophy. Cambridge University Press, 1996.[3]
to try to answer them, but rather point them out and express the thoughts that led to my project.

As soon as I started working with this specific subject I began connecting different things with dreams. When I read these notes by the video artist Bill Viola the connection was obvious for me.

“The genuine “hyper-realist” artists of today are not the painters of the school of the same name, but the commercial film and television producers; for it is they who deal with something that has become almost more real than the real: a persons image.

Reflecting on this trend of the recording media becoming more and more realistic, one can easily say that their ultimate goal is perhaps to become invisible, to become completely transparent, to become indistinguishable from what they record (i.e., to achieve the highest “fidelity”). Looking to the future, most people in the field would say that film and television are steering themselves towards some kind of life-size, three dimensional, holographic, audio-visual projection, almost indistinguishable from a real scene. Further far-out futurists speak of a medium-less medium, electrical stimulation directly to the brain to evoke sequences of mental sensations virtually identical with perceived external reality.”

Bill Viola

The above text was written nearly twelve years ago. The video artist actually speaks of a fantasy, a “medium-less medium” in the “far-out” future. In my perspective this fantasy is a reality for every human being. The above quotation describes in great detail what a dream is, so in my view it is consequently a description of an experience in our every day life.

Another issue rises from this text. Although dreams are the closest thing to what Bill Viola is speaking of there is a fundamental problem. In my point of view it is quite certain that when you speak about commercial film, television, images, media, you take one thing for granted – you know that there is always a transmitter and at least one receiver. There is always a common point and that is sharing. Sharing is a problem when it comes to dreams simply because dreams are so personal in nature. Dreams are a personal experience where transmitter and receiver are the same. Reproducing a dream is, so far, impossible – even apart from that, sharing it is extremely restrictive. You can share your dreams with others orally or through writing them down. You can try to draw them out, but a truly accurate reproduction of a dream is impossible. The reality of the dream will still always be distant, no matter how faithful your attempt to convey it. You are trying to reproduce an experience - but no matter how close you get you can never really achieve accurate

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reproduction because you are relying only on your own memory and because dreams have no logic and often seem absurd upon later recollection.

“The philosopher Henri Bergson goes further than Freud to demystify dreaming. He is not concerned with the dream as a clue to life as narrative, but regards it as a test site for his theories about perception and memory. For Bergson the dreamer uses the same mental faculties as when he is awake, but without the restrictions that bind him when he attends to life. The dreamer does not have to adjust to a constant progression of present moments, each with an immediate past and an immediate future; he is free to conjure up any memory-image he fancies at any time and he can hold on to it for as long as he likes. But when the dreamer tries to analyze these images rather than just letting them flutter by he becomes too logical, Bergson says, precisely because he is not taking the surrounding world into account. The result is the absurdity we associate with dreams”.

Anders Kreuger & Åsa Nacking

It was clear to me from the beginning that in my project I didn’t want to try to recreate something abstract or any kind of dream-like imagery. I would like to work with facts, recorded dreams, personal experiences, something that is not abstract or symbolic, because these are the two strongest and most obvious connections to dreams. But where do you start with a subject like this and which direction do you take?

2.2 Critical State Testing

In Lucid Dreaming there is a technique called Reality Testing, Reality Checking or Critical State Testing. This technique is a simple way to help you, while dreaming, to realize that state and thus become conscious and be able to take control. According to this technique, throughout the day you test yourself, checking if the moment you are experiencing is a dream or not. You force yourself to doubt if this moment right now is a dream, and try to answer in the best way you can. This way in an actual dream situation you might not be able to answer with certainty and come to realize that you are dreaming.

When I first read about reality testing it sounded very strange. It felt like stepping into a world of constant uncertainty and doubt. On one hand you assume that the determination would be quite simple when you are awake. After all, when you are awake you know that you are awake. Or do you really? How can you know? On the other hand when you are in a dream you do not doubt if you can jump up to the forth flour, it is just plain reality!

