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Dissertation Review - Ali Alperen Şahin

The artistic dissertation entitled *Sites of Psyche: Exploring Raw Spatial Interventions* was submitted in 2024 by Ali Alperen Şahin (born 24.07.1994 in Altındağ, Turkey) to the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław Doctoral School, in the field of art and the discipline of fine arts and conservation of works of art.

The originality of this dissertation lies in the aesthetics of the presented space-related media artworks, which enable audiovisual perception to be experienced through embodied interaction. However, this also presents a commonly acknowledged limitation in the field of installation art or ephemeral, site-specific interventions: I was not able to experience these temporary projects in person. My evaluation is therefore based on the written component of the dissertation, alongside the available video and photographic documentation. Nevertheless, my understanding of this genre, my own experience as an artist, and my theoretical and empathetic engagement with the subject matter serve to contextualise and support my assessment.

The dissertation *Sites of Psyche: Exploring Raw Spatial Interventions* presents an in-depth exploration of space, atmosphere, and subjective artistic expression through a series of performative spatial installations. Grounded in the field of media art and artistic research, the thesis positions itself at the intersection of theory and practice, engaging with spatial intervention, audiovisual performance, and digital art. The work is both ambitious and personal, rooted in the aesthetic and affective registers of the dark sublime, gothic romanticism, and DIY counterculture. Its aim is not only to document artistic experiments, but to propose a conceptual and emotional framework through which space may be approached as an expression of psyche.

One of the project's strengths is its atmospheric sensitivity. Şahin succeeds in articulating an affectively charged engagement with space, expressed through immersive multimedia installations. Atmosphere is not simply evoked; it is constructed through layered interactions of light, sound, and physical materials. The ability to render ephemeral, emotionally resonant environments situates the work within contemporary practices in expanded media art, where material and immaterial forms often overlap.

Şahin's doctoral thesis comprises five site-specific multimedia interventions realised between 2022 and 2024:

- *xycknss*, January 26, 2022, club Ciało, Wrocław, Poland
- *ø-t*, June 10-12, 2022, Pałac Gorzanów, Poland
- *annnnmn.outofpills*, June 24-28, 2022, the abandoned Bethanien Hospital, Wrocław, Poland
- *a rite kept in shadows*, December 27, 2023, Korpúlsstaðir, Reykjavik, Iceland
- *illithianeE*, October 27, 2024, The Wooden Church, Park Szczytnicki, Wrocław, Poland

The documentation of these works presents a reduced colour palette; a sombre black-and-white aesthetic dominates the video materials. Although the five sites differ significantly, they share a common history of abandonment or functional obsolescence. This status becomes an aesthetic element in Şahin's artistic treatment of the spaces.

These works demonstrate that existing spaces can be experienced as atmospherically charged environments with distinct aesthetic effects. They may appear deserted, gloomy, or mystical, engaging in a dialogue with the visitor's personal mood. Şahin emphasises this atmospheric impact, grounding it in personal biography. His site selection is guided by affective resonance, with places chosen to reflect an inner state. Starting from a found atmosphere, the artist constructs a spatial experience that invites emotional and sensory participation. In the case of *A rite kept in shadows*, the artist also claims this experience for himself in an intimate moment of interaction with the existing space.

Besides light, sound, and digital visuals, physical materials like fabrics and tree branches, also contribute to atmospheric formation. In his scenographic engagement with spaces, Şahin incorporates not only technical devices but also additional physical materials such as mirrors, plastic strips, found objects, and candles. The materials are selected in relation to the intended mood and the qualities of the site. With minimal means, the artist constructs a performative narrative that defines the perceptual field.

The soundscapes composed for each site function as spatial sound installations. These include ambient audio reminiscent of water droplets, crackling fire, breaking wood, wind, and thunder. These elements reinforce the dark and mystical atmosphere. However, due to the limitations of time-based documentation, the overall ambience cannot be fully captured in the short video excerpts. Therefore, the artist's aesthetic choices in the design and editing of the documentation—consistent with gothic and dark romantic visual codes—play an essential role in mediating the intended mood.

Light and shadow are central to Şahin's artistic practice. Various lighting techniques—including LED strips, DMX-controlled spotlights, and video projections—are used to create choreographed sequences of light and shadow. Kinetic light elements and programmable devices such as robotic arms allow for precision in these movements. The use of technology remains restrained and tailored to the specific character of each site, avoiding spectacle for its own sake.

