The artistic response

Örebro Variations is a permanent public art work commissioned to Tanja Ruiz Gutierrez by the City. The artwork is performative and proposes four films as predetermined walking paths between Central Station and Järntorget square. Viewers can follow along the path in their phones or tablets, wearing earphones to better perceive the soundtrack. Additionally, maps and instructions to access the artwork are displayed in the station and a series of lenticular images in the adjacent bicycle and pedestrian tunnel complements the artwork. The artwork addresses questions related to mobilities at local and global scales.

The legitimacy to propose a public artwork based on a relatively immaterial support relies on the fact that 85% of Swedish citizens own a smartphone (this figures are increasing). The sectors of advertisements and tourism have been massively investing this technologies in the past years. Unlike cultural information, our proposal is not informative. Unlike advertisement or political propaganda, we avoid the use of any authoritative tone. We defend a vision of public art as a means to raise questions instead of giving answers. It appears fundamental to us that the artistic field better occupies the interstitial terrain between information and place, specially at a time where the public debate is deserting the public space. We believe that an artistic intervention of this magnitude can not erase the consequences of the de-industrialisation or hide the need of major urban structural changes but it can efficiently contribute to transform our experience of the city understood as a living organism.

The disposition of “Video walks” was first proposed in 1999 by the Canadian artist Janet Cardiff. In her work “In real time” the viewers followed a prerecorded video displayed into a camcorder viewer. Her explicit goal was then to “test the limits of reality”. In our case, the use of the Video Walks respond to specific aspects of contemporary urban reality. A simple observation exercise in the train station makes us wonder: where are the passengers? Although apparently present, we are in fact immersed into our phones. Örebro Variations uses our screens but, with the aim to draw our attention back to the urban physical environment.

The pedestrian is invited to follow the path of each film presented as a sequence shot. As we take advantage of the double purpose of the phone being both a camera and a display the viewer has the impression to be filming herself. We experience the differences between the film and the place increasing gradually when virtual projections related to the subjectivity of the narrators enter our frame. Each film whisper in our ears an individual story of displacement. Considering the films jointly, the artwork proposes a cross-cultural reflection about exile and translation.

On Displacement, the character is a Swedish lady who had trouble to recover her swedishness after 24 years living abroad.

On Memory is about a Swedish filmmaker somehow exiled in time.

On Language underlines the strong relation between language and place, through the narrative of a young student who collects foreign languages to shape her own.

On the contrary, the narrator of the film On Exile, refuses to learn Swedish and manages to work for years in the cultural industry in English.

The subject of migration imposes itself in the european public sphere of the years 2015 and 2016, when this artwork was conceived. Even if Sweden is in general more positive to immigration than people in other EU countries (according to a Eurobarometer survey from december 2016, 64% of Swedes are positive to immigration compared to an EU average of 37%), we have experienced a growing political polarisation over migration issues. Focusing on skilled migration and on individual experiences does not deny the difficulties of integration, but gives relief to the picture of the “migratory crisis” alarming figures of the mass media. The reality of Örebro is by any means disconnected of that of the entire world, beginning precisely with the above mentioned de-industrialisation, where labor-intensive manufacturers relocated production facilities to third world countries with much lower wages and lower standards.

Even small cities are becoming generic and the citizens increasingly international.

In this globalised context, many of us live in permanent translation.

Even if we appear to be walking in Örebro we are actually walking somewhere else.