Inlak'esh Alaken

[I am you, you are me]
The practice of intercultural engagement

Joanna Patricia Ambrosio Guerrero
BDesign, Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente, Mexico, 2006

Abstract

Picosito para que alcance, saladito para que sobre / Spicy to make it last, salty to have some left

As a designer, I have been identified as problem-solver, and rarely as problem-identifier. Designers have the opportunity to make a significant difference in society, and help in the development of conscious citizens from a wide range of cultures and languages.

Intercultural interaction has increased within this globalized community, and it has become part of our lives. As a foreign communication designer, I have identified the importance of intercultural understanding, so we don't alienate each other, and help develop shared experiences and collaborative projects when the same language, time and/or space may not be shared.

This research study promotes the exploration of the process of a designer becoming a researcher and a thinker who collaborates within a multicultural community. It is an extended exploration of my previous experience collaborating for Mátika Magazine within an international group of designers, visual artists and writers. Therefore, it explores the different possibilities that hybrid design brings to a stream of creative disciplines, and how this diversity can be used as a tool to expand the relationship between space, culture and creativity.

Within this paper, I describe the process and outcomes of developing the project Inlak'esh Alaken. This project took form with an event hosted at the same time in three different cities: Vancouver, Guadalajara and Los Angeles. By pushing further the possibilities of online network services, a live video of each event was streamed online and projected in each place. Within this project, I practice the research of different technologies to create urban art as an exploration of new ways to communicate between different cultures. Therefore, every participant in each city shared the same performance with the use of Graffiti Wall and Laser Tag. With the use of these tools of non-verbal communication, the participants were asked to interact with the others and communicate at the same time in different places.

Abstract

Within this research and the process of my work, I aim to push the boundaries of traditional communication design, and share a body of knowledge that might help other communication designers in the process of becoming researchers and agents of social change. I share the process of becoming a visual journalist, and how we as designers can develop a method of documentation that accounts for the moods and concerns of our society, bridging different environments and translating the outcomes into seductive graphics of information.

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Preface

A Dios rezando y con el mazo dando / To God praying and with the mallet hitting

As a designer who had limited experience in the philosophy of design and wishing to live in constant movement, I found myself in a place surrounded by water (sky and ground), and with a bag full of Mexican treats and a heart filled with aspirations, I settled in Vancouver.

Determined to pursue a Masters program, which could amplify my skill set and knowledge in developing new media art, I entered the Masters of Applied Art in Media Arts at Emily Carr University. I hoped to learn new technologies, applications and innovative computer software to (someday) apply it while developing creative motion graphics and attractive digital design forms for a "very important" set of clients. I hardly felt the necessity of joining the Design stream; this might have been due to the fact that (unconsciously) I saw myself as a developer, but never as a *thinker designer[1]*.

From the beginning I was encouraged to play, research and explore. "What should I explore?" I thought, "Play how?" By the third week of grad school, most of my peers were "working" on their projects, and I didn't know what I was supposed to do. The confusion grew. While most of them were creating pieces of artwork, I was thinking: "I'm a designer. I work if I get an assignment or if I see a problem. What if I'm not questioning anything? Am I supposed to be questioning something and finding the answer by designing?" Throughout my professional development, I was taught to act as a *problem-solver[2]*, graphically solving issues such as the lack of corporate identity of certain companies, designing a functional storefront graphic or developing a gorgeous, brand-new tequila bottle. Acting as a *problem-identifier[3]* was not as developed as the act of problem-solving. Identifying a problem without any background or brief was a challenge that I had to take, and designing my own brief of in-depth reflection was my first mission.

While I was swimming in my own confusion, I was also working on the new issue of Mátika Magazine[5]. Every edition of the magazine involves a different graphic and editorial theme (e.g. Pop-art, Art Nouveau, Mexican-Art) and this time the title was *Urban Art: Appropriation of the Cities.*

Working as part of a team of communication designers, artists and writers from around the world, *intercultural[6]* (and international) communication is essential. The Mátika team had to get together to creatively develop the project Má-tika Magazine in a specific period of time. Sharing international experiences, knowledge and practice, people from Mexico living in Germany, Spain, United States and Canada got together online and communicated via *Skype[7]*. The use this tool served as a forum for discussion, and as a window to the place the participants were living in.

To develop my graphic design piece as part of the collaboration for the new magazine's issue, I had to do some research on Urban Art and decided to go downtown to take some photos of Vancouver. I felt immediately attracted to the not-so-underground culture of art I was experiencing. As I was designing for the magazine using photo and illustration collages, I was also researching the art of graffiti-making and the biography and portfolios of urban artists such as Obey, Banksy, Mark Jenkins, Graffiti Research Lab and women artists like Fifi and Thundercuts.

The extended discovery of graffiti and other types of street artwork changed my perspective on how I looked at the city. The interaction between citizens and their built environment, and the use of technology and new media to create urban art, was quite appealing to me.

As a communication designer struggling to identify myself in the Media Arts environment, where film and animation studies were developed, I found a lack of understanding of where I was. For a moment, I felt that my motivations and aspirations followed by a background of visual graphic communications were heading in the wrong direction. I needed to change the curse of my objectives for the better.

As an MAA program requirement, I applied for several internship programs. One in particular caught my eye, an internship working as a communication designer for Greenschool, in Bali, Indonesia. Sponsored by Greenschool and Emily Carr University of Art and Design, the three months of living in a

sustainable environment helping to develop an international elementary school and spreading the message of sustainable living had little or nothing to do with my thesis research. However, I felt that getting closer to my background as a communication designer would help me to understand where I was standing, and define the curse of my carrier.

And so, I got selected, and flew to Bali on June 2008.

I lived in a sustainable environment for a month, in the "intern campsite", located on the west side of an 80-hectare jungle-campus. I had to get used to the compost toilets, the roosters, the computer and its electric shocks, the daily rice meal and spicy hot chilies, the language, to the chants of the temples at night, the lizards, cold showers and the green neighbor Mr. Frog. I had to get used to being by myself, as I was the only intern and lived alone.

As a communication designer intern I helped Greenschool spread the word about sustainable living and education. I decided to experience Bali as much as I could, and every day after work, I spent my time documenting life in this Balinese community. Working in a place where English is rarely spoken, I studied Indonesian just enough to get around. The lack of communication was added to a list of challenges I faced every day. I became a type of journalist, sharing intercultural experiences with the local people, understanding that their family and their community are very important to them, as well as the awareness of themselves, of others, of nature and of God. They are devoted to their surroundings, and every stage in their life is respected and honored. To support my documentation, I kept a diary where I wrote and sketched my experiences in Bali. These are some translated words from my personal diary:

> June 8th, 2008
> The scenery left me astonished. There is a temple in each and every corner, and because it was Wisdom Day, people kept coming and going with their best garments to deliver their offerings to the temples and schools… unbelievable.

The architecture, the magic... This is a place particularly beautiful. It kind of looks like Jamaica[8] or event a hidden road going to Puerto Vallarta, but then the jungle opens up and I can see the gorgeous rice fields, beautiful, everything is so green.