Or is it really? Starting to doubt your waking state all the time seems to be the first step to insanity if you think about it, because in the end there is no certain answer, yet it feels so obvious.\footnote{See DESCARTES, R. quotation, 2.1 on page 10[3]}

I felt that this technique presented an interesting point of view on life itself. Even more interesting were the reactions I got from people I discussed this with. Each person’s reaction was very different. For some the answer to “Are you dreaming right now?” or not was obvious and some didn’t want to even think about it. Others could not understand why someone would want to control their dreams or believed that we shouldn’t mess with them because they considered the transition point between sanity and insanity to be quite thin. In any case, this topic actually created a lot of interesting conversations and revealed so many different views on the subject that it established a good basis upon which the project could grow.
3 Approach

3.1 Participation

The first idea I had when I began to work on this subject was to use the images of myself sleeping and my personal dream records to create an installation. I had collected images of myself sleeping and diaries of my dreams for the past three years. That was material I could definitely use or work from in the beginning. On the other hand when I first collected this material, I did not have any intention of using it for anything other than a personal archive; so although I always had a specific method in recording the images and text, it actually had not been entirely consistent. I needed to have more control over what I was collecting if I wanted to use it in my work. I could have started collecting new material more methodically but I was having doubts on whether something so personal as my dreams could be interesting for others. How do you keep interest in the relating of a dream? How do you share an experience like this\(^1\)? Is it important to share the true experience or would a made up dream have the same effect? All these questions were a very important part of the process, they actually helped me to make decisions, choose paths and realize what I was doing. Ultimately my decision was to choose the path of a participative project\(^2\).

Of course participation in art is very wide and can have different levels. In the case of more traditional forms of art such as painting the viewer participates in a way by only looking at the piece. A painting cannot be perceived without a viewer, it would be as if it never existed if not shown and shared. Participation here is limited but existent.

In an installation art context, your participation - the fact of you being there, is at a different level than the one of more traditional forms of art. By entering an installation you complete it. In an interactive installation your participation is even more crucial as you are called to participate actively.

\(^1\)See 2.1
\(^2\)ROUX, X. Participation in contemporary art. Creativity and Cognition - Supporting creative acts beyond dissemination (2007)[10]

“IT IS IMPORTANT TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE CONCEPTS OF PARTICIPATIVE ART AND PARTICIPATORY ART PROJECTS. THE LATTER DESCRIBES ARTWORKS IN WHICH THE ARTIST USES PARTICIPATION AS A COMPONENT OF ART MAKING. IN PARTICIPATIVE ART PROJECTS HOWEVER, PARTICIPATION IS THE PROJECT AND THE ARTIST CREATES THE FRAMEWORK ALLOWING FOR PARTICIPATION WITH NO PRE-CONCEIVED IDEAS OF THE OUTCOME. AS IN PARTICIPATIVE DEMOCRACY OR PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT IT IS NOT SO MUCH THE FACT THAT PEOPLE PARTICIPATE THAT MATTERS BUT RATHER THE FACT THAT PARTICIPATION IS THE MAIN PRINCIPLE GOVERNING HUMAN INTERACTIONS IN SUCH MODELS”.

14
In her book *Installation Art*, Claire Bishop mentions:

“The history of installation art’s relationship to the viewer is underpinned by two ideas. The first of these is the idea of ‘activating’ the viewing subject, and the second is that of ‘decentering’. Because viewers are addressed directly by every work of installation art - by sheer virtue of the fact that these pieces are large enough for us to enter them - our experience is markedly different from that of traditional painting and sculpture. Instead of representing texture, space, light and so on, installation art presents these elements directly for us to experience. This introduces an emphasis on sensory immediacy, on physical participation (the viewer must walk into and around the work), and on a heightened awareness of other visitors who become part of the piece. Many artists and critics have argued that this need to move around and through the work in order to experience it activates the viewer in contrast to art that simply requires optical contemplation (which is considered to be passive and detached)”\(^3\)

She continues on talking about ‘decentering’ and the ‘decentered subject’, mentioning the contradiction between Renaissance perspective painting, where the viewer is always the central point and installation art.

“The correct way to view our condition as human subjects is as fragmented, multiple and decentered - by unconscious desires and anxieties, by an interdependent and differential relationship to the world, or by pre-existing social structures. [...] there is no ‘right’ way of looking at the world, nor any privileged place from which such judgments can be made. As a consequence, installation art’s multiple perspectives are seen to subvert the Renaissance perspective model because they deny the viewer any one ideal place from which to survey the work”\(^4\)

In my case I thought that a high level of participation could be the solution to keep a level of interest in the project as well. It would be a project where participation is the project itself and could work well and enable sharing without worrying about the true story. I was not going to focus on dreams themselves, but rather on the connection between dreaming and the moment right now that we usually, without much thought, call reality.

