
Relational Space: The Digital Interactive Art Space at Vallensbaek Train Station

Espaço Relacional: O Espaço Digital de Arte na Estação de Trem de Vallensbaek

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Abstract:DIAS, the Digital Interactive Art Space, is the first curated exhibition space in Denmark to focus solely on the digital art field. Since its opening in 2014, DIAS exhibits works by Danish and international artists with practices based on digital and electronic media, for example, video art, sound art and interactive artworks. DIAS is situated in the fully functioning Vallensbaek station southwest of Copenhagen. While merging with the daily rhythms of its host, the art space is open to the public around-the-clock. On the basis of experiences, photographs, and interviews, this article investigates how understandings of intensity and relation based on works by Gilles Deleuze and Sylvia Lavin can provide knowledge about how digital art can be a potential resource in our everyday surroundings, and how Vallensbaek station exhibits digital and interactive art for it to become a potential resource in the train passengers' lives.

Keywords:Digital Art, Intensity, Urban Space, Art Exhibition.

Resumo: O DIAS, o Digital Interactive Art Space, é o primeiro espaço expositivo organizado na Dinamarca a se concentrar unicamente no campo da arte digital. Desde a sua abertura em 2014, o DIAS exhibe obras de artistas dinamarqueses e internacionais com práticas baseadas em mídia digital e eletrônica, por exemplo, videoarte, arte sonora e obras de arte interativa. O DIAS está situado na estação de funcionamento de Vallensbaek, a sudoeste de Copenhague. Ao se fundir com os ritmos diários de seu local, o espaço de arte está aberto ao público 24 horas por dia. Com base em experiências, fotografias e entrevistas, este artigo investiga como os entendimentos de intensidade e relação baseados em obras de Gilles Deleuze e Sylvia Lavin podem fornecer conhecimento sobre como a arte digital pode ser um recurso potencial em nosso ambiente diário, e como a estação de Vallensbaek exhibe arte digital e interativa para se tornar um recurso potencial na vida dos passageiros do trem.

Palavras-chave:Arte Digital, Intensidade, Espaço Urbano, Exposição de Arte.

1 Introduction

DIAS, which is short for the Digital Interactive Art Space, is the first curated exhibition space in Denmark to focus solely on the digital art field. Since its opening in 2014, DIAS exhibits artworks by Danish and international artists with practices based on digital and electronic media, for example, video art, sound art and interactive artworks. The exhibition space is a shared space. Connecting the art space to the flows of daily life, DIAS is situated in the fully functioning Vallensbaek train station, southwest of Copenhagen. The digital art space is open to the public around-the-clock and, thus, merges not only with the space but also with the daily rhythms and movements of its host. Due to the spatial and architectural organisation of the station, train passengers will inevitably have to pass through the art space as they walk from the arrival and departure platform to the station's exit doors one level below or vice versa. The vision of DIAS and the expected outcome of sharing the train station's space suggests that the relation itself can create a certain artistic and architectural potential. The relevance of investigating this innovative potential has led to the topic of this article, which is the spatial agency of the technical images and digital art of DIAS at Vallensbaek train station.

DIAS informs on its website (www.diaskunsthal.dk) that the choice of experimenting with the train station as a site for exhibiting art is a way to challenge and rethink the traditional art institution. The intention is to produce enriching art experiences and to prepare the ground for people's curiosity towards the art. The choice of the particular site supports the idea of creating "an opportunity to rethink the relationship between art and reality – and [...] to use contemporary art as a resource in our daily lives." (DIASKUNSTHAL.DK, 2015). By situating itself in the fully functioning train station, DIAS expresses an interest in zooming in on the particular daily living situation represented in the train station. Furthermore, to interfere with people's daily routines, such as the habitual and familiar act of walking through the station and taking the train to work, and then to develop this situation further into a particular context for experiencing art. During my two visits to DIAS in August and September 2015, I was what I shall think of as a traveller-visitor, arriving to and leaving DIAS by train. I realise that I was a traveller-visitor diverging from most other people in the place as my primary reason for being there was to experience the relationships between the art, the people, and the space, and thus to think about the spatial agency of the digital and interactive artworks. On the two occasions, I looked at the movements of passengers and people at the station, while they automatically and perhaps non-consciously became art-goers. I thought about how the changes in a person's speed and movement patterns might express the pushes and pulls of the artworks as a physical sign of being affected. I noticed how it was sometimes obvious that a person's movement diverted from the decided path or direction. Many traveller-visitors glanced quickly at, especially, the large projection screen on the long wall in the tunnel (Fig. 4). A few spent more time with one of the art installations, for instance when stopping and listening to one of the sound art pieces appearing from corners or other usually unnoticed places. However, my impression was that a significant number of individuals actually seemed to be unaffected by the art exhibition and showed few or no visible signs of being distracted and interrupted in their

