

## **Reactive media / MAP – Media Art Platform**

**By**

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Contemporary Art has always been about exploring or transgressing boundaries. The historic Avant-garde investigated the limits of the Art Institution, for example; and art after the WWII has largely been transforming the limits of the art work and the conventions emanating from philosophical aesthetics. Lately, the infusion of New Media into art has dramatically intensified both the exploration and the transgression of the boundaries of reality itself – in this case understood as a presence in a physical space and depending on lived time-duration. The contemporary Scandinavian media art scene is no exception to this generalized and abbreviated version of recent developments; it is very innovative and active, experimenting intensively on many fronts – including a strategic exploration of the boundaries between the human body, New Media and physical space/time duration.

Some important contemporary Scandinavian artists make use of augmentation as an artistic strategy on two levels, mainly: as a way of bringing the performing body and technologies together in new forms of expression; And as a commando raid into realities outside art –bringing social and cultural existence into aesthetic practice.

This experimental focus of the artistic practice qualifies, we would claim, as scientific and philosophical inquiries into the ways art relates to reality in the broadest sense. Art conducting this kind of experimental practice is investigating into how aesthetics, art, culture, normality, space, time, visual culture, narrative etc. is working in an augmented mode.

Our project “MAP / Media Art Platform” attempts to examine and use this field of experimental production, to use the words of Peter Lunenfeld, in digital dialectic context – which means that the research project will attempt to look at it as a field of cultural production which is semiotic coherent and structured around the

artist as a functionary or indeed *mediator* between the body and reality-constructions.

Moreover, MAP stages a variety of transdisciplinary experiments that are investigating reality as a construction site – an augmentation of art practice into a critique and possible change of conventionalized reality-constructs and traditional aesthetics.

Working from the notion that augmented reality in contemporary art is a reality under construction, MAP investigates augmented reality and ubiquitous computing as the New Reality of art and the art museum. Moreover, augmented reality is part of a transdisciplinary field that is changing art production and art museums rapidly.

However, the focus on augmented reality and ubiquitous computing should not only be seen as a new media issue, but as part of a profound change in the way artistic production is being conducted in public and social spaces, combining physical experience with technological interface. Hence, the augmentation of reality in contemporary art is not about aesthetic transformations alone – it is not a matter of form or style; instead, it is part of a cultural change involving the relations of art practice, art institutions, humanistic research and the public space which is brought on by the refining and expansion of technology into every aspect of our lives.

### **Reactive, Responsive, Ubiquitous, Pervasive... MEDIA**

The notion of augmented reality is taken into serious consideration by the Danish media artist Mogens Jacobsen, who explicitly “hates the concept of ‘interaction’<sup>1</sup>. This is more than an aesthetic comment – it is a structural remark on the status of an entire field of practice. Interaction has become a kind of logic-by-default that we use to ‘explain’ New Media. Instead, Mogens Jacobsen introduces the concept of ‘branching.’ And ‘reactive media’: “Reactive media is without narrative story.” Jacobsen’s practice could be categorized as ‘responsive media’ or ‘reactive

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<sup>1</sup> Mogens Jacobsen: “I hate: 1) Interaction; 2) Narrativity – thinking about navigation in a storyline; 3) The timeline”. Quoted from: Morten Søndergaard: *Notes on Mogens Jacobsen*, Get Real! Seminar, at KIASMA, Helsinki, 2004. Published at: [www.samtidskunst.dk/3sted](http://www.samtidskunst.dk/3sted)

media'. The point for Mogens Jacobsen is that we must never stop looking for the true epistemology of real-time, pervasive computing and augmented reality.

Historically, the museum was a social meeting place, where the guests interacted the architecture of the museum, other guests and the exhibited art. When digital mediation became a possibility, we saw a lot of more or less successful cases where museums tried to expand the physical exhibitions by using the new possibilities. The most naïve was giving the audience access to a computer presenting additional information to the presented exhibition.

When the internet and web became "the place to be", museums followed and established websites as any other commercial company. These websites can coarsely be divided into two categories: The purely utilitarian website informing a potential audience about prices, opening hours, directions and the current show. The other – more ambitious - type of website tried to expand the exhibition-area of the museum. The idea sounds great on paper but seldom succeeds in real life. These websites often ignores the bodily and social experiences of a trip to a museum. And when they are most successful often compete with the rooms of the actual museum.

At the same time large section of art has left the purely physical domain. Contemporary Art is not constrained to marble, paint or material substances. Art, conceptual ideas, subversive strategies, social interventions, telecommunication and science are converging within the field of research based art. A field baptized "Information Art" by American artist Stephen Wilson.<sup>2</sup>

How will these new art forms fit inside the framework of the museum? To use the words of professor Hiroshi Ishii<sup>3</sup>: We have experiences and methods to exhibit objects build by atoms, we now have to deal with objects build by bits – in some cases digital bits.