After three months of experiencing life on a *developing*[9] island I came back to Vancouver. In addition to the almost two weeks of jet lag, I experienced an unexpected culture shock. I became more aware that the *Western Culture*[10] with its overwhelming bombardment of advertisements, mass media and mass communication often teaches society to disconnect from its living environment. "We know that the advertising language is militaristic. It is about campaigns, squeezing out, wedging in, forcing out. It is about starving out the competition" (Winkler, as cited in Frascara, 2002, p.58).

After finally settling down and taking back my former life, I reviewed my previous research in Urban Art and its purpose of changing the way society perceives its environment. I decided to bring my experience of living in three different cities (Guadalajara, Vancouver and Bali), and working with people from different cultural backgrounds and languages, to develop a project that integrates urban art, intercultural communications, social engagement, and *experience design*[11].

I developed as a communication designer working internationally. With my updated documentation of the different cultures experienced, I decided to push my research further and strove to find out how visual communication design can make a social difference by developing tools for intercultural interaction within open spaces. I was building my own design brief. I was becoming a thinker designer.

Going back to my roots as a communication designer helped me to find my soul. It forced me to stream back into my background and realized that I didn't belong in Media. Even though I constantly tried to give a productive critique to my fellow classmates without knowing anything about filmmaking or animation, I missed the productive organization and processes that only a designer can build.

Without thinking twice, I added one more action to my loaded list of transitions: I was transferred to the Design stream.

I shaped my knowledge with documented experiences. I became aware of my purpose not only in this program, but also as a *citizen designer*[12]. I became what I am now.

I would like to acknowledge everyone who has contributed within this transcendental experience. To all of you: *gracias*

Dedico este cierre/comienzo de mi vida a mis almas inseparables:
Mamá, Juanjo, Arturo, Kenji, y a mi ángel de la guarda. Gracias por todo.

1. Introduction

Más vale pájaro en mano que ciento volando / Better to have one bird in hand than hundred flying

As an individual that has been living in constant transition, movement and displacement, I aim to get a better understanding of the responsible designer as a visual journalist, focusing on the practice of intercultural and social communication and interaction with the use of technology and urban art as tools of engagement.

Within this paper, I present a detailed description of the main project developed during the last year of the Masters program: Inlak'esh Alaken. This project reflects the documentation and practice in the search for an answer to these research questions:

1.Do interactive, public events promote local, social engagement?
2.Do online video broadcasting promote intercultural understanding?
3.How does the designer become an interceptor between cultures and contribute to the development of communication when the same language is not shared?

Inlak'esh Alaken, in Mayan language, means I am you, you are me. This is how, traditionally, the Mayan people salute each other and their environment. Intercultural interaction as a phenomenon has existed since people from different cultures have been encountering in different contexts. These interactions have increased considerably, and have become part of our everyday life.

When it comes to cultural differences, there is still a sense of "alienation" within today's social behavior. To decrease this sentiment of alienation, it is important to bridge the gap between communities with different cultures and learn how to communicate with each other. Intercultural communication as a phenomenon is not new. It is aligned with human movements across the planet as well as the "history of images and the growth and use of images in every facet of human life" (Burnett, 2004, p.20)

Within this research, I present the three main non-verbal language categories dictated by Samovar & Porter (2003): bodily behavior, time and space. (p.15)

These three categories are projected within my work and the project *Inlak'esh Alaken*. The category of bodily behavior is represented by the moving image and graffiti art. For the purpose of this essay, I use the term *graffiti art* not to reference vandalism, but, rather, as part of a movement that goes beyond spray cans and markers, bringing community engagement within our society's specific cultures, interests and histories. The categories of time and space are represented by the three different cities that worked as participants in this project: Vancouver, Guadalajara and Los Angeles.

In this essay I use Jorge Frascara's (2004) definition of design: "a process of conceiving, planning, projecting, coordinating, selecting, and organizing a set of elements for the creation of visual communications" (p.2). After reflecting on this definition, for the first time in my professional career I could no longer consider myself a graphic designer. If I must identify myself with a label, I prefer to be referred to as a hybrid designer. According to Tony Dunne (n.d.), Head of Interaction Design at the Royal College of Art, London "new hybrids of design are emerging. People don't fit in neat categories; they are a mixture of artists, engineers, designers, thinkers. They are in that fuzzy space and might be finding it quite tough, but the results are really exciting" (as cited in Anonymous, 2006, p.8).

Within my work, I'm pushing forward the applications of visual communications, instead of developing a graphic design as an object. I explore the process of expanding the channels of intercultural communication and producing new meanings into our daily social interaction.

During the search for a personal identity, I was introduced to Rick Poynor's book *Obey the Giant: Life in the Image World* (2001). In this book, Poynor talks about the role of the designer as a reporter, as a visual journalist (p.185). This has been one of the theories that has most influenced my work: *the designer as a visual journalist.*

Based on this theory of Jan Van Toorn, *the designer as a visual journalist* talks about how designers are living an identity crisis, to which Poynor

(2001) reflects: "the term *graphic designer* no longer seems adequate" (p.185). In trying to identify the actual designer (also considered an author, editor, producer, translator, performer and such) there has been confusion, so to avoid this confusion he suggests another way of thinking about communication design. It sounds more or less like what the average designer already does, but basically the visual journalist "captures and condenses into seductive graphic forms the mood, concerns, inspirations, aspirations, fads, obsessions and stylistic tics of the day, functioning as a constantly updated report in the way we live now" (Poynor, 2001, p.185). This research study describes my journey towards emerging as a visual journalist.

Through the course of the Masters program, I developed a series of experiments on new technologies to develop urban art, especially graffiti art. To answer my previous research questions, I developed the project *Inlak'esh Alaken*. This project was an event that took place in three different cities: Guadalajara, Vancouver and Los Angeles. It was intended to promote local, social engagement by bringing a local community of artists and designers together, in each city, with the help of a social event. It was intended to promote intercultural understanding by transmitting live from each city, broadcasting video online and projecting these three live videos on big screens, where the participants could interact live with the other cities. It was also intended to develop new ways of communication when the same language is not shared, with the help of new technologies to create graffiti, such as *Laser Tag* and *Graffiti Wall*.

In this essay, I explain the process to develop the project, and how some of these initial intentions had successful results, and how some initial intentions were not successful when the use of technology challenged the desired outcomes of the project.

Within this research I hope to contribute a methodology for the development of new intercultural experiences, becoming a design researcher that investigates from a different perspective: the perspective of a visual journalist.

2. The Project

Analyzing my previous research, I found the necessity to develop a project as an experiment of Interaction Design from a communication designer's point of view, also involving art, media and curatorial practices. Nathan Shedroff, in his article *Information Interaction Design: A Unified Field of Theory of Design* (1994), defines Interaction Design as "essentially story-telling and telling. It is at once both an ancient art and a new technology" (p.2). I wanted to develop a story-telling environment, where the participants could tell the stories and share common interactions within different experiences.

Shedroff (1994) also explains how story-telling has always been affected by media (p.2). Currently, new media offers innovative possibilities for story-telling that were never addressed before. Within my work, I used technology and new media to develop an environment for the creation of experiences, where the participants were asked to develop international communication within a graffiti art performance. All this was accomplished with the development of a social event.