walk. These observations led to the main questions I would like to think about in this article: How can digital art be a potential resource in our everyday surroundings? And how does Vallensbaek station exhibit digital and interactive art for it to become a potential resource in the train passengers' daily lives?

The idea to start up a digital art space in Vallensbaek developed from sometime in 2012 and until DIAS opened in 2014. DIAS was originally initiated by the mayor of Vallensbaek, which is a small Danish municipality with only a little more than 15000 citizens. Building upon a vision of exhibiting digital art in urban space combined with the intention of creating a warmer and a safer atmosphere at the train station, DIAS is considered to have been a success and is currently there to stay, continuing its existence based on public and private funding. This information was generously provided to me by the daily leader of DIAS Eva Rehling when I met her in Vallensbaek in September 2015. In this article, I draw on information about DIAS gathered in my conversation with Rehling and on the publicly accessible material provided by DIAS on its website. Furthermore, historical facts about the train station were kindly provided to me by the general manager at the Danish State Railways (DSB) Niels Dam. I am grateful to both Rehling and Dam for so generously sharing their knowledge.

Fig. 1 – Arriving at Vallensbaek train station, Denmark.



Photo: Author, 2015.

2 Intensive presence: A different train station

Exhibiting art in the dynamic and busy infrastructural space that Vallensbaek (and any other) train station will always aspire to be, has the potential of creating perceptually interesting and unforeseen encounters. Because the artworks are connected to people and to the station as a composition of, for example, energy, movement, and space, I shall think of this particular train station and exhibition space as a body composed through a continuous process of relating. The philosophy of Spinoza and Gilles Deleuze inspires us to think about a

processual, composite body not as being characterized by a configuration of static entities, but by formations of motion and rest, of movement and changes in intensity, and by the “interlocking of relations”:

[...] composite bodies have parts of very different orders, which enter into relations that are themselves diverse; these diverse relations compound to form the characteristic or dominant relation of a given individual, at this or that level. Hence there is an interlocking of relations for each body, and from one body to another, and this constitutes its ‘form’. (DELEUZE, 1988, p. 32)

I will later return to how encounters can be understood and experienced as changes in intensity, which are directly felt and thought. And indeed, the train station and exhibition space as a shared space creates a conceptually and spatially strong potential for the continuous formation of relations between people, sounds, images, etc.

DIAS follows the flows and hours of the train station, which means that the art space is open 24 hours a day. Owned by DSB, the building was at the time for my visits still kept mostly in the original materials from its inauguration in 1972 including the wooden ceiling and the wall cladding consisting of hundreds of small, square-shaped, turquoise colored tiles. The digital images and the retro-aesthetics of the materials have a particular potential for creating a material-digital composition, which perceptually adds more value to both. This was a significant quality in the video installation *Dobbeltpendul* (2015) by Brian Kure (Fig. 2) shown during the 2015 DIAS Urban Collection exhibition. Projected directly on the wall, the artwork illuminates the surface, while the projection creates a visible colour relation between the two. The tile surface in return adds tactility and materiality to the projected images.

Fig. 2 – Installation view: *Dobbeltpendul* (2015) by Brian Kure.

