APPLICATION OF 'THE ALTER BAHNHOF VIDEO WALK' TO DEVELOP EMPATHY BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

F. Tusa, T. Fontaines, X. Briceño, E. Tusa
Technical University of Machala (ECUADOR)

Abstract
The following research paper exposes an experience case applying 'The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk' technique in students of three semesters of the Social Communication career at the Technical University of Machala (UTMACH), in the 2015-2016 period. The Technical University of Machala is an institution of higher education located in the south of Ecuador country, specifically at Machala city. The objective of this experience case was to record the subjective and intimate world of students by using the mobile phone in order to unveil their thoughts and those scenarios that have marked, in a deep way, their existence. In this exercise, the past and the present are united in moving images that reveal meditations and memories of each student. 'The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk' was designed for the old train station in Kassel, Germany as part of 'Documenta', an art installation created by Canadian artists, Jane Cardiff and George Bures Miller. With this technique an alternate world opens up where reality and fiction meld in a disturbing and uncanny way that has been referred to as physical cinema. In this confusion, the past and present conflate and students guide us through a meditation on memory and reveal the poignant moments of being alive and present. This paper exposes a qualitative methodology based on the technique of documentary video where the protagonists are students who apply the technique of in situ observation and the field output. The principal results of this art experience in classroom are: 1) Highly creative and subjective documentary videos, 2) New audiovisual productions by student initiative, 3) Socialization of short films between teachers and students, 4) Content feedback and peer evaluation. As conclusion, this paper infers that 'The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk' technique improves the relationship between teacher and students, develops empathy in these educational actors and also helps to understand particular life situations that directly influence the attitude and behaviour of students in classroom. Besides, 'The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk' technique encourages creativity and teamwork among classroom partners.

Keywords: Video Walk, teacher, students, education, university.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk was designed for the old train station in Kassel, Germany, as part of Documenta project. In this video, participants are able to borrow an iPod and headphones from a check-out booth. They are directed by the artist Cardiff and Miller through the station, where we can see an alternate world opens up where reality and fiction meld in a disturbing and uncanny way that has been referred to as physical cinema (Cardiff and Miller, 2012).

The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk develops a unique medium for instruction on aspects of history. Also, it offers a walk over the grounds of the Kulturbahnhof in Kassel with a portable media player and headset that are available on loan. This kind of artistic project is a video history of the former railway station in text and images (Hanssen, 2010).

How can bring the past history of the site alive? Cardiff and Miller uses these elements:

- Historical photographs,
- Previously filmed scenes,
- Commentaries,
- Sounds,
- Classic Music (Hanssen, 2010).

Besides, walkers follow the route described in the video where we can see places at which they are actually located on the screen. Those who attempt to bring the depicted events in line with reality as they walk experience a peculiar sense of uncertainty and irritation, a slightly uncanny atmosphere of simultaneity in which levels of reality are interwoven (Cardiff and Miller, 2012).
1.1 The Affective Historicization of Public Spaces

Since the 1990s, we see a new art style that specialist called spatial art, a category that has broadened to include features such as:

− Installation,
− Architectural environments,
− Relational interventions,
− Aesthetic exploration of automated real-time location technologies
− Augmented reality technologies (Ross, 2013).

In the next years, spatial art has led to a major redefinition of the relationship between art and the public space. Whereas aesthetic strategies privileged a critical demythologization of the public space, using various tactics as:

− Site-specificity,
− Institutional critique,
− NeoMarxist (Ross, 2013).

All these forms of analysis of the social conflicts underlying public sites, recent art tends, rather, to privilege an affective activation of space. For example, in Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s relational urban environments, passersby are invited to use their smartphones to send a personal online message, which they hear a few minutes later broadcast in a public space, modulating the light beams projected in the space (Lozano, 2012).

This type of affective activation stems from participatory practices in which the viewer contributes to the creation of the artwork. It is also a result of media explorations that tend to dissolve the distinction described in concepts like (Buchanan, 2012):

• Public space: Site of political debate, confrontation among private opinions that advertising endeavours to make public, practice of democracy, forms of public communication, circulation of different points of view.

• Public spaces: Places accessible to public(s) that inhabitants travel across in short, the public road network and its fringes allow free movement of people and free of charge.

Thanks to their mobility, the media may go hand in hand with the public space: they may be used to circulate different points of view. As result, The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk explores spaces differently. It’s about letting yourself wander through spaces, particularly, urban spaces like cities. Technology shows us how can find yourself lost in a city (Buchanan, 2012).

Is important to mention that we will stick to the same commuter route we know, forgetting that there is always an opportunity to off-road and explore. Psychogeography is about seizing that opportunity and explore an urban space with technological devices (Hanssen, 2010).