Inlak'esh Alaken was part of the celebration of the 3rd Anniversary of *Mátika Magazine*. In March 2009, the cities of Vancouver, Guadalajara and Los Angeles became the main protagonists, where each city participated with a local event. Considering the different culture and verbal language of each city, a new expression towards an international society was developed, this within an art performance, a performance of moving images, music and graffiti art.

In Guadalajara, this event was hosted by Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente (ITESO), starting at 20:00 hrs CST and ending at 23:00 hrs CST. In Vancouver, this event took place in the Motion Capture Studios, at Emily Carr University of Art and Design, starting at 18:00 hrs PST and ending at 23:00 hrs PST. In Los Angeles, this event took place in the facilities of Tuesday Creative Agency, starting at 18:00 hrs PST and ending at 23:00 hrs PST.

Inlak'esh Alaken involved three different projections and technological interventions installed in the same place, in each city. These installations were titled: Inlak'esh Alaken Live, Graffiti Wall and Laser Tag.

2.1.Inlak'esh Alaken Live

Inlak'esh Alaken Live consisted in a large projection of a live broadcast video from Guadalajara, Vancouver and Los Angeles, which was projected in those three cities at the same time. Showing a small portion of the space where it was recorded, and connected through the Day In A Life (DIAL) platform, people interacted with each other live from these three different locations. This means that someone in the event of Guadalajara saw and interacted with another person in the events of Vancouver and Los Angeles at the same time, and vice versa.

In this hybrid-form of simulacra, communication and interaction, the mediated image spaces, "became more than just vehicles of communication. Images turned into intelligent arbiters of the relationships humans have with their mechanical creations and with each other" (Burnett, 2004, p.221). The participants of each city were informed of the live video broadcast, and were encouraged to communicate with the participants in the other cities.
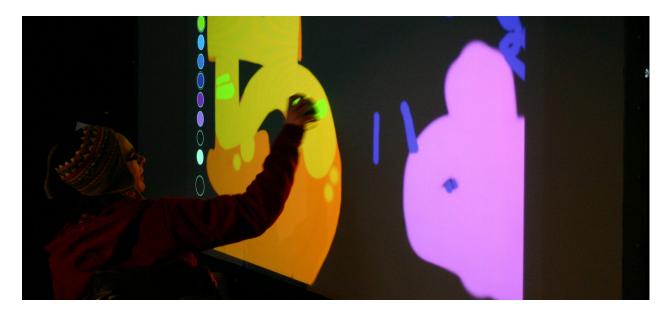
Figure 1.
Inlak'esh Alaken Live

2.2.Graffiti Wall

Produced and directed by Tangible Interaction Design, Graffiti Wall was an installation in Vancouver and Guadalajara, where the participants developed digital graffiti on a rear screen. With the use of a spray can replica with a built-in infrared LED light, the participants experienced digital graffiti art, collaborating with each other and developing collective murals. With the use of online connections, the first intention was that whatever the participants from Vancouver draw would be also shown in the screen of Guadalajara, and vice versa. This way, an international collaboration was intended to take place, where both cities (LA was not included in the development of Graffiti Wall) developed the same mural in different places.

The participants were taught the use of the "graffiti" tool. We, the producers of each event, as providers, did not intent to have any control over what the participants were sketching. In some cases, they wrote and draw messages directed to the participants in other cities, generating new ways of non-verbal communication, using a visual language based on text, movement, and sometimes bodily performance in front of the camera.

Figure 2.
Graffiti Wall

Two main artists participated in the art of digital graffiti in Vancouver and Guadalajara, and it was intended for them to work together on a digital mural at the same time but in different places. Jeremy Crowle, participated in Vancouver, and Reynaldo Alejandro "El Peque" Martínez participated in Guadalajara. Unfortunately, Guadalajara experienced some technical difficulties during the event, where the Graffiti Wall was not properly working to interact online, and this collaboration couldn't take place the way it was intended to.

This was an unexpected issue, and it only shows that technology can never be 100% reliable, no matter how much we practice beforehand, technology is still unpredictable. The intended intercultural interaction between these two artists could not take place. However, each artist worked on different pieces individually. This individual performance was specially valuable, since it served as an inspiration for other non-graffiti artists to develop new techniques with this innovative tool of interaction.

2.3.Laser Tag

Developed by Graffiti Research Lab New York, Laser Tag V.02 is an application that can be projected into any type of surface (buildings, walls, bridges).

Figure 3.
Laser Tag

The participant points a laser pen over the projection surface and a stroke simulating a graffiti brush follows this dot of light. This way, the user can create text, images, illustrations, tags and a fair number of messages on a large scale.

Throughout the event, the Laser Tag application was used in different environments. In Vancouver, it was projected indoors over a rear screen in the same way Graffiti Wall was installed. Meanwhile, in Los Angeles and Guadalajara, this application was projected over a building wall, which exhibited a much larger scale of interaction. Since Los Angeles did not install the Graffiti Wall, Laser Tag was their source of visual communication. They explored and experimented this tool as much as they could, while in Guadalajara and Vancouver, the Graffiti Wall installation was the one that attracted most participants.

2.4.The Event Itself

Within *Inlak'esh Alaken,* new global and local experiences were developed. "With every experience, we acquire knowledge […] which is communicated by building compelling interactions with others or with tools so that the patterns and meanings in their information can be learned by others" (Shedroff, 1994, p.4). There was a development of new technological skills and information not only through the use of networks, but also through the use of different tools of non-verbal communication, such as music, Graffiti Wall or Laser Tag. "When we act upon an object, we [can] also take into account the action itself, […] the transformation can be carried out mentally. […] The abstraction is drawn not from the object that is acted upon, but from the action itself" (Piaget, cited in Turkle, 2007, p.38). With the reaction of the participants to the action of communicating with others, I can go back to the first research question and confirm that interactive, public events do promote local, social engagement.

Considering that this project was an experimentation of experiences, several limitations were considered from the begining: technology, time and communication.

1. Technology:
No matter how advanced it is, we still cannot rely 100% on technology. Some things that we considered could go wrong involved the internet connection (main priority), computer crash, lack of batteries for graffiti tools, components braking from the use.

2. Time:
Working with three different cities, the organizers had to consider the time difference. Without previous organization, each event could start earlier or later than the other two.

3. Communication:
Successful communcation between organizers was a priority for a successful result. We had to be in constant communication with each other by radio and other online chat services, such as Skype. We had to rely on this type of mediums to communicate, and restrict to their limitations.

Considering these limitations, different forms of communication took place between the participants and the organizers as well, and with the mix of visual graphics and background music, different sensorial experiences were created.

These experiences developed within a local and a global context, produced different types of knowledge, either personal (from each participant) or collective. This knowledge was introduced by the use of images, to which Burnett (2004) explains:

> The imagescapes and image-worlds that are being built recast what it means to engage with culture and context. It is not enough to claim that information communicated over networks is simply an add-on to

existing forms of communications. Rather, image-worlds are dependent upon, and make possible, broader forms of interaction not only among people and images, but also between people and the communities in which they live (p.220).

Do images, then, promote intercultural understanding? This project does not fully answer this second research question, however, it does bring the principles to develop an environment where intercultural understanding can be informed through the use of images, and the help of online networks for video broadcasting. I hope to push this experience further, and use these tools to create bridges between different communities that share similar social or political issues, such as migration, war or geographical separation.

