

author(s)



Sérgio Eliseu  
Paulo Bernardino Bastos  
Research Institute in Art, Design and Society and  
Research Institute for Design, Media and  
Culture, School of Fine Arts, University of Porto

abstract

This project explores the potential of Augmented Reality technology when applied to the artistic production, mainly in its Urban Guerrilla Art aspect.

"Memory Train", a mobile Augmented Reality artwork, is provided as a case study. Built on the Layar platform, this project was developed as a protest against the shutdown and destruction of a centenary portuguese railway line, involving an unauthorized (but legal) invasion of the former train route with pictures, sounds and messages captured and recorded by many users in several locations.

Besides exploring the concept of space beyond the physical location and relative artistic issues about place-memory, this work also intends to include other related data to each setting, providing it with a new socio- political narrative.

keywords

augmented reality, guerrilla art, memory, local.

## Memory Train

Augmented Reality Guerilla Art.



People have always felt the need to share and express themselves in a public manner, sometimes by telling a story or posing a question and, many times, through the defense of a political ideology (Smith 2007:11). That's also why so many artists, mostly working under pseudonyms, use public spaces to install and perform or attach their work, blurring out the boundaries between public and private spaces as a mean of democratic participation. This attitude has been commonly called "Guerrilla Art", and arises from a group of street art forms that use political expression as medium, open to anyone and that enables the recreation of a space, bringing it a new life (in most cases considered illegal) [1].

However, Augmented Reality has not only redefined the design and entertainment experience but also widened the chances for artists to reframe media art and the urban experience by exploring the use of portable, location aware devices in which the physical space becomes the canvas (Paterson et al. 2013: 125). In fact, now it is also possible to use AR techniques to make "Guerrilla Art", bringing with it the advantage to freely interfere with the real world without physically changing it. That means that AR "Guerrilla Artists" ceased to have legal reasons to fear the police with their new invasions, such as occurred in the emblematic case of the "ArOCCUPY May Day's", that started in NYC's Financial District and has been spreading across the globe [2].

The concept of "Memory Train", our case study, is related to the history of Lousã's railways, which began with the official announcement of its construction in 1873 under the royal order of the King of Portugal, Louis I (1861-1889). After 15 years of interregnum, on 16 December 1906, the trail line between Coimbra and Lousã was finally opened and worked for more than 100 years [3].

However, this historic railway was shutdown in 2010 in order to be upgraded to a better system (subway) - "Metro Mondego". As appropriate as that may sound, the subway project encountered what very few could consider as a small problem, the construction began without securing the necessary funds for its

completion. As a consequence, four years later, 16.5 million passengers are still without any train or subway services and, considering the enormous financial crisis that Portugal has merged into, are bound to remain without it [4].

At the moment, all affected populations use their own car or travel in more uncomfortable buses to do the same route, taking plenty more time, running lots of road risks and polluting the environment due to the increase of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. So, in order to bring this matter to light and to mark the 4th anniversary of the total shutdown of this railway, the project "Memory Train" invaded its former train path with the participation of many local citizens that shared contents concerning to the use of this service, such as pictures, sounds and videos [5]. These materials were then manually worked and geo-tagged through the use of an AR browser for smartphones/tablets called Layar [6].

In order to maximize the impact and experience, derived from the convergence of geographic space among the digital data, the application should be deployed in the former railway route. So, the project is also accompanied by series of cultural walking actions, disclosed online in a group created for that purpose in the social networks that counts with more than two hundred members/collaborators. The result was a very large impact on the local media with interviews and work explanations. It's also possible to monitor the project and its initiatives in a purposely built website that includes all the available contents, as well as a map with the points of interest and the result of the cultural walking actions [7].

In this new kind of artistic invasions, we believe that art transforms itself in a state of encounter by enhancing a public space outside of the institutional circle of the art system in a close relationship with the daily lives of its inhabitants. Thereby, acting as a resource on which further actions can be built, the project "Memory Train" also expects to serve as a platform for rethinking the fundamental issues of belonging and participation, having as a starting point a local matter. In this specific case, with a

very strong symbolic charge that establishes a relationship between local communities and the significance of the railway in their lives.

## Footnotes

[1] Probably, in the beginning of this kind of art, the most famous cases were the "Guerrilla Girls" group actions. Nowadays, we have many famous works, like the ones from "Banksy".

[2] <http://aroccupymayday.blogspot.pt/> , accessed in 12-10-2013. There are many other works of a similar nature like, for example, "Namaland" from Connor McGarrigle (<http://www.walkspace.org/namaland/> , accessed in 03-01-2014) .

[3] <http://www.metromondego.pt/> , accessed in 03-01-2014.

[4] [http://www.tcontas.pt/pt/actos/rel\\_auditoria/2011/25/audit-dgtc-relo26-2011-25.pdf](http://www.tcontas.pt/pt/actos/rel_auditoria/2011/25/audit-dgtc-relo26-2011-25.pdf) , accessed in 07-01-2014.

[5] The application was built in December 2013 and has been updated on a regular basis since 4 January 2014.

[6] It employs the Layar platform since it provides a development environment and software platform that can be used freely in a wide range of equipments. <https://www.layar.com/> accessed in 01-11-2013.

[7] [www.comboio.eliseu.com](http://www.comboio.eliseu.com)

## References

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## Aknowledgements

This work is funded by national funds through the Foundation for Science and Technology — FCT — in the scope of project PEst-OE/EAT/UI4057/2014.

