
(Un)tethered Polyphonies

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Abstract

Current discourses around urbanism and communications seem largely concerned with efficiency and optimality of performance. We are critical of such approach, as it often tends to forget what there is that we really like both in the places we inhabit and in the ways we communicate with each other.

In this poster I present the processes and the results of a selection of four workshops I led in the last year in Monterrey, Istanbul, Moscow and Castrignano de' Greci.

"Sonification of the Social City" is a workshop led by Jamie Allen and Paolo Patelli (CIID Research) and

hosted by Design DECODE in Monterrey, Mexico between 29–31 August 2013.

Participants tinkered with a "decoding toolkit" - pieces of software written in Processing and installed on Raspberry Pi boards, which harvest geo-localized content from Twitter, manipulate text, produce audio. The transformation of data flows into fully visible (or better: audible) agents provides a possible model for opening up to new forms of civic and aesthetic engagement with communications and the city. The materials were collected into a "Social City Toolkit", which I used in the subsequent workshop.

"Untethered Polyphonies" is a workshop led by Paolo Patelli and hosted by SALT Galata in Istanbul between 13–15 March 2014, as part of the event "Global Tools. Towards and Ecology of Design" curated by Valerio Borghonovo and Silvia Franceschini.

The week before Twitter was shut down in Turkey, the "Social City Toolkit" found a second application in Istanbul. Participants explored alternative narratives between urban life and media technology, looking for "clever tricks, ways to get away with things, hunter's cunning". Discussing urban scenes and models as well as communication, social networking, data collection and the 'internet-of-things', we tried to challenge the vision of a top-down, all-sensing city of the future. We looked for discourses that are lived in the mobility of perceptions, by different spectators. We decoded the polyphonic voices that are interwoven

between the street and the social web. Activists, artists, and designers took the place of the technocrat-elite and the security agency in a sort of group therapy, as they manipulated data and infrastructure to craft escape plans for the medium and its users. We explored residual degrees of freedom from inside the architecture of social media, appropriating commercial tools, subverting their inherent logic, filters and controls. The "Social City Toolkit" was used to sonify the political chat that takes place on the social web, in order to put in back in the street.

"Points and Frequencies as Media" is a workshop led by Paolo Patelli and hosted by Strelka Institute for Media, Architecture and Design in Moscow between 18–20 June 2014, as part of the event "Future Present: Archives in an Expanded Field", curated by Yulia Rudenko.

Since its emergence digital technology has been constituting copious systems of transmission, storage and dissemination of knowledge and information. The expansive digitization has brought in the era where anyone can make any image or text globally accessible; the era when anyone can be her or his own archivist. However, global accessibility does not always rhyme with preservation: the Internet is perceived as an ocean of data where everything drowns and disappears.

At the same time, Moscow is a navigable open-air museum of heroic architecture, but many buildings are facing oblivion, and are leaving space to the spatial typologies or the rampant Russian capitalism. The urban landscape is changing at fast pace, leaving no trace behind. Starting from the idea behind a

"Colombarium Habitabile", proposed by Brodsky and Utkin in one of their "paper architecture" boards, we questioned what kind of media could preserve what matters of the city, keep record of the things that matter to us.

Participants produced and shared bytes of information that makeup traces of two very special buildings, the ZIL Culture Centre, built in 1930-1937 by project of Vesnin brothers, now completely renovated, and the Automotive service center "Lada", designed by Leonid Nikolaevich Pavlov and built in 1967-1977, currently facing demolition. We used a Kinect sensor to scan interior spaces and found objects, to produce 3d point cloud representations of rooms and spatial fragments. With contact microphones we recorded their background noise, the frequencies and vibrations of the technical systems – ventilation, water, and electricity – and the responses of the building's structures to the activities they currently hosts. We set up an online archive, a webpage for dj-ing with spatial and aural records, a columbarium of externalized information. The result is a tool where different media can serve active advocacy, as much as enact a new kind of nostalgia.

"Kastrignàna - The Ethnographic Museum of Past and Future Ethnography" is the result of a workshop led by Paolo Patelli with Giuditta Vendrame, Cosimo Bizzarri with Lea Dicursi and Luiz Romero, Giacomo Leonzi with Ruggero Castagnola and Gianpaolo d'Amico with Matteo Bencini. Hosted in a medieval castle in Castrignano de' Greci between 17–31 July 2014, it was part of "XY Labs". It hosts about thirty objects and artifacts that tell the past, the present and the possible and impossible futures of the city of Castrignano de' Greci.

Interactive augmentations alter traditional toys and musical instruments, projections animate small religious niches, imaginary machines produce postcards, magic water is found in medieval tanks. All together they act as narrative objects that unveils the key themes of the small town where they are found – or produced.

