

Crafting for Spirituality : Projected light as a model for the cultural imagination

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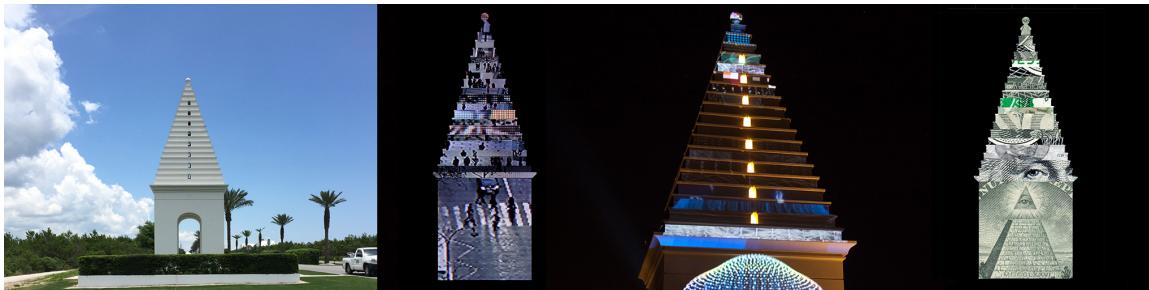


Figure 1: Stills, Digital Graffiti, Alys Beach, Florida 2015.

Abstract

The increasing visibility of works in public settings using projection systems creates a range of potentials for the arts and cultural communities.

Projection and projection mapping systems offer new possibilities for the display and visibility of media imagery, and they do so in forms which are not subject to the teleological constraints of screens as display surfaces.

The shift from the framed, determined space of the screen to a potentially infinite range of image spaces, has implications for representation at its most fundamental levels.

In contrast to the fixed, culturally determined praxis of the image within the "frame" of the screen, projection is both a transformation of objects and spaces, and a perpetually liminal process. Between the virtual and the extant, projected light is indeterminate both spatially and temporally. Projection operates as a series of potentials, modeling a metaphysics that breaks with Cartesian duality.

Projected light, in breaking with the language of the screen, offers a model of the media text as neither fixed or persistent, providing both a cue to the imagination and a perspective for metaphysical inquiry.

Keywords: projection mapping, public displays, museums,

Concepts: •Display systems → **Projection mapping; Projection;**

1 Mapping and the cultural imagination

The development of projection systems for cultural institutions has been a work in progress for the last two decades. As these systems develop in capability and flexibility, the potential for projected

works to operate as a flexible repository of media texts has positioned these works in new and potentially speculative positions as cultural artifacts.

While the use of screens in sites devoted to public collections and visitor experiences, from museums to visitor centers is a persistent feature of these sites, the screen in this context conforms to all of the historical and cultural assumptions about its function as a frame for a media text that in largely conforms to the apparatus and expectations of cinematic and televisual media.

With the development of flexible visual databases [multimedia] in the 1990s, these screens or terminals evolved into user determined displays - without relinquishing their debt to the tropes of televisual presentation.

The MAP exhibit at the National Museum of Australia, [on which I worked for a period of 9 months] was developed as a flexible interface that combined the literal form of the Australian Continental mass - the Map - with overlaid visualizations of the social, cultural, natural and historical visions that have been generated by the land.

These multiple storylines are integrated into the broader schematic of the media database, and are linked by the common "objective" vision of the satellite image of the map's surface. Branching from this starting point - they offer multiple, non exclusive narratives mapped onto the literal image of the landmass.

In this sense - the work operates as a site for the cultural imagination, which is inherently multiple, transitional, transitional and ultimately inconclusive.



Figure 2: National Museum of Australia, Map Exhibit - (still). Site Specific projection

Extending the virtual possibilities of the database, the projection of light as the medium of display positions the work in a space between the seen and unseen - the materiality of the projected surface transformed by light and perpetually becoming something new.

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This transformational capacity admits to an open series of potentials and interpretations within the museum context, offering this very particular and determined site of cultural signification as inherently open individual speculation.

These potential are, however, weighed against the curatorial, managerial and institutional constraints that accompany the development of public cultural sites and visitor experiences. There is an inherent tension between the multiple stakeholders in these projects and the more open potential of contemporary media display systems.

2 Light and place

New developments in realtime image manipulation for projection have combined with lighter and more powerful projectors to offer a new set of possibilities for projected works. These possibilities are able to reconfigure fixed forms - particularly architectural spaces, into variable display surfaces, creating a link between the material and immaterial [virtual] states through the medium of light.

2.1 Between form and potential.

Open source tools like Syphon have facilitated a fluid ecosystem of image interchange between realtime image manipulation, generative software applications, computing and display systems. This in turn facilitates development of an inherently recombinant process for the mediated image to be placed into physical space, rapidly transforming the possibilities of that space as a programmable display surface.

These possibilities have been theorized under the rubric of the Temporary Autonomous Zone [Bey 2003] and Expanded Cinema [Youngblood, Fuller, 1970]. The latent potential for these processes to interact with space in flexible and highly temporary forms is an a shift not only in the aesthetics of screen spaces and their potential - it is likewise a fundamental re-imagination of physical space itself - from the built form to natural landscapes.

Inherent in this process is the capacity of light to form an immediate and temporary bridge between the possibilities of the virtual [media, software and computing in the abstract] and physical space as a site of open representational potential.

2.2 Writing with light

The process of creating these Temporary Autonomous Zones as an aesthetic representation is explored in the works displayed as part of the Digital Graffiti exhibition in Alys Beach, Florida in 2015 and 2016. This series of works, Datapoint.01, Pyramid Scheme and Datapoint.02 are a rapid reconfiguration of public space using Madmapper, a Syphon based image manipulation software to conform the around 18 separate image planes to a complex architectural form in the space of around 20 minutes. The speed, flexibility and modularity of this process reconfigures the physical space into a series of displays - an inherently complex and interrelated set of propositions that create both affective intensity and which are perpetually transitional.

3 Spirituality. The machine's ghost.

"The cause-and-effect relationship sanctified by modernism, in which form follows function (or vice versa) needs to be abandoned in favor of promiscuous collisions of programs and spaces, in which the terms intermingle, combine and implicate each other in the production of a new architectural reality" (Tschumi 1994)



Figure 3: 'Pyramid Scheme - (still). Site Specific projection

What emerges from these new and recombinant forms is a challenge to the Cartesian duality that is implied by the screen based text. If the openness, variation, and temporary nature of these projected works are considered as a cue to our relationship with the metaphysical imagination, we can see this work as closer to a concept of the imagination which sees it as a site of intensive relations, and the implicit challenge to both form and permanence admits a more open, transitional and spiritually speculative role for the technologized image.

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