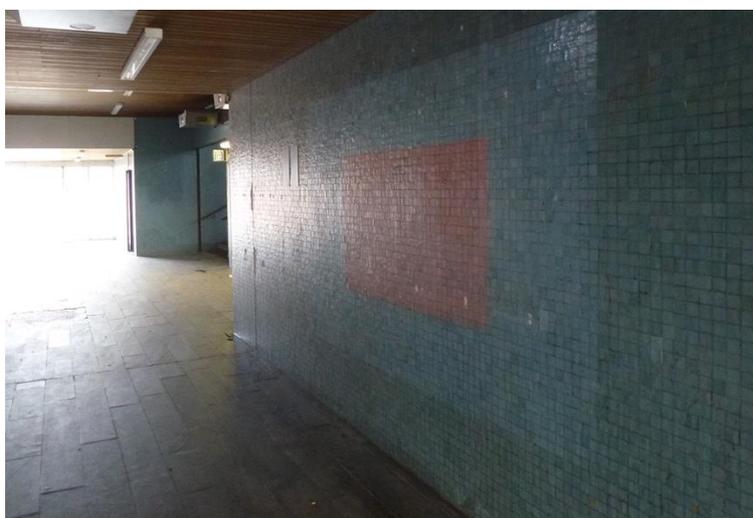


Photo: Author, 2015.

The fact that DIAS has decided to experiment with letting the space and time of the train station become an alternative institutional frame for experiencing art based on digital and electronic media indicates particular experiential intentions and promises. First of all, it suggests that this spatial composition will create the suitable conditions for interacting with the

art installations. Also, that the two functional programs, i.e. the art exhibition and the activities of the train station will benefit from each other and create an experiential potential. And there are effects of this combination that are quite obvious. Materially, the architecture is obviously contrasted by the immateriality of the projected images and the sounds from the installations. Spatially, the seemingly static relationships determined by the positions of walls, floors, and stairs are experientially re-composed because they encounter the sounds, the shadows, and the lights coming from the artworks. And to the train station as a place for movement and infrastructure is added another layer of dynamics as the interactive and time-based art installations interfere with the speeds belonging to the function of the station and the movements of people's bodies. In other words, when DIAS brings the art installations into these frames of everyday life and dynamics, a manifold of encounters is created as modifications of movements, as sudden ruptures and moments of presence, i.e. as *intensity*.

If the art installations can intensify and perhaps add a stronger presence to the usual functions and activities of the station – how can the station bring something to the art in return? How can the exhibition form around the more or less unfocused traveller-visitors, i.e. people primarily with their mind set on catching the train, create a valuable situation? During my conversation with Eva Rehling, I asked her if she would like to comment on these considerations. Rehling agreed that the situation in this particular art space is that most people have come to use the functions of the station and not to visit DIAS. This is a condition and of course a challenge that this particular type of exhibition space has to live and deal with. People rarely go there primarily to experience the art, however, the art experience does become part of their passing through. Some only cast a glimpse on the big screen, others listen more carefully to sound art, and a few spend a couple of minutes looking more closely at specific installations. But still, Rehling considered a quick glance when passing by to be better than not looking at all. For, who knows how people are actually affected individually, and which experiences they carry with them as they continue to catch the train to work. Who knows what they think about, or how the art experience affects their mood and their day. Rehling suggested that even though a person passes by in a hurry, the art might have a profound impact, perhaps non-consciously, still non-reflected – but that something might come back during the day as a mood, an inspiration, or, perhaps, the desire to see more the next day. DIAS has developed various exhibition platforms in the building, attuned to the different functional and spatial qualities one encounters. Close to the exit doors leading to the train platform is the most static exhibition spot where people will stand inside and wait for the train, for instance when it rains. This gives time to focus the attention on the art. On a large staircase is a spot for installations on the floor (Fig. 3), which is easily and often activated because of the massive flow through the building; for example by children jumping on the surface (Fig.3). A fourth type of installation spot is the small leftover spaces inside the station. A former telephone booth, for example, has here been reused as exhibition space. All these particular spots with a present and past function seem to blend into the flow and to draw attention to the particularities of the station.

To explore how the shared space might be able to intensify the experience of both the train station and the exhibition space, it will be useful to look to the philosopher Gilles Deleuze for an explication of what intensity can do. We probably all know intensity through our experiences, as something felt and sensed. Something affects us more, deeper or simply stays with us for a shorter or longer time, as a feeling or sensation. Deleuze calls the intensive the nature of difference (DELEUZE, 2004, p. 300), being neither the difference one finds through comparing objects, nor the more or less of a quality. Rather, the intensity is the force expressed in an encounter; an encounter that matters to you or me, and thus making a difference. It is real, implied and expressed in actual things, thoughts and sensations. In this respect, the intensity is what makes something unique, in a situation, to an individual.

