

## **Ambient Cinema – An Analysis on the Basis of the Film *Pitoti***

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### **Abstract**

The master thesis, titled “Ambient Cinema – An Analysis on Basis of the Film PITOTI” represents the continuing theoretical and practical engagement with the art form of Ambient Cinema. Building on Frederick Baker’s theoretical treatise in his book “The Art of Projectionism” (Baker, 2008) and practical works in this area, such as “Cutting Garlic” and “Ring Road – A Viennese Odyssey”, “PITOTI – From Pexel to Pixel” was used as a way to further develop this special language of film, while creating a film for the Pitoti exhibition, which was presented at the Triennale 2012 in Milano.

In documenting and giving this work a wider context, it is meant to enable avid readers and filmmakers to not only understand this innovative language of film but to use it.

Ambient Cinema as a way of storytelling has been around for a while. Raoul Grimoin-Sanson used it in his work for the world exhibition of 1900 in Paris, if only for a short time due to technical difficulties. Technical and financial matters, that until recently have continued hindering advances into mainstream recognition, a wall that has been crushed by the aggressive technical advances of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The digital revolution, affordable professional hardware and software and above all the audience’s changing attitude towards or even demand for new forms of media are key aspects in this development. In his book “Technologies of Seeing” (Winston, 2009), Brian Winston deals with this correlation between technological advancements and social trends and suggests a model that sees social needs as the driving force to implement innovation into mass communication.

With Ambient Cinema, including technical as well as narrative innovations, we are at this very point of implementation, or as Brian Winston calls it, adaption. This process is not unforeseeable. It all comes down to “consider the social, cultural and economic context when assessing a new technological option” (ibid.: 106). This theory in connection to Ambient Cinema leads to the practical approach of assessing the current form of film grammar, its origins in the past and connections to new principles established in the course of executing projects. An aspect not to be underestimated is writing and producing for an audience brought up on classical film language. But not only did this help the communication with the audience but cleared the view on the essential themes of the production itself, creating a documentation particularly suitable for people, actively trying to work their way into Ambient Cinema.

This thesis aims to do just that, the first chapter dealing with the theoretical background of Ambient Cinema. In this process basic theoretical research was conducted, which concluded in the connection of the six principles of Ambient Cinema, as established by Frederick Baker; projector, medium, image, camera, space and time, to the classical film grammar. All these principles are part of a greater process called Projectionism, that’s characterized by all stages of filmmaking, from the actual shooting to the projection for the audience, to play a more active role in creating a narrative than it is the case with classical film productions.

Adapted writing, shooting and editing is a must for working in the field of Ambient Cinema. Therefore the second part of this thesis meticulously portrays the process of developing “PITOTI”, with focus on the interconnection of theme and medium, resulting in a documentation of a highly specialized process on a both narrative and technical level. Theme in the form of the Pitoti rock art, rock engravings found in the valley of Valcamonica, North Italy, which is presented from a classical archaeological point of view and of particular characteristics, closing the 10.000 year gap between prehistoric and modern digital art. Those characteristics or rules like the depiction of body joints, the horizon, movement and perspective posed, just like in our situation with Ambient Cinema, limitations and possibilities at the same time. Those prehistoric artists found stunning ways to use medium and place for their messages, which we try emulate in the medium of Ambient Cinema.

This thesis shows, especially through its structure, that the true challenge is to work out the symbiosis between narration and technology. That some-

thing is achievable from a technical standpoint is hardly relevant, only in its impact on the audience is the real potential revealed.

The documentation of the technical execution of this project is therefore highly influenced by its narrative role. The use of the Kinect-system<sup>1</sup> combined with a DSLR-camera through the software RGB-Toolkit<sup>2</sup> is a perfect example of this process. It closes a circle to this art stretching 10.000 years back, by creating a virtual 3D-model out of real life models based on 3D-scans of the actual Pitoti rock art. This thesis shows, also through its structure, that the true challenge is to work out the symbiosis between narration and technology. While this is also true for classic film productions, Projectionism, and therefore Ambient Cinema, present much more aspects to consider and take advantage of.

The mentioned principle's transformation out of their passive state into a more active one, in the course of functioning as potent narrative tools. Interconnection of sound and picture in the present and ancient past. The active use of space as a mayor feature. All of these aspects have one thing in common, they are controllable. This thesis builds on the possibility to communicate the skills of controlling these narrative tools, but it can only be the beginning of further developments.

So what is the next step? Following impressions and interpretations of the Triennale-exhibition opening in October 2012, the answer must be integration.

The most interesting situations in the Ambient Cinema cube arose when a spectator, on his search for the best viewpoint, found himself in one of the corners and became a reacting part of the projection itself. Or a spectator entering the cube in the middle of the film through the one projection surface realized as a moveable curtain, in this way suddenly creating an edge and a new space. Situations that can be characterized as uncontrollable, as problematic and an obstruction to the designed narrative, or perceived as possibilities. The loss of control reveals the two sides of Ambient Cinema, the Janus twins. Control on the one side, originating from classical film productions, and coincidence on the other, its roots in the VJ-culture also depicted in Frederick Baker's book.

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1 <http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/kinectforwindows/>

2 <http://www.rgbdtoolkit.com/>

It is their combination that holds so much potential. We just have to look at the rising sales of the videogame industry to witness how attractive coincidence and freedom of perception are for the audience. No other medium offers more possibilities of interaction and indeed the most powerful emotional moments occur when events are perceived by chance rather than forced upon by the game mechanics. Following this relation, the focus returns to the process of adapting an art form to the current social and economic situation but under a new pretext, which suggests that this presentation of the process builds on the wrong relationship between art and audience. Rather than speaking of adaption, future progressions of this art form should be realised under the theme of integration.

The stories we want to tell and the emotions we want to convey are meaningless until perceived and interpreted by the audience and only become real when the audience becomes a part of it. Ambient Cinema presents many aspects introduced in this thesis, their potential hardly exhausted, to achieve this kind of bonding.

## References

- Baker, Frederick (2008): *The Art of Projectionism*. Czernin Verlag.  
Winston, Brian (2009): *Technologies of Seeing*. British Film Institute.