2.5.The Brief

Within the process of the development of this project, I followed certain criteria based on different contexts, putting together a design brief for my personal knowledge. The event happened in three different cities, but I was physically present only in the production of the event in Vancouver. Therefore, I am enlisting the contexts developed within the event installed in Vancouver:

Inlak'esh Alaken took place in the Motion Capture Studios at Emily Carr University. It is a black room that accommodated three different projections screened at the same time. Watching the projection of the live video broadcast from the three cities was a very important part of the interaction, so this projection was installed in the back/center of the room. The camera that was recording the event in Vancouver was placed below the projection screen, letting the participants interact with the other cities as if they were facing them (the way we do with our computer and a webcam). The installations for Graffiti Wall and Laser Tag were facing each other, simulating a "war" of graffiti art technology. These projections were set on each side of the main projection (video broadcast), so that the whole interaction could happen in the middle of the room.

The setup for each event was previously practiced. With the use of hand drawn sketches, I described every cable, plug-in, connection, equipment and location necessary for the event setup, which eventually was adapted for each city. Nonetheless, we experienced some technical difficulties, especially while trying to get the three cities started at the same time. Guadalajara experienced the most delay in setting up the Graffiti Wall, although it did not affect the interaction between Vancouver and Los Angeles.

The participants were mainly students, faculty and staff from Emily Carr, although people from outside of this community came to participate as well. An extended international community forms Emily Carr, thus, the values, languages, habits, codes and attitudes of each participant changed individually, enriching the local experience of participation and intercultural communication.

The level of technical expectations of the participants differed individually. Some of them were not surprised with the tools of interaction present in the event, but some others stayed for a long period of time, exploring and experimenting these tools, manifesting their emotions and excitement. Before and during the event, the participants were informed of the process of interaction, and the instructions of how to use each tool to develop digital graffiti. The same participants determined the time each participant took to use the Graffiti Wall's spray cans, or the laser pointer for the Laser Tag. There was no control over the personal use of the tools, producing a margin of uncertainty over the final results.

3. Methodology

Within the process of answering my previous research questions (1.Do interactive, public events promote local, social engagement? 2.Do online video broadcasting promote intercultural understanding? 3.How does the designer become an interceptor between cultures and contribute to the development of communication when the same language is not shared?) I developed a methodology based on experimentation and documentation, working on becoming a visual journalist and developing as a thinker designer.

Following is a description of each phase of my research and practice, which evolved into my personal methodology.

3.1 Changing the quality of the day

As I mentioned earlier in this essay, at the beginning of my Masters' studies, I engaged with the *street art*[13] movement as part of my initial research. What most captivated me about this movement was how these manifestations were the result of collaboration, different minds working together to change the quality of the day. It is art that is free, living where real life is happening, away from museums and galleries. It brings an element of surprise and draws our attention to what we look at every day but no longer see, usually bringing a message about our society, about us. If Modern Artists dedicated their lives to Art, then street artists dedicate their art to Life (Scwartzman, 1985, p.106).

Graffiti art has been developed as a way to communicate a message to a wider range of audience. It is a form of self-expression that goes back to the beginning of culture. Currently, new technologies have been developed to create graffiti art, and as part of my research I followed the works of Graffiti Research Lab (Laser Tag) and Tangible Interaction Design (Graffiti Wall).

Both urban art interventions explore what goes beyond traditional graffiti art, beyond spray cans and markers. They develop a sense of absence, instead of a sense of presence. In other words, they explore a digital form

Figure 4.
Technological Dreams

of expression that has certain movement and can be erased with the hit of one key, contrary to traditional graffiti art, where the presence of the work is longer and static. They explore different tools of interaction, where the use of light replaces the use of toxic materials (spray paint) to create a performance.

These new experiences provide a different way of communication, where non-verbal language can be shared. Therefore, within my work I brought together these new tools of interaction, with an extended possibility to send a message to a broader audience, where international interactions can be experienced, and new collaborations can take place.

3.2 Influences and Inspirations

To get to the project Inlak'esh Alaken, I had to previously develop a series of experiments, and research a fair amount of new technologies and current projects that use visual communication to develop a message.

Besides the research of new technologies to create urban art, I also researched artists whose works influenced my practice, such as Christopher Baker, Banksy, Shepard "Obey" Fairey, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and Krzysztof Wodiczko.

1.Christopher Baker: artist that explores social, technological and ideological networks present within the urban landscape. His project Urban Echo (2008) consisted in public, interactive projections on buildings' facades, representing SMS sent by participants in a flowing cascade of letters and sounds. This work in particular showed a new perception of our built environment, and it was one of the first close approaches I had to light projections. His way of linking technology and social engagement influenced my future practice.

2.Banksy: internationally recognized visual artist, whose political and social messages are either admired or banned around the World. His determination to send a message based on politic criticism and sarcasm was quite inspiring to the development of my future work. At the end, I didn't follow a political ideology, rather than a social ideology.

3.Shepard "Obey" Fairey: similar to Banksy, this recognized graffiti artist and designer influenced my practice within the research of phenomenology, and how a message can be globally shared with the collaboration of the society, helping in the development of conscious citizens.

4.Rafael Lozano-Hemmer: visual artist that develops large-scale interactive installations in public spaces. His use of technology and custom-made physical interfaces influenced my work in the hope of develop a space for people to interact within an open space in an urban environment. This was my initial intention, and I hope to follow it with the development of future work.

5.Krzysztof Wodiczko: visual artist who produces large video-projections over buildings' facades. His work is internationally recognized as a severe critique of political issues. His collaboration within communities to develop his work inspired the development of my practice, wishing to give a voice to citizens who are somewhat silenced or have the need to share a common ideology.

3.3 Experimentation

To get to the project *Inlak'esh Alaken*, I had to previously develop a series of experiments, including the development of Mediafesto, Light over Rain, a documentation of the Graffiti Wall usage, and Tele.fone.

3.3.1   Mediafesto

By the end of March 2008, the Media students hosted an Open House called *Mediafesto*, in which several Masters students exhibited their media artwork at the Intersection Digital Studio (IDS). At this stage, I was investigating the technologies to develop interactive graffiti art, and I wanted to experiment with my recent discoveries. I installed an interactive rear screen (double sided screen), to use the Laser Tag V.02. With the help of a projector, a video camera, a laser pointer and a laptop with the Laser Tag V.02 application installed, people started "laser tagging". My first attempt to explore new technologies to create urban art, participatory interaction, new and forms of messaging was successful.

Figure 5
Laser Tag

The development of this event confirmed the first research question: 1.Do interactive, public events promote local, social engagement? *Mediafesto* was an interactive social event that promoted social engagement within a local community of artists and designers.

3.3.2 Light over Rain

One of the main characteristics of my initial intent was to develop a project outdoors. As a designer, I needed to consider the challenges that could come up during the development of the project. Living in Vancouver, I had to consider the weather for projecting outside, especially during rainy season (if there is such a thing). Instead of working against the rain, I decided to work with it and experiment with light over (through) water. With the project *Primal Source*[14] from Haque Design & Research as main inspiration, I decided to explore the possibilities of projecting over the rain.