1.2 Digital Mediations

In The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk audiences borrow an iPod and headphones from a check-out booth and then are guided through the station. This tour includes visual technology along with the audio. As with earlier walking tours, virtual and actual realities overlap. This piece provides a visual guide enhancing the virtual tour-guide’s voice (Jirgens, 2015).

The path that the audience is advised to take, parallels exactly the pre-recorded video path on the iPod. It is almost as if the audience member is recording the events in the station, while simultaneously being the subject of a video recording. A sense of infinite regression contributes to a feeling of alienation and disembodiment.

In The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk temporal anomalies occur. Virtual events happen on the iPod that are not present at the same moment in the train station. The digital portion of the tour includes prerecorded sounds and visual recordings of musicians at the station, again, generating a hyperreality (Cardiff and Miller, 2012).

The tourist is directed to follow the virtual musicians who move through the station on the I-Pod. Meantime, a line spoken by the virtual guide compares memory to baggage one tows behind oneself.
Just as the line is spoken, it is augmented by a virtual image on the iPod of a young female traveller towing a wheeled travel bag through the station, just ahead of the observer (Jirgens, 2015).

The guide’s comment on baggage serves as a reminder that digital culture extends memory function, as well as expands the phenomenology of the experiential grid. As users proceed through the station, they must avoid actual people who do not appear on the iPod video (Hanssen, 2010).

Conversely, young virtual ballerina appears on the iPod video, who is not actually present in the station. Meanwhile, we overhear the voice of an older German man recalling mass destruction and broken bodies on streets following bombings during World War Two (figure 1).

The tour moves to a monument for Jewish people who were forced to board trains on Platform, only to be deported to death camps. We hear that their life stories were written on paper and then wrapped around stones, now on display inside a glass case within the station (Wilky, 2013).

The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk raises the question of memories people don’t want. Passage ways to hidden time-closets are briefly opened. There are some memories we’d rather forget, but if we do, it is at our peril. Disturbing histories of human aggression are important to recall if we wish to avoid them in future.

A voice at the beginning of this walking tour reminds us of things outside of our realm of perception. Video provides a worthy analogue for the potential expansion of the experiential grid through technological mediations (Ross, 2014).

Time and history leave only traces on the walls of the present, but the tour provides an extension to human memory, mixed with a site-specific investigation into events during World War Two. As consequence, technological mediations such as:

- War victims,
- Stones wrapped with life-stories,
- Cemeteries,
- Monuments,
- Landmarks,
- The ergodic tourist (Ross, 2014).

All these elements are positioned within a narrative speaking of a troubled past. The participants watch things unfold on the small screen but feel the presence of those events deeply because of being situated in the exact location where the footage was shot. The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk reveals the poignant moments of being alive and present.
This is one of the reasons why *The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* is a particular medium to develop a deep and intimate inspiration. There’s a strange confusion of realities, using found-footage and real footage of the court itself. With the backdrop of the station, the movie told a story reminding of the past of the train station as a traffic hub when thousands of Jews were transported to the concentration camps by the Nazis.

During the walk, the reality of the lively train station and the events in the movie weaved together closely, letting the past and present reality become peculiar disarray and making it difficult for visitors to keep these two layers separated. In video, viewer finds himself at the locations where the stories happen as he experiences the blurred line between reality of the physical space and cinematic fiction recorded (figure 2).

![Figure 2. Physical space and Cinematic fiction](source: Cardiff and Miller (2012)).

This project takes a spatial or, rather, locational turn, highlighting the significance of a physical space, but at the same time aiming for dislocation and for the creation of different and partial perspectives. *The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* is an exploration of micro-histories on varying scales that link the local history and reality of a space with the world, and worldly.

In this spatial art, sound as a producer and function of space is key. The walks in particular, set up a specific experience within a space, a historic place. It’s a space charged with absence that is entered by walkers, listeners and viewers. Here, we see sound functions such as:

- Hollow presence,
- Traces of bodies,
- Action remain.

*The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* adds several layers to the awareness of absence, in function of the next frames:

- The iPod at once frames a past experience of the place.
- Displaces takes place as a second experience.
- If we are in the train station, following along ourselves, another exists following the trajectory of the video from a desk, within the frame of a computer screen.
- The train station is a framed or a framing layer.
- Each moment which has taken place within the station becomes an additional layer.

When Miller is standing on the main platform filming and Cardiff is walking towards the train, not only does one train depart before the other, but also the hand holding the iPod was Miller’s hand rather than Cardiff’s. Also, the narrating voice had obscured any masculine characteristics of the hand.
Suddenly, the extent of time’s overlapping hits us again, as intensely as when the video on the iPod switches to Cardiff leafing through the book displayed in the trolley thing. The doubled soundtracks of the station (Cardiff’s voice and the old man’s voice) tells a story about the sound of bombs falling was imported from another space (not recorded in the train station).