The individual is a take on the whole of reality, where reality is not restricted to actual things that we can show or identify in the world. The individual is, rather, a series of processes that connect actual things, thoughts and sensations to the pure intensities and ideas implied by them. [...]. When you stand, daydreaming, looking out over your favourite land- or cityscape, or staring into another's eyes or flesh, or allowing your body to become an automaton through repeated work and exercise, allowing thought and sensation to drift through you, you are closer to Deleuze's idea of the individual than when you squeeze your head in your hand, reflect and consciously toil with a difficult question. An individual is not a self-conscious 'I', it is a location where thoughts may take place. (WILLIAMS, 2005, p. 6)

We can think of intensity as sensed on the threshold between an actual quality, or extension, and its virtuality, i.e. its embedded forces for becoming and for affecting change. Thus, the intensity is a force for becoming but is sensed and felt as an encounter through a quality or an extension. In fact, the encounter is something that throws us into a sudden thinking or feeling. We know it as the small ruptures we feel during the day, without necessarily giving them much attention, i.e. the continuously affective variation, which is part of everyday life. Affective encounters are sensed as the changes, powers, and variations that things or we undergo. Thus, the sensation of intensity varies from person to person, from situation to situation, and is as such connected to the creation of relations. Relations that do not correspond to the orders, positions or distances of extended space, but can be, for example, a sensation that stays with us to completely overshadow or light up a situation. Encounters come in a variation of affective tones; so Deleuze reminds us:

Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter. What is encountered may be Socrates, a temple or a demon. It may be grasped in a range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering. In whichever tone, its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. In this sense it is opposed to recognition. In recognition, the sensible is not at all that which can only be sensed, but that which bears directly upon the senses in an object which can be recalled, imagined or conceived. (DELEUZE, 2004, p. 176)

Encounters and the affective tones they come in are not distinguishing outside from inside; they do not separate urban life from green parks as different categories, and they do not oppose figures or objects of the past to the visitors from the present. Encounters are new openings and relations. Thus, intensities can travel between situations and create new 'asymmetrical' relations when activated in new contexts.

[...] intensity can be perceived as qualities in extension (this shade of red), but we never sense the intensity that allows us to perceive that shade since it

varies in what it can make us sense with the quality according to the contexts in which it is expressed. That is, the sensations associated with that quality vary according to the other qualities that are present, according to the actual objects they appear with and according to the individual they appear in. This shade of red may appear at different depths depending on what other shades it accompanies – it may arouse different passions depending on the shapes in which it appears and the other colours and words associated with it. These different contexts 'have an effect' on the intensities expressed through them because they bring different intensities into relations of greater and lesser clarity and obscurity. This is what Deleuze means by the title of the chapter 'The asymmetrical synthesis of the sensible' [in *Difference and Repetition*] – different actual relations of qualities imply different syntheses of intensities [...]. (WILLIAMS, 2005, p. 189)

Fig. 3. – Installation view: The interactive sound installation *Drowning/Burning*, 2010-2015, by Wayne Siegel.

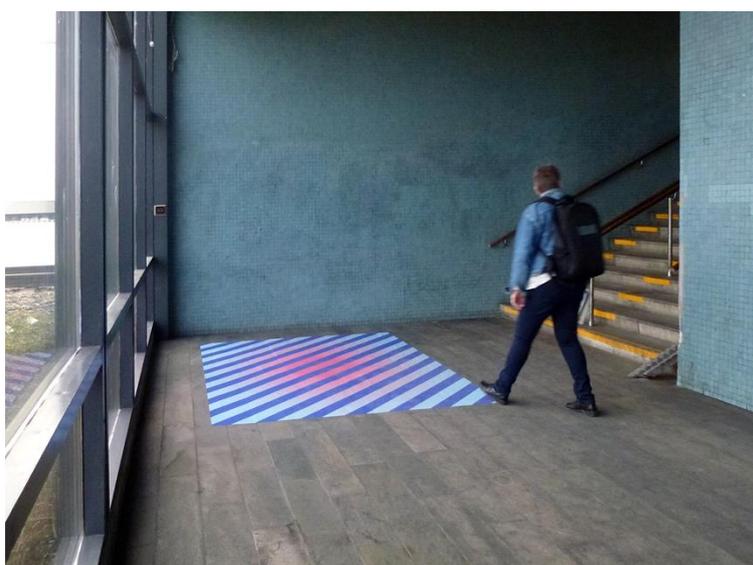


Photo: Author, 2015.