I have worked in the past on participative projects. There are many things that you need to take under consideration in order for them to actually work. You need to have total control throughout all the process levels and make decisions on every parameter. You need to plan, foresee and constantly adapt. In such projects it is very hard to actually do all of the above. It is difficult to see how everything is going to evolve when all is in the participants power to change - yet that is the most interesting part of all. There is a big

\(^{3}\)Bishop, C. *Installation Art, a critical history.* Tate Publishing, 2005.[2]

\(^{4}\)Ibid
risk as well as great potential while the time factor is crucial. Patience and persistence are absolutely needed. It is always a challenge working towards this direction but also very interesting.

3.1.1 Participation online

I decided to work on my theme by creating a participative project that could be accessed online. This decision was made mainly because of the advantages of using the internet and all of the advantages that come with it. When you are working on a project where participation is actually what shapes and builds it up, you need all of the attention you can get. Nothing could be the more appropriate than a website. It is immediate, accessible and gives you the opportunity to reach more participants and viewers. It is a very effective and familiar interface.

Something else to consider is how easy it is nowadays to create a website. You have all the tools available online and in fact it is usually a very low cost solution, if not a free one. Another big advantage is that you can promote your project through social media to get traffic to your website and attract possible participants as well as viewers. In other words, you have the advantages of increased accessibility, all the means for adequate and effective promotion, and ease of use - all that with little or no cost.

Finally there is something else very closely connected to internet that is very important as well; the concept of sharing. Internet is a place where people share. They share files, they share ideas, theories, links, opinions, comments and all kinds of data. The Internet itself is a participative project; alive, constantly changing in directions no one can foresee or control. It is a living organism and from my point of view it is the best tool available for what I wanted to accomplish.

When I started researching on lucid dreaming on the internet it was fascinating how many websites I found specifically created for lucid dreaming, some with manuals and dream diaries. I had been thinking about how dreams could be shared and how actual dreams in my work could be interesting for someone - yet I discovered that dreams are shared online all the time. It is amazing what can be found on the internet on this subject.

In a meeting I had with a researcher in the field of lucid dreaming he encouraged me to search on the internet for forums where people share their experiences. He was more interested in “shared dreams” or “mutual dream” experiences, something that has not been proved scientifically, yet there are many records of people actually having a common dream. It is amazing the number of forums and the amount of posts on these lucid dreaming and shared dream experiences. This not only indicates that people do share these kind of experiences, but also that it is an interesting and engaging subject for many.

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5 See sharing, 2.1 on page 11

6 Shared or mutual dreaming is a term commonly used to describe the occasion when two or more people share the same dream.
3 Approach

One post I found very interesting was by a person that had written a tutorial on how you could share a dream with another member of the forum. This person claims to do this with a fellow member – every now and then they meet on the moon. The tutorial’s first step requires the interested members to read each others dream diaries and subsequently arrange a meeting in a commonly known place. The example alone seems surreal enough but still is only the beginning – the goals are to experience far more advanced and complicated shared dream meetings where a group of people decide to meet in their dreams to play pre-organized games such as RPGs. Although nothing is scientifically proven it is a quite intriguing field to step into; my main conclusion from all of the above is that these communities may be one of the most effective ways to share. Once I realized this, I wanted to use it in my work and this led me to the online project “Why is this not a dream?”.

3.2 Why is this not a dream?

“Why is this not a dream?” is an online participative project addressing the question why we think we are not dreaming right now.

![Screenshot of “Why is this not a dream?” project website](image)

Figure 3.1: Screenshot of “Why is this not a dream?” project website

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8RPG stands for Role-Playing Games, a broad family of games in which players assume the roles of characters, or take control of one or more avatars, in a fictional setting.[13]

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
3 Approach

I created a website\(^9\) in order to get different points of view from visitors that would like to contribute. This website’s purpose is to collect and showcase videos that answer the question “Why this is not a dream right now?”. Based on my thoughts about sharing and reality testing that I explained previously, I tried to keep the idea simple and straightforward. I wanted to create a platform for sharing video opinions and other views on the subject.

