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Texel. Suspending time at the train station.



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Mots clés

Art

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Texel. Suspending time at the train station.

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I. The Research

Time has become a metrical value of reference in our daily commutes. As such, people are able to determine with greater accuracy how long their journey to work or place of study takes than the actual distance travelled. However, this “metric” use of time seems to come at the expense of the feeling that each duration is variable; given that each interval can be evaluated and instantly communicated, any deviation from the nominal duration is seen as an anomaly. In train stations, the omnipresence of visual display systems tends to reinforce our perception of travel time as an objective, measurable, calibrated duration. Commute trips, particularly time spent in train stations, thus tends to be experienced as an obligation devoid of interest – as dead time. The attention we pay to the places we pass through when we commute is therefore lessened by this “utilitarian” vision of commuting.

Reversing the accelerated pace of daily life, the Texel project encourages travelers to step out of their bubbles and routines, and to create a hiatus in their daily commutes to enjoy a sensory experience that urges them to change their perception of their travel time. The train station once again becomes a place of mobility versus the current tendency to optimize and flows and minimize traffic, producing but a mere connection node between transport networks. Specifically, the project more attempts to clarify the question, “Can we improve the quality of our mobile lives by changing our relationship to the time we spend in train stations?”

The project consisted of designing and testing an interactive artistic device created to change commuters’ experience of the time spent in transit areas, in this case train stations. It was led by two young artists - Lyes Hammadouche and Ianis Lallemand - as part of their creative PhD project “Science, Arts, Creation and Research” of PSL Research University within the Reflective interactions group of the EnsadLab (the laboratory of École nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs), under the supervision of Samuel Bianchini. Several academic disciplines and trades were involved in developing the project: in cooperation with the artist-researcher team, EnsadLab engineers and SNCF agents helped implement technical and practical aspects. Notably, the computerized development of the interactive system was designed by Colin Bouvry (EnsadLab), the computer development of the motorization by Didier Bouchon (EnsadLab), the exhibition furniture at the station by Charles-Henry Fertin and the production monitoring for the exhibition at the station by Emmanuelle Barbey (EnsAD).

The work, called Texel (a contraction of the words temps (time) and pixel), is composed of interactive hourglasses. Hourglasses were attached to a frame via two metal arms, a motor (attached to the outside of the frame) and movement sensors. The hourglasses are activated according to commuters' comings and goings: the unit rotates on its axis each time someone approaches or moves away, affecting the flow of sand, which accelerates, slows down or stops. The changes in the sand flow rate - visible to commuters - reflect the intensity of their interaction with the unit, as well as the device's ability to "fill" time. The amount of sand at the bottom of the hourglass indicates the time spent during the interaction. However, the duration, is relative and based on a sensory experience. The work's interactive dimension makes it such that travelers can only understand its meaning by deviating from their trajectory and spending time interacting with it. Thus, Texel offers a changing and variable representation depending on the individual and his or her choices with regard to the work. [A guided tour](#) with Samuel Bianchini describes the work's design process.

Ermont-Eaubonne station (Val d'Oise) was chosen to host Texel for a month, from November 16 through December 16, 2015. Designated as a "laboratory station" by SNCF, it is also one of the busiest stations in Ile-de-France, with 35 000 passengers per day. Many travelers regularly frequent the station for their daily commutes. As such, the work also faced the challenge of the recurrence of experience. Texel was deployed in two areas and in two different formats:

- In the main connections hall: a linear set of eight hourglasses;
- On the mezzanine between the doors leading to J line: a single hourglass.

The station installation was quantitatively and qualitatively assessed by a multidisciplinary team comprised of three social science researchers: Anne Bationo (ergonomist), Francesca Cozzolino (anthropologist) and Clara Meyer (ethnologist). The assessment focused on understanding the work's impact on travelers. How did Ermont-Eaubonne station users interact with the work? How did Texel change the travel experience for these commuters? Anne Bationo and Francesca Cozzolino present the main results of their survey in their guided tours (see guided tour by [A.Bationo](#) or [F.Cozzolino](#)).

 Launched in March 2014, the project is in keeping with the Mobile Lives Forum's first research axis: Understanding. Mobile and immobile lives: how do we experience mobility today?

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Chapô

According to Hartmut Rosa, mobility no longer refers to space but to the time required to travel across that space. The ever-present display systems at train stations tend to reinforce that very same perception of travel time as an objective, a measurable length of time, rather than a feeling wherein each duration is variable. This experimental project, led by artist-researchers at EnsadLab, aims at reintroducing a subjective relation to time and place at train stations by means of interactive hourglasses.

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