Now, what could this mean to DIAS's vision of making art a resource in daily life?

3 Moving and zapping – daily returns to the artworks

What does it mean to make art a resource in people's daily life? According to Rehling, it could mean to provide the possibilities for simply having an experience, to create moments of reflection and thought, but also to bring a light and playful atmosphere to a space, as interactive art often does. Her experience is that travellers frequently change their route through the station because they follow a sudden impulse to pass by a tracker activating sounds etc. So the awareness of the surroundings and the encounters with the station as an exhibition space does affect people's movement. Apart from affording an experience, DIAS helps to create general reflection regarding the uses of digital media and to give more attention to the significant role it plays in our daily lives. Surely, something is transmitted; something is exchanged, somehow.

Especially the younger group of train passengers and local citizens have been positive in the reception of DIAS, according to Eva Rehling. The young generation expresses an intuitive understanding of the artworks and, not least, the digital media, and they easily engage in playing with and trying out the interactive installations. A very positive outcome of this is the creation of a dialogue between the younger and older people. Something that has led to additional events, as, for example, a workshop where local citizens, among them a group of retired engineers, experimented with transforming old dial phones into portable phones in collaboration with local teenagers.

The tunnel leading through DIAS and the station is locally an important, infrastructural connection between the two parts of the city that are otherwise separated by the railway tracks. This is also the part of the exhibition space where people are most sensitive to the exposition, according to interviews and the public feedback Rehling and her collaborators have received. In our conversation, Rehling explained that because of this general function of the tunnel, people walking through it are not always prepared for, or even very interested in having an art experience. They have not actively chosen to experience art, and, therefore, DIAS is careful not to provoke strong feelings and reactions, for example by exhibiting art with sudden, unexpected sounds.

The architecture of the tunnel combined with the fact that people are often in a hurry when they walk through it can be a challenge to the artspace. Especially, in situations when DIAS shows works that need more time and attention. Rehling, however, suggests to consider this as a kind of experiential zapping; with zapping understood as the (daily) return to an artwork, however in different phases of, for example, a video loop. This means that many short visits create more attention, altogether. It creates a particular situation around the art of which many works are composed of sequences and loop, of shorter or longer duration. The typical experience only captures a fragment of the work, perhaps 30 seconds out of a much longer work. According to Rehling, what characterizes this experiential zapping is a tapping in and out of the same work over many days, as the viewer returns to the station on different occasions. As an example of her own zapping-experiences, Rehling mentioned the screening of *Flooded McDonalds* by Superflex, a 21 minutes long film work from 2009 where a built life-size replica of the interior of a McDonalds gradually floods with water:

We screened *Flooded McDonalds*, which is a very long sequence showing the flooding of a McDonalds constructed 1:1 by the artists. You see all the cups and the doll, etc. And it is very long. Even though it's a very long sequence it worked well in the space, because the message was present whenever you would pass by, whenever you went through the area, it was very strong. And the next time you would come into the space, something new was happening, it would be flooded to a new extent and something else would be floating on the surface of the water. Always something different.

4 A kissing relation

One of the artists who have exhibited at DIAS is the Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist. In 2014, for 17 days, the art space screened her 9 minutes long video installation *Aujourd'hui* (1999). In slow motion, this video installation shows a woman's face as she walks through everyday surroundings, thus creating a dreamlike, immersive and colorful atmosphere. As one of

Europe's most acclaimed video installation artists, Pipilotti Rist's work, and more precisely the immersive installation *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)*, is one of the recent artworks concerned with sensory atmospheres, which are analyzed in Sylvia Lavin's book *Kissing Architecture* (LAVIN, 2011). In the book, Lavin develops a much-needed set of original concepts allowing us to address the spatial agency of architecture encountering art installations such as multimedia projections shown on the interior or exterior building surfaces. She explores this type of contemporary, architectural and artistic proximity as a kissing relation. The book opens with a discussion of Rist's installation, which was shown in the atrium of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in 2008. According to Lavin, the temporary contact between the installation and the building is neither simply art nor architecture but a new medium, which we must find between these disciplinary categories. Like in a kiss, the relation is the coming together of two surfaces, that "[...] soften, flex, and deform when in contact." (LAVIN, 2011, p. 5).