The website has four main pages. The home page is the page with a list of all the submitted videos. The visitors can watch any of the videos or use the “upload” page to contribute their own answers. The answers are short video recordings with no limitation on the type of recording, format or of the approach of the possible answer. The videos can be recorded with a video camera, a web camera, a photo camera or even a cellphone. Any response that is either literal or symbolic is accepted.

On the website there is also a “project description” page so that anyone who is interested in contributing will be able to get more details on how the project started, an explanation of it’s existence and what it is about. Finally there is also a “blog” page that I update with interesting related material, photos or anything else that I feel is connected with the project. The project is in need of constant promotion to keep getting feedback and my main tools for it’s promotion so far have been social networking websites like facebook, twitter and vimeo, or mailing lists.

Promotion is a procedure that needs to be active all the time in order to have visible results and it even takes time to make use of what search engines have to contribute. The project itself is an ongoing process, as is the promotion of it. This has certain advantages and disadvantages that I will discuss in Chapter 4 on the outcome and the problems of the approach\(^10\). There I will also talk about the first physical presentation\(^11\) of this work.

3.3 Relation to other art projects and inspiration

After first discovering lucid dreaming I watched the movie “Waking Life”\(^12\). As a starting point. It is very important to mention this movie here because it is based on lucid dreaming and for an interested individual it does have many references to dig into. In a sense, it is very dense of amount of information passing to the viewer in facts, techniques and theories; both philosophical and scientific. This, combined with the type of images used to animate the movie, make you want to watch the movie many times and reserching deeper into all it’s references.

As I started working with my project and building the website I also began searching for other artists that have worked before in relation to dreams, participation or in projects. I managed to find quite many interesting works and I selected some of them to refer to here.

\(^9\)“Why is this not a dream?” project website [http://www.whyisthisnotadream.net]
\(^10\)See 4.1 on page 24
\(^11\)See 4.1 on page 25
\(^12\)Linklater, R. Waking life. FOX Searchlight Pictures, 2001.[8]
3 Approach

Figure 3.2: Poster of the movie “Waking Life” (2001)

"Strikingly original... nothing short of amazing."
—Peter Travers, ROLLING STONE
In each of them I note points that I find particularly interesting or that could be useful in order to visualize how other people approach similar situations.


2 beds, video cameras, projectors, ISDN network

"Telematic Dreaming creates a hybrid space that joins real and virtual forms of presence and pushes the limits of human perception and communication. Two remote locations, A and B, contain a bed, a video camera and a projector, and are connected by a high-speed telecommunications line. In each location, video of the person lying in the bed is captured and projected on the bed in the other location, so the person in A sees the person in B lying with them in bed, and vice-versa. Although one knows, intellectually, that the other person is not physically there and despite communication can take place only by gesture (there is no sound), the virtual, telematic presence of an other in one’s midst - and on one’s sheets - can evoke very strong emotional responses. The bed and its occupants become a screen and a stage, which complicates its highly charged semiotic coding as a personal, intimate and erotic place. The work’s title also suggests an in-between state between sleeping and being awake, between immediate physical presence and remote telepresence. This provocative digital..."
This specific piece is quite old and extremely innovative for that period. It made use of technology in order to underline how technology itself affects our communication. In this piece, Paul Sermon uses an internet connection to bring together the image of a person lying next to a real person on a bed. Created almost 20 years ago, it is quite prophetic in a way, keeping a very intimate and dreamy atmosphere. Participation in this project is vital as being in the installation completes it. What I personally find interesting in this installation is its simplicity, although I can imagine that a project like this in 1992 was anything but simple to realize. But in a level of conception and presentation it is very simple and immediate. It is an effective work, using participation in an interesting context. Today, bringing the image of a person from far away into an artwork is a common routine, but back then it was not so – which is what made being in Sermon’s installation almost a dream.


![Learning to love you more](http://www.learningsloveyoumore.com/reports/91/jooosephine.php)

Figure 3.4: Miranda July & Harrell Fletcher, Learning to love you more

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3 Approach

“Learning to Love You More is both a website and series of non-web presentations comprised of work made by the general public in response to assignments given by the artists. Participants accept an assignment, complete it by following the simple but specific instructions, send in the required report (photograph, text, video, etc), and see their work posted on-line. Like a recipe, meditation practice, or familiar song, the prescriptive nature of these assignments is intended to guide people towards their own experience. [...] Since LTLYM inception in 2002 over 8000 people have participated in the project.” 14

I chose to mention this project here because it is a very good example of a participative project that uses a website as an interface. Another reason why I chose to mention it is that my project “Why is this not a dream?” has a very similar approach but with a different subject. They both focus on participant content submission and use a website to be as accessible as possible.