Author Keywords

Workshop; Interaction Design; Istanbul; Monterrey; Moscow; Social Media



Figure 1. Sonification of the Social City. Design DECODE, Monterrey. Mexico. With Jamie Allen



Figure 2. Sonification of the Social City. Design DECODE, Monterrey. Mexico. With Jamie Allen

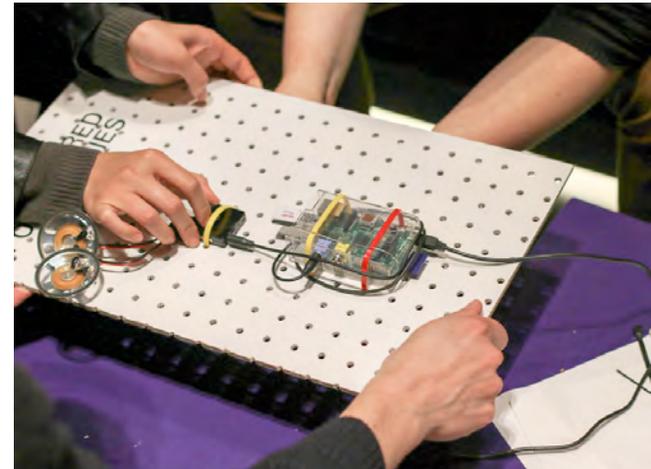


Figure 3. Un-tethered polyphonies. SALT Institute, Istanbul

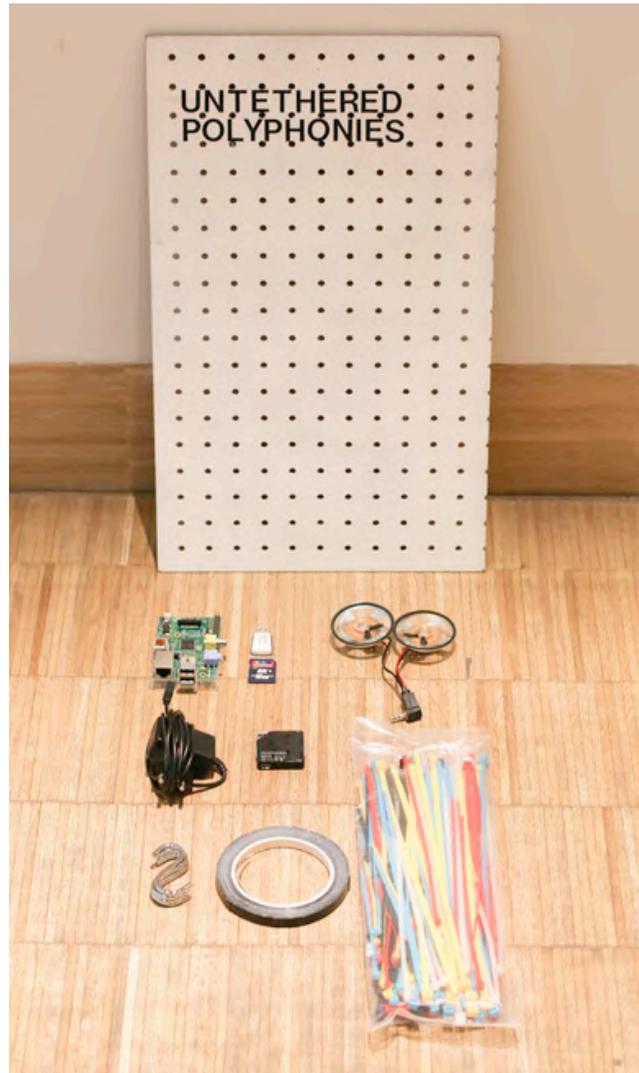


Figure 4. Un-tethered polyphonies. SALT Institute, Istanbul.



Figure 5. Un-tethered polyphonies. SALT Institute, Istanbul. Still from [video](#).

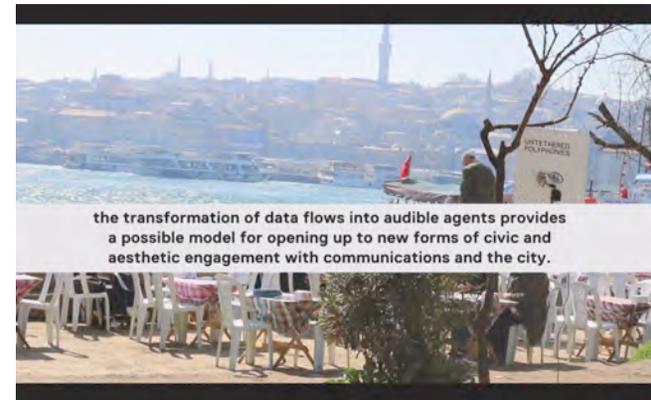


Figure 6. Un-tethered polyphonies. SALT Institute, Istanbul. Still from [video](#).

