The RAMI 14.0
MOULTAQAYAT ALEXANDRIA

7th June : Master Class Mohamed H.YOUSSEF

Creation and interactivity

Guests : Naoyuki TANAKA et Mohamed EZZ et Marta VALLEJO/ Resistance (((s))) ound

Mohamed Hassan YOUSSEF : Graduate from Fine Arts in Section Decor - expressive arts, specializied in fine arts, visual, multimedia, photography and artists' books. A multimedia designer since 1994 and specialist since 1997 at the Arab Academy for Science and Technology and arts Director at the Planetarium center since 2010. Artist amount several independent projects in interactive spaces, as *Particules*. Trainer of digital arts for children and young artists. Animator for several Medialabs through RAMI platform. http://ramimed.com/Mohamed-Youssef.html

Multaqayat Day3 RAMI 7 june 2014
Reflections (3)

The third and the last day of the master class series was the master class of artist Mohammed Youssef and his guests. The session was started by Youssef explaining that the aim of the presentations is to show interactivity as a tool for artistic creation through the work and practices of the artists who are presenting their work. The first speakers were Marta Vallejo and Mohammed Ezz and musician Khaled Kaddal (via Skype) presenting the project Resistance(((s)))ound (http://www.lacompanyia.org/?p=701). Marta started by explaining a bit about her background and interest in working in Alexandria with the project, as part of **La Companyía**, a collective that is has launched an on-going research process about sound art with an antenna in several cities (Dakar – Alexandria – Brussels – Madrid-....etc) where the starting point is interactivity. In the sense of searching for meanings that are relevant to each city, through trying to "interact" with its inhabitants and the people living in those cities. As the political context in several of those cities has been pivoted on the notion of resistance to corrupt regimes or unjust power relations, the idea of resistance became the central theme for the project. A screening of the video, *Sawtyat,* showing an installation created in 2013 by Khaled Kaddal, showed several wind chimes suspended from a tree, right outside the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, along with Khaled Kaddal's guitar hanging from the same tree. The chimes are suspended in such a way, as to be within reach of passing pedestrians, who may choose to "interact" with it as they please. A description of the project was posted on the tree as well. The video shows the different reactions to the 'unusual' objects, with reactions varying from playful fiddling with the chimes, to more aggressive thrusting of the metal tubes, to puzzled looks and inquiring expressions and even laughter at this assortment of objects. Artist Khaled Kaddal then went to explain a bit about the idea behind the installation and how it came to be. Kaddal started by telling a personal anecdote where while taking a cab, along with his guitar, the Salafi cab driver interrogated him about the instrument and why does he play it, admonishing him as to the folly of playing music and how it is forbidden. This reaction prompted Kaddal to think about music and sound as something that exists in nature, and that happens everyday even without the presence of particular or recognized instruments. So, the idea of installing wind

chimes (an object not necessarily affiliated with music per se) in a public space was developed, in attempt to see what kind of interaction people will have to it. The hanging of the guitar, was a symbolic gesture to this personal experience of music considered as forbidden or restricted to an instrument.
The actual video of the project http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CtAk5otZeI

Marta then continued to talk about the process behind the sound piece "*Shad el Habl*" https://soundcloud.com/alexandria-s-ounds/push-and-pull, produced in Alexandria for the Resistance(((s)))ound project that was created and that they were going to play. The process entailed defining what structures does one resist, the sites of resistance, and the actions one takes in face of such structures and constraints they enforce. A neutral definition was reached, which is the scientific definition of resistance, the forces exerted on an object, and the opposing reaction to these forces. Mohammed Ezz then introduced himself and his interest in the project. He started off by explaining that he moved from being involved in the act of physical resistance (political action, rallying, organization, ...etc) to seeking a different medium of understanding or expressing resistance. This is his first artistic collaboration, and experimentation with sound art. The sound track "*Shad el habl*" was then played which was a manipulated collection of sounds from different parts of the city. While the sounds were edited, no other sounds were added to the existing material that was recorded.

Marta tried to explain that the process of recording and collecting sounds, included positive sounds, negative sounds, and neutral sounds. What was interesting for her, was the different ways in which people "identified" different sounds that they encounter everyday and would normally never stop to try to analyze it or identify it. Several questions were raised about the relation between political act of resistance and its relationship to the sound piece. Ezz then tried to explain that at first to him resistance was about creating a margin for oneself, to confront something through action, in an attempt to create a physical margin. But that after working on this project he has realized that the artistic medium redefines the notion of resistance, it creates a mental margin, space for contemplation, and hence an opposing reaction to all those "forces" that are encountered in everyday life.