“Learning to love you more” is basically a project that is an open call to visitors, giving them different assignments with specific instructions. The participant needs to choose an assignment, complete, and share it on the website. Through time on the website you can see a collection of different submissions and the different approaches of every person on the same subject. After eight years of submissions the website now is online only as an archive but has been quite successful in actually collecting the assignments and had quite many participants.


“Man With a Movie Camera: The Global Remake is a participatory video shot by people around the world who are invited to record images interpreting the original script of Vertov’s Man With A Movie Camera and upload them to this site. Software developed specifically for this project archives, sequences and streams the submissions as a film. Anyone can upload footage. When the work streams your contribution becomes part of a worldwide montage, in Vertov’s terms the decoding of life as it is”. 15

In this work Perry Bard is utilizing an important film as a starting point for an online participative project. It is an invitation to people to choose a section of this particular film and create a remake of it. Each remake is uploaded to the online archive. On the website a new version of the film is available to watch, consisting of the different contributed videos. There is no final version of the remix as the submitted videos are used randomly to always generate another different version, so the remix available to watch on the website is constantly changing.

14Learning to love you more website [http://www.learningtoloveyoumore.com](http://www.learningtoloveyoumore.com)[5]
What is particularly interesting in this project is how the artist succeeds in getting people to participate by contributing videos of their own version of the story, as well as how he makes use of the project website as a platform. The work is so accessible that the generated video really becomes the worldwide montage he describes.
4 Outcome

4.1 Problematics to the approach

Managing to create a successful participative online project is not an easy thing. As I mentioned before there are many aspects that need to be taken under careful consideration in all levels of creation. Apart from that, there is no particular point when you can say that a project like this is finished as it is always ongoing.

Before attempting to start building the work up, there is a lot of planning required. Necessary to plan would be the information you want to focus on, the structure of your page and the system that will manage your contributions, and how those contributions will be made and handled. You need to layout a website in an effective way that is not confusing for the visitors, as well as to decide what kind of aesthetics you will to use. After each of these decisions and plans are made and realized, you enter the critical phase of promotion. Promotion is a vital step that after launching the project will bring traffic and contributors. Finally, all of these actions need to be reevaluated and redesigned to adapt to the audience, visitors and contributors.

There are certain advantages gained by choosing this approach in the first place, such as accessibility and visibility through the web, and low cost and easy access to contribute. On the other hand there are disadvantages that can hold the project back. Throughout the process of creating “Why is this not a dream?” I was asking myself if I had all the skills to do this in a successful way. It would be common sense to get help from one or two people that have better knowledge in their field to limit the possible risk of not being able to get traffic to the website and contributions. A programmer’s help to build a video platform and an effective contribution page could be very useful, and a person that knows more about online marketing and practices as well. But then of course, having some basic knowledge and no budget, I decided to work around these problems myself. As an art student it was a good chance to experiment and to learn more on how this would work or what I could do about it, find workarounds, use open source tools, etc.

Since I did not have help while working on this project it was a big challenge for me as well as a big risk. Because as artists what should we be focusing more on? What is the most important part in an art project? When should we ask for help from people that know more in their field and when do we attempt things ourselves? Can we do it? Can we do it well? Should we do it? Does it matter really? All of these questions came up as I was working on the project, knowing the risk of failure the whole time in the back of my
mind. I decided to do this project alone as I had some knowledge in the field of website design. I knew how to setup a webpage, fill it with content, update it and have it working properly.

On the other hand I had doubts on what to focus on or what to bring forward to have an intuitive and straightforward user experience. There is a huge world we call marketing and it is one of the main things that move the world around today. There were details that I had never thought about that matter greatly in order to sell a product; in many cases I felt as if my project was a product that I needed people to purchase, almost like the contribution of a video were the payment. How could I succeed? Was I an advertiser? Definitely not. Should I dig into advertising or marketing as an artist to get my “product” moving? Apparently yes, at a basic level, but what made me different would be what I focused on. As an artist I should be focused on my concept but in a way it is very restrictive when having to deal with the promotion of my work.