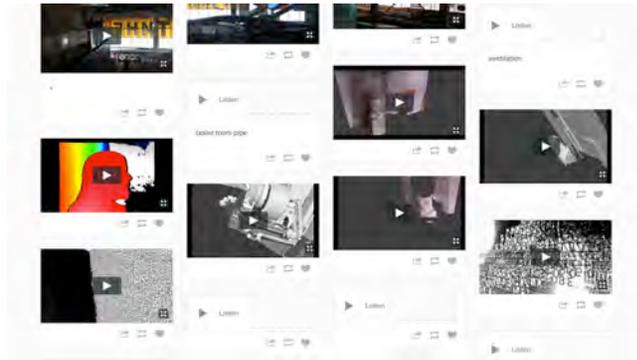


Figure 7. Points and Frequencies as Media. Strelka Institute, Moscow

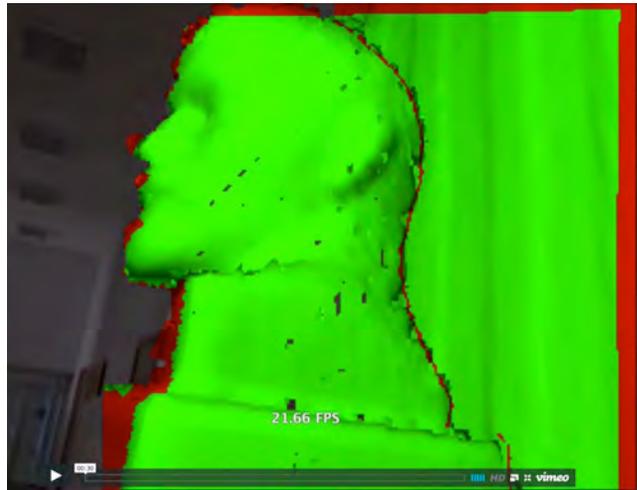


Figure 8. Points and Frequencies as Media. Strelka Institute, Moscow

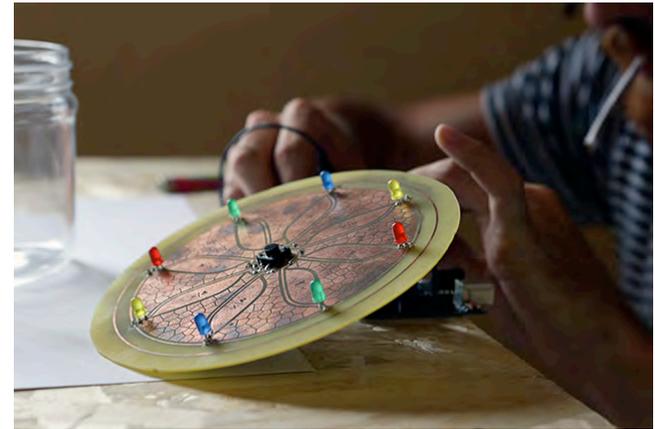


Figure 9. Kastriagnàna - The Ethnographic Museum of Past and Future Ethnography. Castrignano de' Greci, Italy

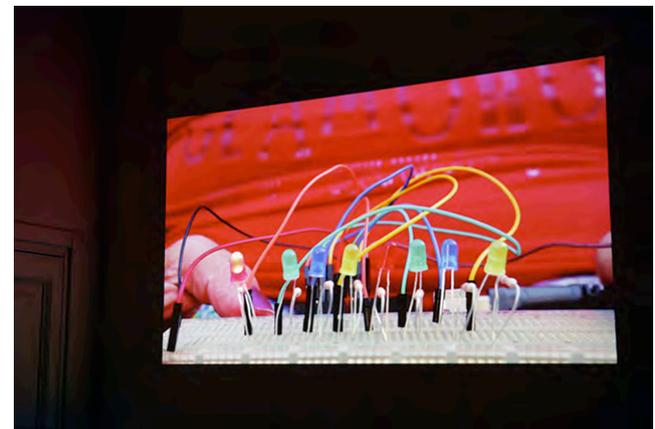


Figure 10. Kastriagnàna - The Ethnographic Museum of Past and Future Ethnography. Castrignano de' Greci, Italy



Figure 11. Kastrignàna - The Ethnographic Museum of Past and Future Ethnography. Castrignano de' Greci, Italy



Figure 12. Kastrignàna - The Ethnographic Museum of Past and Future Ethnography. Castrignano de' Greci, Italy