I set up a projector in a small dark room, projecting a colorful screensaver onto a wall. I setup a table between the projector and the wall, with a plate on top of it, where I dripped water from a punched plastic bag. I documented the process with video, and the results were unsatisfactory. The dripping needed to be continuous and fluid (like a mist or heavy rain),

Figure 6.
Light over Rain

and because rain can hardly be modified for my own benefit, it was hard to identify any projection over the dripping water. I concluded that, in the end, the inconsistent, soft rain of Vancouver would not affect the outcome of the projection.
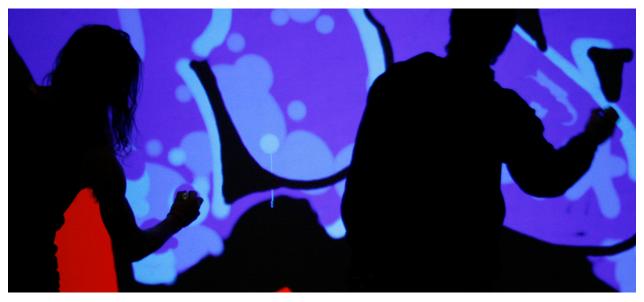
3.3.3 Graffiti Wall

In February 2008, I had the opportunity to meet Alex Beim, a communication designer who recently founded Tangible Interaction Design. One of the first of its kind, this design studio creates full-on sensory experiences where people can interact in the everyday physical world. I collaborated with Alex for the documentation of the application Graffiti Wall, an installation based in making graffiti with light (similar to Laser Tag) using infrared LED pens to "draw" over a rear screen. I wanted to document the experience of actual graffiti artists tagging with this interactive tool, analyzing the participation more than the functionality of the tool.

This is how I met Jeremy Crowle. Vancouver based visual artist, Jeremy works with a realistic style. His work has been showed internationally, and has a strong background developing graffiti art. In December 2008, I gathered a team of artists lead by Jeremy Crowle and setup the environment for documentation with photo and video. Each member of the team used the pen, and tagged digitally for 8 hours in total. As part of the documentation, I felt like interviewing these graffiti artists who where using the tool for the first time. One of the main questions that I asked was how this tool of interaction changed the main objectives of graffiti art.

To my surprise, Jeremy explained that he didn't feel that the purpose of graffiti art changed drastically with Graffiti Wall. Even though for him it was challenging to use the digital tool instead of a spray can, he wanted to smell the paint as he was "tagging" digitally. He mentioned that graffiti art making is about delivering a message to the world with certain style, and in this case he was using a screen instead of a wall to deliver that message. It certainly steps further of the boundaries of traditional graffiti art, but

he interpreted this interaction as a new tool to develop and study graffiti. All these previous explorations made me reflect on the use of technology and new media, and how these impact the outcome of the interaction. By bringing a surprise factor with a certain tool provided to the participant,

Figure7.
Post Crew

multiple interactions could be present at the same time, making space for collaborative participation and social engagement. Therefore, the technology tools can affect the outcome of the participants' interaction.

3.3.4 Tele.fone

Tele.fone is an ongoing project developed for the Interactivity course for the Masters program. In collaboration with Kara Pecknold and Jennifer Sawrenko-Gellis, we developed a cell phone game using images instead of text. The main purpose of this project was to consider image as a support between communities that don't share the same language.

The Cell phone has become the most common tool of communication (and is more available than Internet) around the World. According to the International Telecommunications Union (2005), as of 2005 there was approximately one mobile phone subscription for every third person in the

world, and there were 19 countries in which the number of mobile phone subscriptions exceeded to the number of persons living in the country (as cited in Ling, 2008, p.14).

The use of mobile phones in a global context is increasing considerably, and the opportunities to combine its potential with new social networks makes it more attractive for new (and current) cell phone users. It is becoming part of the world's social media, where the possibilities of sharing and communicating are expanding.

Within this project, we provided a social ritual. Ling (2008) defines ritual as the "establishment of a mutually recognized focus and mood among individuals" (p.9). Within this project, the ritual incites social cohesion, and focuses in the outcome of a process within a certain group, rather than a repetitive behavior. The ritual consisted in sending and receiving multimedia messages, following the instructions previously handed by us.
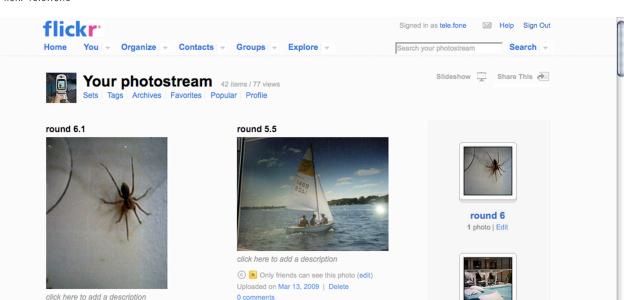
We gathered five international volunteers to participate with their mobile phones (all of them with cameras) to investigate if an image can be used instead of text to communicate. The idea was based on the game Telephone, where a message is sent to one person, and that person has to share the message with the next. We sent out five different questions (Where you live/Where you work/How you get around –transport-/What you are eating/ What you wish for –dreams-/What you worry about -fears-) in the form of an image. The first recipient had to guess what the question was for that image, and send it to the next person as an answer, also in the form of an image (with no text).

The process we have developed is the following:

We send the initial question to the first recipient in line, and he/she has to reply with an image to a given phone number. This phone number is programmed to receive the image and automatically upload it to the project's Flickr account. Once uploaded to the Flickr account, we must send the last

image replied to the next recipient in line, and so on. At the end of the game, everyone can see the participants' responses and which were the original questions.

Figure 8.
Flickr Tele.fone

Because this is an ongoing project, it is not possible for me to describe the outcome of these experiences and results of the interaction. So far, the images already sent to the Flickr account as a response to the initial questions, show a variety of interpretations.

I am participating on the development of this project to answer the third research question: How does the designer become an interceptor between cultures and contribute to the development of communication when the same language is not shared? Currently, I am not in the position of translating the images' interpretations, since not all the questions have been asked, nor answered. However, I conclude that this project is an initiator on how the designer can overcome the challenge of verbal language and become a problem-solver from the user's perspective, and not from the designer's deduction. This can be developed by combining visual language and interactive communication through local and available technologies.

3.4 Place-making

Throughout the years, the meaning of the city has been evolving into modern places for transport and communication. With the evolution of new forms of technology, including transportation, computers and Internet, the city has become a cluster of advertisement that little supports social engagement. Ronald Lee Flaming, in his book Place Makers (1981), talks about the phenomenon of *placelesness*[15] and how we are living, transporting and moving in spaces that never become places (p.7). Therefore, my initial intent was to develop a space of engagement within the city, creating a place to bring intercultural communities without the necessity of a social event.

Throughout my practice, I had little experience in the development of places for social engagement in open spaces. This became a limitation I could not overcome throughout a determined period of time. Therefore, I changed the course of this initial intention becoming a place-maker with the help of a social event. With this experience, I am hoping to follow my initial intent within my future work.

For the purpose of this paper, I define place and space according to Hisham Eljadi's definitions in his paper *Identity: Glass and Meaningful Place-Making* (2005) where space is described as "an area configured by nature that accommodates the evocation of feelings", while place is described as "an area in space designed to accommodate certain human activities" (p.92).