1.3 The Power of Sound
Cardiff and Miller’s digitally enhanced installation works and walking-tours have re-contextualized the relationship between artist and audience. Their installations juxtapose the detritus of the past, re-contextualizing life-altering moments. Their walking-tours revisit historically significant sites investigating subjects (Wray, 2012).

The frame of reference in their works demands the inter-active presence of the audience as essential figure set against a ground embedded with desire, absence, and anxiety. Their installation works recall the artistic tradition of the tableau-vivant in which a scene is set in order to tell a story.

Often, the story line in these tableau-like settings is disjunctive, and elliptic, leaving audiences to fill in the gaps. The walking-tours are kinetic and performative, requiring audience participants to use audio headgear and/or portable-I phones as they are directed by a virtual pre-recorded ‘tour-guide’ that tells them where to travel, what to watch for, and indirectly, what to think.

In The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk we see ergodic qualities, in other words, ergodic art demands interactive extra-noematic responsibilities, demanding high degrees of physical engagement, unlike turning the pages to a book, or regarding a sculpture at a gallery (Aarseth, 1997).

While Cardiff and Miller’s installation works require some audience engagement, their scripted, ergodic walking-tours demand direct audience participation. Walking through the space, one gets the uncanny audio-illusion of moving through a live but invisible chorus that performs Tallis’ piece, then takes a break and chit-chats, and is followed by a loop back to song (Wray, 2012).

2 METHODOLOGY
This paper research focus on a qualitative methodology which consisted in the use of short fiction by university students applying The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk technique. The selected sample were third and fourth semester of the Social Communication career at the Technical University of Machala, in Ecuador.

The short fiction was elaborated in work groups of five students each one, inside Stylistic and Specialized Writing II subject-matter. With all the short fiction we applied qualitative analysis of content based on multiples variables such as: related topics, exposes values and public places used.

3 RESULTS
In this section we show the principal results of qualitative analysis of content based on three variables and their respective table of information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Related Topic</th>
<th>Exposes values</th>
<th>Public spaces used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>Compass</td>
<td>Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love failed</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Cemetery</td>
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<td>Deception</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Bar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fraternal Friendship</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>Home</td>
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<td>Teenage pregnancy</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Disco</td>
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<tr>
<td>Road to success</td>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>Airport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion to play soccer</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Stadium</td>
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</tbody>
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3.1 Discussion

Through the virtual environments that students create, the walking-tours enfold layers of simulacra built upon pre-recorded audioscapes. These audioscapes then guide the physical body through both virtual and actual environments. The fugue-like overlaps of actual and virtual events inspire multi-stable perceptions and a phenomenological response to:

- Intersection bios and techne,
- Intersection body and technology (figure 4).

![Figure 4. Intersection body and technology](source: author (own elaboration)).

The artists’ digital extensions of mind and memory, integrated with the audience’s mind and body generate a nomadic *cyborg* experience, wherein the virtual and the actual become so integrated that they sometimes seem indistinguishable (figure 5).

![Figure 5. The artists’ digital extensions of mind and memory](source: author (own elaboration)).

Besides, when short fiction enters the audience’s mind, it also opens previously hidden passageways to their own minds. It’s a two-way, digital roadway between self and other. Audience and artists become symbiotically *jacked-into* each other’s minds. Through the surrender of autonomous agency, the sense of disembodiment and the virtual *voices* simulated a schizophrenic phenomenology (figure 6).
Why we talk about a schizophrenic phenomenology? Because, in short fiction we see secret doorways to unnerving past events are temporarily revealed, while disjunctive narratives and elliptic plots invite us to become further engaged by filling in the story-line gaps themselves.

The digital paradox between virtual and actual through is a technologically mediated cyborg experience and it raises questions about how techne and bios combine to constitute reality. We find ourselves situated as figures in a digital ground, intimately linked to an ephemeral past that invites re-evaluation. It is their conscious resituation of artist/audience interactions that distinguishes this project (figure 7).
4 CONCLUSION

- *The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* technique was used to record the subjective and intimate world of students by using the mobile phone in order to unveil their thoughts and those scenarios that have marked, in a deep way, their existence.

- With all the short fiction past and present time are united to reveal meditations and memories of each student.

- *The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* was designed to open up an alternate world where reality and fiction meld into a physical cinema.

- The principal results of this art experience in classroom are: 1) Highly creative and subjective documentary videos, 2) New audiovisual productions by student initiative, 3) Socialization of short films between teachers and students, 4) Content feedback and peer evaluation among classroom partners.

- *The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* technique improves relationship between teacher and student, develops empathy in these educational actors and helps us to understand particular life situations that directly influence the attitude and behavior of students. Besides, the project encourages creativity and team work among university learners.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to all students of Social Communication career at the Technical University of Machala, in Ecuador, to participate in *The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* class project inside Stylistic and Specialized Writing II subject-matter.

REFERENCES