Ubiquitous computing and augmented reality are by definition embedded within the physical environment. At the same time both paradigms is opposed to the current desktop metaphor – the graphical user interface, where a single user is captivated in front of a screen. The ubi-comp system often allows multi-user interaction, and therefore opens up for a richer social experience.

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<sup>2</sup> "Information Arts", Stephen Wilson, MIT Press, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Hiroshii Ishii and Brygg Ullmer: "Tangible Bits: Towards Seamless Interfaces between People, Bits and Atoms". Proceedings of CHI97, 1997.

## **MAP MFSK**

MAP MFSK is an ongoing research project, which navigate within the following ground-rules:

- 1) A social active situation should be implemented.
- 2) A physical interface for digital material should be performed in the social active situation.
- 3) Fugitive and mediated art forms should be distributed to an audience in a direct and perceptive way through augmented or pervasive technological designs.
- 4) The audience should be able to discover complex layers and work beyond the perception.

The Museums of Contemporary Art in Roskilde is inviting media artists to develop different solutions using distribution media and new media to its very limits – and beyond. The practical idea is that each artist will choose to work with one project each within the ground rules of Media Art Platform.

## **Hørbar / Audiobar**

The project named *Audiobar* is doing precisely that<sup>4</sup>. In *Audiobar* Digital material from the collection of Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde becomes physical present in a body-space. Fugitive and intermedial artforms from the museum's collection are distributed to an audience in a direct and perceptive way through augmented or pervasive technological designs.

Instead of discussing art and media as something separate that collide suddenly in new media, creating the abstract notion of "interface", our presentation of *Audiobar* would approach the matter of Human-Computer Relations from the angle of the experimental practice of reactive media.

Hørbar/Audiobar is a responsive environment for exploring the collection of audio art from The Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde, Denmark (MFSK). You interact with the sounds using a tangible interface: By placing bottles on a table.

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<sup>3</sup> Hørbar/Audiobar is part of MAP (MEDIA ART PLATFORM), Curated by Morten Søndergaard, Museum of Contemporary Art, Roskilde – Denmark.

The bottle- and bar-metaphor was chosen to facilitate social interaction between the visitors at the Hørbar/Audiobar.

This installation is the first phase of a larger Media Art Platform project which has been conceptualized and developed by media artist Mogens Jacobsen and media art curator Morten Søndergaard. In the process of developing Hørbar/Audiobar, the ground rules of Media Art Platform (MAP) MFSK project was formulated by a workgroup from the museum and the artist.

The idea with MAP MFSK is to use new media & distribution technology in mapping the idea and content of a collection of fugitive and mediated art from the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde, Denmark

The Hørbar/Audiobar environment consists of two rooms: A bar-room for playful collective interaction and a study lounge for deeper explorations in solitude:

### **Room 1: The bar**

The bar consist of a central table and 260 bottles places on shelves.

The bottles all have colorful labels. The labels indicate the content of the bottle; one bottle may contain mostly noise, one may contain "80% vocals", and another "20% rhythm". There are 12 very subjective categories of labels easily recognizable by color. Some labels are black with white lettering; this type of bottle contains a "period" – e.g. 1960-1965.

Placing bottles on the table will trigger a search for an audio-track fitting these parameters.

### **Room 2: The study**

Two monitors and two set of headphones are available in a second smaller room. These monitors display the title and artist of the last 10 tracks played in the bar. When the visitor selects a track, a page gives more in deep information about this track. At the same time the track is played in the headset. The visitor can also chose to get a list of all available tracks by the same artist. These tracks can also be explored in the study.

### **International showcases in 2008**

Hørbar/Audiobar is exhibited at ZKM – Zentrum für Kunst und Medieteknologie in Karlsruhe, Germany – until july 2008.

A smaller version of Hørbar/Audiobar will be shown in Amsterdam in the fall of 2008, as well as in Shanghai in the winter 2008-09.

Hørbar/Audiobar was a project by artist Mogens Jacobsen.

Hørbar/Audiobar and MAP is part of the collection of MFSK.

Media Art Platform is curated by Morten Søndergaard, Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde; it is supported by Kulturnet Danmark / The Danish Cultural Heritage Council, Sonning Fonden and Sound Forum Öresund.

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[www.audiobar.info](http://www.audiobar.info) / [www.mogens.info](http://www.mogens.info) / [www.mfks.dk](http://www.mfks.dk) / [www.samtidskunst.dk](http://www.samtidskunst.dk)