These complex issues often become more important than the main idea or concept in the work and when finally called to make important decisions based on these issues it becomes a common problem that each artist needs to deal with. I do not find this situation any different than working with video and having to deal more with settings, qualities in image, capturing, exporting, color correction and other technical details that often become bigger that the content of the video itself most of the times. This is the way it is - as I see it it is in the artist’s hands to decide how to deal with these issues. You can choose to ignore it, fight with it or even use an expert’s knowledge. In the end it is all about having that experience and taking decisions according to the given circumstances. Above all though, it is being able to understand what is happening and why. These kind of problems, restrictions and obstacles are part of the process that makes you realize what you are really doing and where your focus is.

In my case I had managed by now to create a participative online project based on an average web design layout that was launched with my basic knowledge of online marketing. In it’s three months of existence I managed to get only basic feedback. That was not as much as I had hoped for to work on my final master presentation but it is understandable and normal as the project is ongoing and needs time, patience, and constant attention.

Another possible problem could be that my subject is still too broad. Sometimes people need specific instructions in order for them to be more comfortable in contributing as in the case of Miranda July & Harrell Fletcher in Learning to love you more\(^1\). Perhaps the participation threshold is set too high when you give people the option of deciding by themselves what to do, what to say. It is possibly something to take under consideration and experiment with in the future. Something that also led me to this conclusion is also my very first physical setup of this project, my first very simple presentation in Camp Pixelache 2010\(^2\) at Kerava Museum in Helsinki.

\(^1\)See 3.3 on page 21

\(^2\)More details at Camp pixelache website [http://www.pixelache.ac]
As you can see in figure 4.1 the setup in this case was minimal - a computer screen placed on a podium with a web camera and a mouse. An open browser window with the project website of “Why is this not a dream?” was always in focus and people could watch the contributed videos as well as read more info on the project. At the same time they had the option to push the record button and contribute their own video answer through the web camera. This setup was a simple experiment for me to see people’s reactions and evaluate how the website worked. The unfortunate thing was that this presentation was quite short as the piece was exhibited for only a day. It was also in a place that was focused more on discussions and workshops and the participants consisted of a targeted group of people interested in technology. This situation made it more difficult for me to evaluate what I exhibited. It was quite hard to get contributions in that kind of setup, but helped me to realize that I needed to simplify the website even more, make it more self explanatory and easier to understand.

Lastly there was the problem of language to consider. Not everyone speaks English or feels confident speaking in English. I think it is important that the website be available in more languages and in my point of view is a necessary but time consuming task. Right now I do have Greek and Spanish versions of it and I intend to work on Italian, German and French in the future.

I do have many details to work on with this specific project that in time can give some good results. This way of working has been a big learning process for me and that is in this case most important outcome of this project.
4 Outcome

4.2 Life’s waiting room

For my final master thesis project in the exhibition “Clouds of Witness” at Röda Sten in May 2010 I worked on an installation called “Please wait”. The work was connected to my research in dreams and my online participative project but was not totally focused on that. Since “Why is this not a dream?” had limited contributions and the exhibition was getting closer I had to make a decision. Did I want to go ahead and present my work, as an ongoing project, with what material I did have in a setup similar to the one I presented in Pixelache? Or did I want to maybe put the online project to the side and work on another idea? I was leaning towards the second option and finally I decided to work on an idea I had before of an installation. My first idea for the installation dated back to reading this passage about two years ago:

“When Idries Shah, the preeminent Sufi teacher, was asked to name a fundamental mistake of man’s he replied, ‘To think that he is alive, when he has merely fallen asleep in life’s waiting room’.”

Ever since reading that I have been thinking about waiting rooms and how they could work as an installation. A waiting room is a space specifically created for people to wait in until what they are waiting for takes place. It is a place in between other places, a transition space, and is not in itself a goal, only a necessity. The quotation also made me think about waiting rooms as a voluntary imprisonment. I thought of it as an enclosure. In that sense I wanted to create an installation space that would simulate a waiting room and possibly oblige people to wait there for no apparent reason. For example, I could create a waiting room at the entrance of an exhibition and force people to wait for a certain amount of time before entering. This would enforce the feeling of waiting and the obligation attached to this act. The situation in which your entrance is delayed would recreate effectively the true idea of a waiting room, especially done in an art exhibition context.