I am aware that the creation of false needs within an urban society develops a sense of superficiality, and that social engagement and community-based activities are fading in a city of isolation and cyber communication.

I went back to Guadalajara, Mexico for the Christmas holidays of 2008, and decided to explore the context I used to live in and how it has changed. I found out that the most important topic of discussion in Mexico right now is the internal war that is happening between the Cartels and the government.

It is said that the number of deaths as a result of kidnapping, public and underground shooting and bombing is approximately the same as the number of civilians killed in the war at Iraq. Fortunately, in the state of Jalisco (my hometown) things are not as bad, but in the nearby states people are living in constant fear. This added to the financial crisis makes an unstable society, and vandalism has increased considerably.

Informed by this particular situation, I went downtown to observe the plazas and public spaces where people congregate, and analyze the society's reaction to this particular subject of discussion. The public spaces were filled with families enjoying the day, children playing around and couples walking by. People were trying to live their lives normally, despite the problems that surrounded them.

Compared to the contrasting Vancouver, I found the necessity to open a window and share these differences in culture performed by the same citizens, experiencing a multicultural interaction. The world is full of different realities, and unfortunately not all people are conscious of these realities. The difference in culture, traditions, language and environment of each of the places I have been to and lived in are rich in variety, and the interaction between these places brings an interesting performance of the way we live now as contrasting communities. This interaction of places is increasing considerably, and new network of cultures are created.

> Whether in the form of transnational political initiatives, global economies, new technologies or urban social movements, networks are the distinctive characteristic of spatial organization in the twenty-first century. Networks have changed our forms of cultural coexistence and communication just as they have the way in which we produce and experience spaces. Cities, regions, countries and continents are being experienced less and less as fixed territories and increasingly as fluid and contested landscapes, formed and mobilized by networks of integrating realities (Mörtenböck & Mooshammer , 2008, p.15).

Becoming a place-maker with the use of networked technologies to reach a wide range of participants opens an opportunity to develop a space where several realities intersect.

Within my future work, I hope to follow the exploration of network technologies at a bigger scale, where wider and broader audiences can be reached, linking different communities that share the same political and/or social concerns.

3.5 Intercultural Performance

For many years, "film and video have been essential for the study of human behavior, as in investigations of interaction in the city space" (Collier, 1986, p.139) and many other points of study. Being a support for the study of cultural phenomena, the tools of video and moving images contribute to the perception of our surroundings, seeing, understanding and responding to the character of an action, a place, or a group of people. As opposed to photography or still images, film and video "can record the realism of the time and motion or the psychological reality of varieties of interpersonal relations". (Collier, 1986, p.144)

Using the *language of motion*[17], the image is defined by different characteristics like love and hate, anger and delight. The observer becomes the participant, and therefore becomes the observed as well. The goal, to quote Burnett (1995), is "to get away from the simple linearity of screen to viewer, image to spectator, to overcome the notion that images are sources of experience and sources of meaning" (p.137).

In the project Inlak'esh Alaken, the spectator becomes the participant, an average citizen willing to be involved in this intercultural interaction. Assembled spectators or listeners at a public event form an audience. Because an audience mostly receives and does not participate in the action of the spectacle, I refer to the main audience as *participants*[18].

3.6 The Global and the Local

Every city around the globe is home to different cultures and nationalities. It is quite rare for one city to be formed by a single culture, creating an evolution of multicultural identities. Mulder (n.d.) frames that "we are no longer present in a single place but continually co-present in many different places" (as cited in Anonymous, 2002, p.8). When we turn on the TV or enter to social networks such as Internet blogs and websites, a high level of international information flows through our visual perception. We now have different concepts of local and global, and the city is still perceived as a local place where our lives have some relevance. From an urban point of view, this local place still owns different links to global cultures and contexts.

Motivated by a curiosity to share international experiences, knowledge and practice, people from around the world get together online and communicate with different social network services. These networks, as Manzini (2006) explains, "are capable to catalyze large members of interested people, […] build a common vision and direction, and develop even very complex projects at the global scale (as in Wikipedia) or at the local one (as in *Meetup, SmartMobs* and the *BBC Action network*)" (p.3).

Finding a commonality (e.g. Mátika Magazine project), these tools of interaction are starting to contribute to solving the conflict of large-scale social communication issues, such as sharing political ideologies or people's perception of life.

In his article *Is there Love in Telematic Embrace* (1989) Roy Ascott talks about the relationship of culture, traditions and values to the transition from reality to virtuality. He explains the following:

> *Telematic*[19] culture amplifies the individual's capacity for creative thought and action for more vivid and intense experience, for more informed perception, by enabling a participation in the production of

global vision through networked interaction with other minds, other sensibilities, other sensing and thinking systems across the planet – thought circulating in the medium of data through a multiplicity of different cultural, geographical, social, and personal layers. (para.9)

For several years, many artists and researchers have been developing projects regarding international networking through the Internet and the development of intercultural (and inter-spatial) social engagement. One of the most recent examples –and the one that most relates to my work - is the project developed by Horst Konietzny from Upgrade! Munich: *A Day in A Life* better known as DIAL. DIAL brings the peculiarities and different characteristics of certain locations into contrast with one another. Different locations around the world participate to be networked together via broadband technology. With real time video/audio recordings projected next to each other, each place becomes a performance of that culture's life, creating a poetic fusion of literature, music, performance and video art from each place.

Within my work I explore the use of Internet broadband technology as an important tool for massive interaction. Engaging the participant with moving images and sound in real time, I created an opportunity to develop collaborative performances, bridging international communities through time and space.

Charlie Todd, a comedian and founder of the New York group Improv Everywhere, which organizes flashmobs, says the point of the group's 'missions' is to "get satisfaction from coming up with an awesome idea and making it come to life. In the process we bring excitement to otherwise unexciting locals and give strangers a story they can tell for the rest of their lives. It can simply be about making someone laugh, smile, or stop to notice the world around them.'" (2009, para.21).

4. The Process

This section describes the process of the development of *Inlak'esh Alaken*. During my research I found little information about process/methodology regarding interactive environments in open spaces from a communication designer's perspective. I hope the process described below will inform and bring new knowledge to new communication designers that are willing to follow similar projects in the future.

Within the development of the project *Inlak'esh Alaken*, I became a producer of what I could call the closure of my previous experiments. I confronted a series of challenges and limitations, as well as successful results and a new body of knowledge. In the process of becoming a visual journalist, I documented every challenge and success that came in the development cycle of the project.

Within the process of developing this event, I linked different people and ideas to develop a common goal, and focused more in the process rather than in the outcome itself. Following, is a detailed description of the process to develop the project.

4.1. Research

Similar to the process of any designer, this process includes answering questions we usually answer with a brief. In this case, the design brief was for me to work with as a scaffold. I worked with the journalistic questions, which looks the why of what, and to whom, when and where.

This is an example of a series of questions looking at the key question of what:
1. What is the objective of this project?
2. What motivated me to develop this project?
3. What should I develop to reach the desired objective?
4. What is the element of surprise that will change the observer's quality of the day?
5. What will help bridge the gap between communities that don't share the same language?