In Rist's words, the installation at MoMA was intended to create a particular relation with the architecture and spaces of the museum: "The basic concept was not to try to destroy or be provocative to the architecture, but to melt in. As if I would kiss Taniguchi. Mmmmm." (LAVIN, 2011, p. 1). She speaks of the Japanese architect Yoshio Taniguchi, who designed a minimalist expansion of MoMA in New York between 1997 and 2004. Pipilotti Rist's installation at MoMA wrapped the museum's interior white walls with, what Lavin describes as, "a softly psychedelic garden of Eden" (ibid) including pink curtains and a soft pouf, where people could rest and pour their bodies out. It speaks of an aesthetic experience of being sublimely struck by impressions that are larger or more intense than what is comprehensible. To Lavin, Rist kissing Taniguchi, or perhaps rather the images kissing the architecture, describes the temporary contact with Taniguchi's work:

[...] how her moving images would brush up against his still volume, how her shifting colors would apply moist pressure to his white walls, [...] and how this 'big room', 7354 cubic meters of uselessness devoted to ritualised transcendence, would get filled up by sensuous bodies pouring in and out. (LAVIN, 2011, p. 4).

While she effectively – and affectively – gets the reader's attention with this sensuously based approach to theorizing art and architecture, Lavin lets the idea of kissing describe a relation and an encounter between medias and disciplines. An encounter that offers a starting point for reconsidering disciplines, expertise, and medium specificity in architecture and urban space today – not through confrontation or the claims of inventing new practices, but through the delicate and intimate act of kissing. Lavin conceptualizes this mode of encounter and relation with the term *superarchitecture*. It is a concept for the relation between architecture and digital art, which brings out more in both. Furthermore, she considers Rist as being a *superarchitect*, a producer of works that

[...] not only superimpose themselves onto architecture but that intensify architectural effects, [...] mingling one medium with another so that neither loses its specificity. [...] pouring things together that do not mix but that cannot be separated. (LAVIN, 2011, p.53-54).

At DIAS, the intensification between art and architecture resides, for instance, in the way the auditive layer of the artworks blend into the train station's noises and sounds. It is possible to distinguish one sound from the other, or hear the next artwork, but they connect and compose a temporary relation as the traveller-visitor moves through the station. The sound creates an atmosphere and a feeling of being immersed – the installations blending into the mechanical and human soundscape of the train station, for example, the sounds of trains arriving and leaving, voices, talk, children running, etc. It all comes together, not in a blur, but in the creation of an 'in-ness' of experience unfolding and varying with the space, as one moves through it. At this point, it seems that the Vallensbaek station itself becomes an artwork, intensified by the installations. This is what art can do and how it can affect our daily lives; it can place us in an affective tone, something we suddenly find ourselves in "[...] at the very heart of what happens because it qualifies the overall feel." (MASSUMI, 2011, p. 65). This sudden and immediate experience is not based on reflection, conclusion, or the communication of content, but is "[...] something we find ourselves in, rather than finding in ourselves." (Ibidem).

Fig. 4. – Installation view in the tunnel.