The integration of animated projections with tangible objects strengthens the scenographic quality of the installations, as particularly evident in *illithianeE*. This final project synthesises digital and analogue techniques, combining animated projections with lighting techniques and physical elements like branches, candles, and black fabrics. Spatial sound is carefully condensed, analogue drawings and asemic writing—applied in white chalk onto black fabrics—harmonise within the spatial intervention. Natural daylight was used during the opening phase of the performance, integrating environmental conditions into the work.

The written part of the dissertation is original and stylistically rich, reflecting the artistic positioning of the project, but also leading to moments of imprecision. While concepts such as the sublime, gothic, and dark romanticism are discussed in the dissertation, the treatment is shaped by a heterogeneous mix of associative, personal, and poetic reflections. The artist draws on a wide range of sources—including personal experience, philosophical fragments, web-based media, and popular literature—without consistently situating them within academically validated frameworks. This reflects a common tension within the field of artistic research, where reflective, performative, and experiential modes of knowledge production often take precedence over systematic theoretical argumentation (Borgdorff, 2012). Such an approach is legitimate within practice-based research paradigms, but it challenges conventional academic criteria for coherence and discursive clarity. The result is a reflective form of theorising that is rich in expression but offers only limited applicability within academic scholarly contexts.

In addition to these considerations, the dissertation touches on the influence of video game aesthetics, which the artist identifies as a formative source of inspiration. This reference highlights an underexplored yet significant area for further investigation: the visual and spatial language of video games emerges from a confluence of art historical styles—such as impressionism, realism, surrealism, and abstract expressionism—and cinematic techniques including framing, lighting, and camera dynamics. Examining how these visual strategies inform the immersive environments found both in games and in multimedia installation art could offer valuable interdisciplinary insights. Such a perspective would further contextualise the artist's work within contemporary visual culture and digital media practice.

While Edmund Burke and Yi-Fu Tuan are cited in relation to the sublime, the absence of key figures such as Kant, Lyotard, or Adorno limits the philosophical depth of the discussion. Similarly, the treatment of space and atmosphere remains primarily intuitive. These central aesthetic concepts are treated as an intuitive or experiential phenomenon, yet foundational texts from phenomenology (e.g. Maurice Merleau-Ponty) as well as more recent phenomenological accounts (e.g. Gernot Böhme, Edward S. Casey) are missing. This weakens the connection between practice and reflection, especially in a research context that claims theoretical relevance. The psychoanalytic influence—hinting at Freud and existential motifs—is present but not systematically explored. Theories of the unconscious, dream, or the uncanny could have provided stronger foundations for the central theme of the psyche in space.

The concept of DIY, invoked by the artist, is appropriate within the context of punk and underground aesthetics but remains underdefined. A more substantial engagement with artistic experimentation—as a historically significant method in media art—would be beneficial. Here, references to kinetic art, expanded cinema, or light environments (e.g. Popper, 1968; Youngblood, 1970/2020; Lovejoy, 2004) could enrich the discussion. Despite the use of informal terminology, Şahin's approach—site-specific experimentation, generative visuals, trial-and-error methods—clearly aligns with this lineage of experimental media practices.

The sound component, treated as integral to the work, is conceptually and technically advanced. The use of ambient soundscapes, textural elements and noise demonstrates a refined sensitivity to space. However, the absence of references to sound studies (e.g. LaBelle, 2015) is a missed opportunity. Such theoretical engagement could illuminate sound's cultural, spatial, and epistemological functions beyond mood creation.

A notable gap in the dissertation is the lack of engagement with gender, identity, or social difference. The subjectivity that shapes the work is presented as universal rather than situated. Concepts such as gothic, romanticism or isolation are highly personal but not placed within discourses of embodied experience. Feminist and queer perspectives (e.g. Ahmed, 2006) could offer valuable counterpoints to the existential and introspective tone.

In conclusion *Sites of Psyche* is a personal, affectively rich, technically accomplished and atmospherically compelling project. Its core strength lies in the performative and improvisational approach to media art: an immaterial and material engagement with space through a reflexive process. However, the written portion does not yet reach the same level of depth. The personal, expressive tone is valuable yet should be balanced with a more critical apparatus and awareness of disciplinary standards. The reflective discourse would benefit from more rigorous theoretical integration, particularly from art history, media theory, and phenomenology.

This critique is offered not as a final judgement, but as a scholarly contribution to an ongoing conversation. Drawing inspiration from the present work, this discussion can be understood as an invitation to continue interdisciplinary research and to critically scrutinise personal artistic research within the broader art canon.

The work is carried out with a high degree of consistency and is particularly impressive in terms of its aesthetic quality and complexity. I therefore support the awarding of the doctorate in the field of fine arts and conservation of works of art to Ali Alperen Şahin.

Sincerely,



DI Dr. Martina Tritthart