These and more questions are answered and reflected throughout this essay. It is important to keep a journal or notebook for notes and ideas that may come up, including sketches and quotes from books, journals or articles read through the process of research. A still camera is always a great gadget for documentation.

Once I had most of my questions answered, I started researching precedents. Because Inlak'esh Alaken is not just one object, but a mix of various installations that form an event, I began researching the one topic that I knew the least: live video broadcasting online. One of the challenges that came up was that nowadays there is hardly a brand new idea that no one else has already made or event thought before. Instead of trying to find something new, I decided to join together with the people that had made similar projects in the past, in order to push the boundaries of these projects to get more interesting results. This led me to meet the People.

4.2. People

Meeting new people that enriched my project was one of the most satisfactory results of this process. In the search for projects similar to mine, I found very interesting results from artists around the World. E-mailing is the best way to get your voice out there, and so I decided to overcome my fear of speaking to strangers (if "speaking" is e-mailing, maybe "skype-ing"?), and e-mailed everyone that I though might be interested in my project. The answers I got were amazing, and new networks of collaboration were created.

I have previous experience working in teams at long-distance, and know the basis of managing people in different cities. One of the main challenges of working with people online is clear communication. Despite the difference of time zones, every member of the international team had to be fully committed to a daily-based communication with others. New forms of organization developed, like online calendars and due dates, and weekly

video conference meetings. Strict organization and honest communication brought the team members together and facilitated a successful project development.

4.3. Technology

The biggest challenge of all was the technology. Even though in our western urban lives we rarely experience the absence of Internet, finding a place with a strong connection was the biggest challenge. The Internet connection had to be 8Mbps/1024Kbps or stronger to decrease the possibility of an interruption of the video or audio signal, and therefore overcome drastic time delays. Once we solved this, we had to do some research on equipment rentals. In some cases, interested companies sponsor a free trial of their equipment. It was very important to promote the project to everyone we thought might be a sponsor. Though some said "not today", some said "yes, of course".

I developed a requirements checklist of everything needed for the event in the three cities. It was important to clarify every specification of the equipment, and annotate every cable, tape, light or chair that was necessary to bring a comfortable and complete installation to the sites. This checklist had to be translated in both Spanish and English, and including specifications for the length, weight or energy units for each place.

4.4. Place

In looking for a place to develop the project, a reliable Internet connection was an important factor. I did some research on the topic and found out that one of the strongest Internet connections can be found in schools and Universities.

Fortunately, we found out that in Guadalajara, my undergrad University was hosting a Culture Week during the same week we wanted the project to happen. My team in Guadalajara presented the project to the Communications

and Events Committee, and they loved the project, and supported us right away. We found out that they were thinking of inviting a couple of graffiti artists for one night of mural painting with the topic of social issues and migration. The coincidence of topics and tools of collaboration were fascinating, and we mixed *Inlak'esh Alaken* with their own performances.

I found it convenient to invite Emily Carr University to participate in this merge of possibilities, having found a commonality between Vancouver and Guadalajara, namely art and design audience in an academic setting. I submitted my project proposal for the Motion Capture Studio. Once I got the green light, the rest was history.

5. First Impressions

Each site began the setup at different times. We always kept in touch by Skype and by international radio (radio/telephone with unlimited international connection). From previous experiences, I know that technological difficulties can considerably delay the beginning of an event, so I decided to setup at 12:00pm. With close to six hours ahead and the help of a technician, I setup the three different projections. The Tangible Interaction staff installed Graffiti Wall one hour late (an hour before the event had to start), when the event started in Vancouver, the people in Guadalajara were not ready to start yet, since the Graffiti Wall tests were delayed.

Meanwhile, Los Angeles had some difficulties trying to connect online and start the video broadcast from their side. In Vancouver, the event officially started. It was 18:00 hrs PST, the guests were arriving, Guadalajara had no Graffiti Wall working and Los Angeles was not showing up on the online broadcast.

It took us close to an hour and a half to get the three sites to work properly at the same time. The video cameras for each site were mainly located facing a screen of interaction (Guadalajara and Vancouver with Graffiti Wall, and Los Angeles with Laser Tag), and each screen acted as a white board, where people started to communicate. Unfortunately, some guests had to leave before the intended performance took place, but once everything was fluently working, the results were amazing.

At the beginning, the participants in Vancouver and Los Angeles knew that Guadalajara was having some technical difficulties setting up the Graffiti Wall; they saw it on the video broadcast projection. This fact did not stop them from interacting with the three cites; instead, they decided to write messages on the Graffiti Wall and Laser Tag projections. They wrote messages like "Guadalajara, what's going on?" and a fluent interaction began. The participants in Los Angeles also wrote messages for Guadalajara and Vancouver, and at some point they also interacted with their own body movements.

Throughout the event, we experienced some saturation in the server for the video broadcast, and each site had to reload their transmission every now and then.

While waiting for Guadalajara to properly setup their Graffiti Wall and start the graffiti artists' performance, the participants in Vancouver were mainly exploring the Graffiti Wall tools. They performed a ritual, sharing the tools of tagging and interacting with each other. And then, the unexpected happen. A drawing appeared out of nowhere on their canvas. The participants backed up for a minute, trying to figure out what happened, and suddenly they looked at the video transmission from Guadalajara, and to their surprise, they saw their own drawings showing up in the Graffiti Wall screen of Guadalajara. They started yelling: "It's working! It's working!" and with that same excitement, they kept interacting with the participants in Guadalajara.

This particular experience was the essence of my process, one of the most exciting outcomes of the project. In my position of becoming a visual journalist, I brought this experience as an example of the dialogue I was looking for. As a designer, I became an interceptor between communities and contributed to the development of non-verbal communication.

Jeremy Crowle was present during the entire event. There was one moment when we had to ask the participants to let him begin his performance and interact with El Peque, in Guadalajara. By the time this happened, Guadalajara had other technical difficulties, and the interaction between both Graffiti Wall screens was interrupted. This didn't stop Jeremy to expand his skills with these tools, and he started drawing some amazing "murals". Within the participants, there was another professional graffiti artist who saw what Jeremy was doing, and asked permission to collaborate with him, and he did. They both started a dialogue, a communication that only street artist know. They moved from side to side, working with colors, layers and textures. The rest of the participants became spectators in this beautiful and unpredictable performance.

Unfortunately, as I mentioned earlier in this text, the graffiti artists from Guadalajara and Vancouver did not have the chance to collaborate in the same screen. Both artists are hoping to do this in a near future, and I hope to contribute in the development of this desired collaboration.

There were many challenges to overcome during the event that did have unsatisfactory results, but the process of developing this, for me, was a success. Following the *Collaborative Networks* theory by Manzini (2006), I was indeed capable of catalyzing interested people (in this case, the producers of each city and the external collaborators), and organizing them to build a common vision, developing a complex project at a global scale (p.3). This collaborators and producers were from Mexico, Germany, Uruguay, Argentina, Korea, the United States and Canada. The international collaboration was not only the collaboration of three cities working together, but of different people with different nationalities and cultures working together.

With *Inlak'esh Alaken*, I have contributed to new knowledge of the discipline of Interaction Design, being a small example of how we, as designers, can converge and become a unique complex dynamic of social change (Manzini, 2006, p.3). With *Inlak'esh Alaken* I believe I answered my research questions by developing an interactive, public event that successfully promoted local, social engagement. With the help of online video broadcasting, as a designer, I became an interceptor between communities, (unfortunately not cultures) and contributed to the development of communication when the same language might not shared.