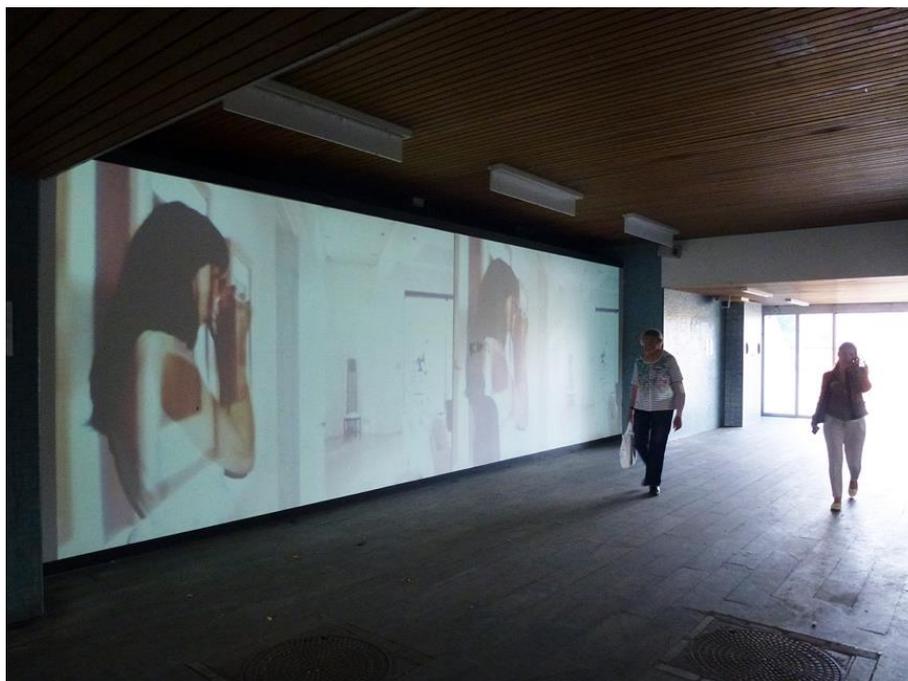


Photo: Author, 2015.

Fig. 5. – Installation view: The Big Store, by Lars Arrhenius, 2008.



Photo: Author, 2015.

5 Learning from DIAS

With this article, I have suggested a particular relational and intensity-based approach to the experiences of art in exhibition spaces. This proposition is supported by the study of the Digital Interactive Art Space at Vallensbaek Train Station in Denmark where the art experience is only partly the focus of the space and the people passing through the train station. The truly unpretentious art space creates the perfect setting for providing art experiences that fit the level of intensity or physical proximity that relates best to the individual person and situation. There is nothing forced about the way people move through this space. The sounds and the visual connections between images create a space that is held together, so to say, by the expressions and contents of the artworks themselves. In fact, the situation is to a certain extent un-focused in regards to encountering the artworks, and this remarkable un-focusing atmosphere where people not necessarily pay much attention or time to the art installations creates the potential for individual affects and experiences to occur. Thus, DIAS exemplifies the idea of an art space where the act of looking away is legitimate and an entirely natural and acceptable way of participating (ROGOFF, 2005). The setting and the institutional un-framing together provide the conditions for the art experience to be a discovery and, furthermore, to protect the experiential potential of being suddenly affected by art in the everyday surroundings of the train station.

DIAS has a particular strength in terms of not trying to control the exhibition experience too much but is instead expressing awareness of the fact that the visitors have very different

reasons for being at the train station. Thus, the individual visitor's mindset and physical movement on the specific day of the visit plays an important role in the composition of the relation, leaving the possibility open that not everybody's attention is caught every time. That this is positive and exemplary is no doubt a rare conclusion to draw. Especially in a time when most exhibition spaces, including those at museums, struggle hard to keep their visitors' attention and to target their display designs and the corresponding activities to the different visitor categories. It only takes a few visits to international or Danish museums' websites to get an impression of this contemporary concern. DIAS' subtle way of showing art installations in the infrastructural surroundings of everyday movement emphasize the spatial and bodily aspects of digital art. More than creating space and time for getting acquainted with the meaning and intellectual content of the artworks, the rapid encounter is sensuous and affective. It is based on the immediate visual or auditory impression, which interrupts the expectations and habits connected to the function of the train station. Consequently, what this particular space is able to bring out and accentuate in the digital and electronically based art is the potential to create interaction between the body, the space and the art installation. Blurring the limits between space and art, it questions the habitual separation of elements in more traditional exhibition spaces, what we, for instance, see represented in the distance between the painting and the wall, maintained by the frame.

Technical images and digital art can become intensities in our daily lives by interfering with the repetition of movements, the sounds of trains and people, the habits and everyday routines we all perform on the threshold of the non-conscious. These are all elements of daily living that are intensified and indirectly, non-verbally commented on through the presence and ontology of DIAS. The intensification of the urban and the architectural effects clearly pushes both the functioning station and the exhibition space to a limit; to a place where they enter a process of composing a body together, or, to follow Lavin's idea, start to form a dynamic and kissing relation. If kissing truly is a new theory of architecture, we have a useful relational concept that should help us think beyond the most traditional approaches to architecture. Compositions of sensory atmospheres, of bodies and relations, come from an in-ness, from within the spaces, movements, sounds and habits themselves.

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Recebido em maio de 2015

Aprovado para publicação em janeiro de 2018

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