This idea of course had practical problems and was not an option in a group exhibition such as the one in Röda Sten. So I had to compromise with a scenario that would be quite different from my initial idea but still would retain the uncomfortable and awkward feeling. I thought I could perhaps focus on the space itself; to work on the theatricality aspect and bring up some surreal points that would make the visitor wonder while waiting. Unfortunately having a room of your own in a group exhibition is a luxury and that was not an option for me. Together with the curator we decided, for the common good, to adapt the waiting room more to a waiting area without walls. I decided to work on the installation in a more scenographical sense, but the lighting conditions were not favorable.

The installation setup was very simple and consisted of chairs, a plastic plant and a television furniture with a television to recreate the atmosphere of a waiting room. I used

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3 More information on the exhibition website [www.cloudsofwitness.net]
Figure 4.2: “Please Wait” installation setup in Röda Sten, May 2010

a carpet to set the boundaries and we placed the installation in a central space of the big exhibition hall. I arranged all the furniture in such a way to portray the best image possible of a waiting room; a waiting room such as those common in doctor’s offices. My goal was to focus in the uncomfortable and awkward moment you are in between two paces having nothing to do and not knowing how to behave. Everyone has been in this situation in their life and for me it has always been an almost untrue, surreal moment. In these rooms it feels almost obligatory to wait but still it isn’t. You have to be careful of how to behave and how to interact with the presence of all the other people waiting with you. In many cases if you wait for a long time you start to wonder why you are there or why you have to be there. It is like being in between two places, two worlds, and that is where I found it closely related to “Why is this not a dream?”. On the other hand, although I didn’t want to focus on that relationship I still thought I could use video material I had as contributions on the website.

Not long ago I went to the hospital for a checkup and I spent three hours in a waiting room to hear my results. The waiting room had a TV on that I watched from time to time without any interest, between looking at a boring painting on the wall, the color of the wall itself and the stains on it, and observing the nurse passing by. After waiting for almost two hours there I realized that all the shows that were being broadcasted were hospital TV drama series with doctors and nurses. I counted three different broadcasts in a row and being in a hospital it was impossible for me not to think that someone was laughing
Outcomes

Figure 4.3: “Please Wait” installation, television with contributed videos

Figure 4.4: “Please Wait” installation, details

...at me waiting. Could it be real?

In this way of having a TV broadcasting something that doesn’t really interest you when you are there I considered using the material from my previous work. I decided to create a playlist of them and have them playing in a loop in the television of my installation.

I believe that the installation “Please wait” exhibited in Röda Sten fails to create the atmosphere that I wanted. In an open exhibition hall my waiting area felt more like a sitting area not connected to a particular concept or experience. Apart from that in this specific setup you are directed to focus on the material shown on the television screen that was never meant to be the focus point. I feel the focus of this particular setup is not on waiting and nor on the video material, but even so these two points are the only visual focus points in the installation. They are both so weak that the installation fails to pass a clear message or experience to the viewer.
5 Conclusion

The outcome of the two pieces I have been working on this year have not fully satisfied the expectations I had when I started working. The risk I took with my project “Why is this not a dream?” has not given adequate results within the timeframe that I had, something that can be improved in the future in ways I have already described in this paper. I am certain that there is potential in that project and that it is worth developing it more in the future. On the other hand the project I exhibited in May didn’t get all the attention needed and it can work differently in a future exhibition.

There are similarities to the outcome of both of the above cases, although they are quite different as works. That could be a combination of different reasons. In my opinion, lack of experience is the most important one; this led to an approach that was not well enough planned. That possibly included a lack of flexibility; an inability from my side to adapt to the given circumstances and make the choices needed to make in order to have a good result.

Although my master comes to an end here with this paper the two projects I worked on do not. This has been a very important learning process for me and based on this process I will continue working on the specific concept and work. If I was to work on these pieces again from the beginning I would make different decisions. Once again experience and understanding of the situation is very important, as it is almost for everything. I do not have the possibility to go back to the past to change anything, but I do have the privilege of building upon it and developing my ideas further.
Bibliography