"Interactivity is different from the production value of 'richness'. Typical television programs and films can have incredibly rich stories, […] but offer almost no interaction except turning the channel or leaving the theater. Compare this with the experience of improvisational comedy in which a story is created as the audience watches, gets involved by offering suggestions, or even joins in the action" (Shedroff, 1994, p.10)

6. Conclusion

Tlalcticpac tochictin ties / The Earth will be as the humans will be

Design is evolving in directions never thought in the past. There is no longer a defined line between this and other creative disciplines. Designers, I have gleaned, are learning how to participate in the social process of networking. Within my work I am presenting the designer as a facilitator and interlocutor between communities, as a multidisciplinary individual that brings an importance to the dialogue between these communities with the help of art, media and design.

With this body of knowledge, I hope to influence future (and current) designers in their search for a social change in the local and the global network. I hope to encourage the art and design community to bring an interaction of multicultural identities and develop an environment of conscious reflection, a place that reinforces community life and provides social engagement and human participation by perceiving the global into the local.

With the use of co-creative technologies, the designer can provide a sensorial and emotional experience to the participant, since "people are naturally creative and are almost always more interested in experiences that allow them to create instead of merely participate" (Shedroff, 1994, p.11). These experiences are valuable tools to share knowledge, and can become key factors to the development of shared ideas and possible solutions to global and local social issues.

With *Inlak'esh Alaken* I have learned to establish a solid network of creative people that share the same ideals, and the importance of this network in future artistic developments. I have learned that technology is growing beyond our expectations, and it can be used as a tool to ease conflicts or limitations in both a global and a local context. However, one can never truly rely on technology, and must research and apply different possibilities as backup plans. I also learned that the possibilities of creation are endless, and so are the limitations and challenges to overcome.

My work involves a fair amount of uncertainty and therefore ambiguity. Based on interactive design, I created an effect in people's global and

local knowledge, and with the help of visual communication, bridged the gap between communities that may not share the same language. It is hard to anticipate the final effect desired, mostly due to the fact that the participants had different cultural backgrounds, and the acts followed by the information they were given were unpredicatble. I was left with the activity of observation, a documentation of the experiment and "capturing and condensing […] the mood, concerns, inspirations, aspirations, fads, obsessions and stylistic tics" (Poynor, 2001, p.185) of the participants. I gathered the results of these interactive experiences, analyzed the documentation, and used the resources of design (words and images) to communicate my argument. This, for me, is what it means to become a visual journalist.

I see myself as a designer that can develop experiences. With *Inlak'esh Alaken*, I developed an interactive, public event that successfully promoted local, social engagement. With the help of online video broadcasting, I became an interceptor between communities, and despite the unexpected challenges that changed the desired outcome (of an intercultural understanding), I contributed to the development of communication with visual language.

If I were to change something from this project, I would have put more emphasis in the music playing as background (ambient music), and use the sound as a generator of emotions, affecting the final results of the participants' interaction. I would have made the projection screens bigger and wider, where the participants could feel a human scale 1:1. I would have tested the whole process of the instalation many times before, with the three cities, which I am sure would have helped a lot in the development of the actual event.

Some areas of study included in this thesis, like *intercultural communication* and *sound as generative*, are still under research, which is why they are not as developed in this essay as other areas of study. I aim to develop a much deeper research in these areas to complete the present body of knowledge, and guide it to different possibilities of work in the future.

Conclusion

This research helped me develop a methodology outside of traditional design practices. It involves the process of developing a body of knowledge that contributes to the evolution and articulation of ideas. I recognize that this is an ongoing research project, which may point to different possibilities in the future.

Inlak'esh Alaken was developed within a limited period of time, a limited selection of space and a limited budget. However, the outcome of this experience can be taken further, pushing the limitations of technology, time and space as a potential for social activism.

In the future, I aim to take the foundation of this project and bring it to communities with similar social or political issues, or even confined due to physical disabilities or political regulations. With the use of available technology and non-verbal language and with the help of *Inlak'esh Alaken*, my objective is to become an agent for social change.

"Designers talk about creating a body of work, but they seldom talk about acquiring a body of knowledge. They take pride in being makers, but seldom identify themselves as thinkers. They claim to be emissaries of communication — to give form to ideas. And while we would like to believe this is true, it seems to us that all too often, we, as designers, are called upon merely to make things look good — rather than contributing to the evolution and articulation of ideas themselves." William Drenttel

Footnotes

El primero siempre será el último / The first one will always be the last.

1. Designers that research taking in consideration the society's needs, studying the culture and creating a change with a conscious design.

2. According to Jorge Frascara (1997), designers have been defined as problem-solvers, which means taking action in response to a problem (Frascara, 1997, p.20).

3. Following Jorge Frascara's (1997) theory of the designer acting as problem-solvers, he suggests the designer to (also) become a problem-identifier, identifying and defining areas where visual communication design can make a significant difference in society (Frascara, 1997, p.20-21).

4. According to the online source Writing a Successful Design Brief (Anonymous, n.d.), design brief is a written explanation - given to a designer - outlining the aims, objectives and milestones of a design project.

5. A project founded in 2004 in Guadalajara, Mexico. It explores new media and technology as a way to create art. For more information please visit http://www.matikarevista.com

6. For the purpose of this essay, "intercultural" indicates the interaction of one or more individuals that have different identity background, such as their country of precedence or education.

7. Social network application to communicate with text, voice or video over the Internet.

8. The author lived in Jamaica at the age of 13, for a period of 8 months. She related Bali with known places from her past.

9. "Developing", in this paper, is a term used to identify a large percentage of the society which poverty levels are increased.

10. Term used to identify cultures with European origin.

11. The practice of designing products, processes, services, events, and environments with a focus placed in the quality of the user experience and culturally relevant solutions, with less emphasis placed on increasing and improving functionality of the design.

12. Steven Heller, in the book Citizen Designer, suggests that design has inherent properties that when applied in a responsible manner contributes to a well-being that enhances everyone's life as a citizen. He describes that to be a good citizen designer requires more than talent. The key is to ask questions, for the answers will result in responsible decisions. (Heller & Vienne, 2003, p.7)

13. When the artist used (is using) the environment as a collaborator.

14. Making use of a large-scale outdoor waterscreen/mist projection system, the mirage-like installation glowed with colours and ebullient patterns created in response to the competing and collaborative voices, music and screams of people nearby. The system's modes changed every few minutes depending on how active the crowd participation was (more quickly when there was more noise).

15. A meaning of banal sameness in the developing of the cities.

16. Group or organization that controls the sale and traffic of drugs.

17. The language of motion refers to a stage where the image moves and it adds a qualification to the character of human behavior. (Collier, 1986, p.140)

18. Someone that takes action into something.

19. "Telematics" is a term used to designate computer-mediated communications networking involving telephone, cable, and satellite links between geographically dispersed individuals and institutions that are interfaced to data-processing systems.

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Más sabe el Diablo por viejo que por Diablo / The Devil knows more for being old than for being the Devil

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