The next artist to present was **Naoyuki Tanaka "NAO",** who in a self-effacing manner introduced his practice as one engaged with different mediums of digital expression. He studied Fine Arts in Japan but then realized that the focus is more on architectural and urban practices so he moved to France and studied at the School of Fine Arts in Aix-en-Provence. His early experimentation was with video art, he then moved to sound and then to net art. Before showing some of his early work, he explained that some of the work he created might not be displayed properly or work at all because either the software and the source code that was used was no longer available or the device used is no longer produced. The first series of works he created ranged between basic animation and simple interactivity, for example changing image through moving the cursor. As well that have been ten years ago or more, the capacities for software and digital arts were quite limited. The work then moved to play on synchronization between two windows (*Night Cards*), to play on text (*Read Psycho*), and even direct interactivity, through moving two fingers on a scrolling pad to trace the cursor (Moonwalk). Renaud then raised the question of the importance of saving early net art or digital-based works by saving the original software they were created with and the devices that were used at the time.
The works Nao presents progressively get more complex as software and technology evolve, in a rather humours turn, he uses animation to create flash representations of a series of definitions (*The Devil's Pictionary,* 2012) that range from political terms, psychological concepts and social phenomena. The terms use the Wikipedia definitions that seem to contrast with the sarcastic depiction.
http://www.drabs.org/?page=0#

An interest in working with sound and noise as well as performance, characterises most of his more recent work. For example, in a life performance with a guitarist, the notes from the guitar are fed into a software that processes the data input by distorting the notes and projecting live streamed images with each note (from an image library that was previously created), all of which is controlled by Nao's fingers through motion-sensors.
http://ramimed.com/Naoyuki-TANAKA-a-k-a-NAO-390.html

A more collaborative aspect of the work is shown through his work *8=8* (2005) where four collaborators manipulated projected images by moving their hand on screen, that is mounted on a table. The movement is captured by motion-sensors that change the images as the hands move.
http://www.mightymess.com/arborescence-05/

Another collaborative project that NAO worked with the artist Adelin Schweitzer, on was *A-Reality> P03,* a complex technical system that is programmed to capture reality and reprocess it in real time. The device can be worn (it consists of some form of helmet, headphones and a backpack, and a laptop attached to the back) by anyone, and the processed images and sounds depend on the motion, direction and gait of every individual. A heated debate took place on the meaning and use of "augmented reality" or "virtual reality" with several of the audiences asking what is the function of such device and why should reality be altered or processed in such a way. Nao answered that for him, what is interesting is not just wearing the device to alter or view a processed reality but rather what is interesting is the moment someone takes off this device and realises the difference between what is "virtual" and what is "real".
http://www.a-reality.org/

The last speaker was **Mohamed Youssef** himself, who started his presentation by giving a brief overview of his practice, he started his training in Fine Arts, and experimented in nearly all mediums of visual arts, architectural illustration, cartoon, graphic design, web design, video and finally multimedia arts.
The first multimedia interactive project that Youssef wrote the project then worked on with the artist Sharif El Sayed, was *The Table, Looking for Lost Time..* (2006) that was presented in Arborescence Festival. As the name suggests the work was inspired by Marcel Proust's famous novel, *A Le Recherche du Temps Perdu (In Search of Lost Time)*. Specifically the work was concerned with Proust "involuntary memory" that was triggered by -the now iconic- scene, the Madeleine episode, when upon eating a Madeleine he had an entire sensorial recollection of his childhood. The project is an interactive installation/video piece, where the audience are invited to sit at a table with all kinds of food-related objects (cutlery, table cloth, napkins, candles,...etc) and each of the object has a sensor that is triggered once the audience touches it, and each object has an associated video piece. The videos are part of a library of 72 videos that were collected by everyone involved in the project. The videos in that sense serve as personal memories of others as well.
http://www.arborescence.org/article699.html
http://ramimed.com/The-table-looking-for-lost-time.html

Youssef then went on to explain the development of virtual reality and projection, as in the case of Holograms, Heliodisplay, fog screens and so on. His own interest and experimentation with virtual reality and interactivity led him to develop the project *PARTICLES.* The project was initially inspired by the idea what constitutes the presence of a body in space and how that presence can then be simply apprehended by basic particles. Through several collaborations and research with several institutions in France (ImeRa, GMEM, CRVM,...etc), Youssef developed the idea of a projected particles of the body that are triggered by motion-sensors and that move in space as the body moves. Audience can then move into a space and start interacting with their projected avatars that are principally guided by their own presence and movement in the space.
http://ramimed.com/PARTICLES.html

http://ramimed.com/Mohamed-H-YOUSSEF-36

Then, Youssef presented the work that have been done with Naoyuki Tanaka in Beirut' lab on 2012 which was based on the technology of motion detection and the use of kinect detector censor and both Youssef and Nao invited the audience to try and enjoy the interactive installation space.

http://mhyoussef.com

There were the questions of the technical know-how for developing such projects and financial support that is needed. Youssef replied explaining that although he had to teach himself a lot about the digital arts

programming and software he still needs the support of others. This is why, according to him, most interactive multimedia projects are collaborative. And they also require a certain investment of resources, this is why some projects take years to develop.

In recapping what has been presented so far, he went to highlight that interactivity and interactive spaces are tools that help in creating new techniques and methods to address universal questions such, as memory, the body in space, the many forms of perceptions and so on. As such an "interactive space" is a space that allow the audience to explore those questions as part of the artistic process and not to be presented with a finished or "final" product.

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Alexandrie June 2014
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