

# Projects Desluz and ZN:PRDM (Neutral Zone: A River Passes Through Me) by Poéticas Digitais Group Gilberto Prado

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## Abstract

The purpose of this communication is to present some recent projects developed by the Poéticas Digitais group related to the theme of environment and flow, visible and invisible forces, and how to dialog with the construction of the context, in which the public is part of a large collaborative system related to the environment. The discussed projects are: “Desluz” (2010) and “ZN:PRDM – Zona Neutra: Passa um Rio Dentro de Mim (Neutral Zone: A River Passes Through Me)” from 2013.

## Keywords

Media Art, Environment, Dowsing, Flow, Poéticas Digitais

## Introduction: Experience and Belonging

To live is go from one space to another, trying insofar as possible to not bump into things.<sup>1</sup>

Georges Perec (1974, p. 14)

How does one make the various vectors and forces that make up our cross and circulations appear, even if we do not notice them? And how to compose with them?

Some layers may seem interesting to overlap. The first would be the layer of signs that are apparent and that guide flows. The second layer, the mapping of paths, signs or situations that are not so evident in our metropolises, which cross them from underneath or at different frequencies and are less noticeable. This type of interest also guides some of the work by the Poéticas Digitais Group<sup>2</sup>, such as the “Desluz” and “Amoreiras”

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<sup>1</sup> Vivre c'est passer d'un espace à l'autre, en essayant le plus possible de ne pas se cogner. Translated by O'Rourke, K.

<sup>2</sup> The Poéticas Digitais group was created in 2002 at the Visual Arts Department at ECA-USP as a multidisciplinary group to promote the development of experimental projects and a reflection on the impact of new technologies in the field of arts. The group is an unfolding of the wAwRwT project started by Gilberto Prado in 1995 and its participants are artists, researchers and students, with vary in each project (Prado, 2010b).

projects (Prado, 2010a), in which we have flows and movements that are not in our visible or audible tracks and frequencies but that affect us in some way. In the same line of conception of these projects is the ZN:PRDM (Neutral Zone: A River Flows Inside of Me) that also poetically explores these tracks and frequencies using antennas to neutralize energy, forked sticks to find water and mobile phones to reconstruct underground river routes. The projects are a starting point in revealing the current relationships with the city, some of which are crystallized, and to eventually generate the potential to destabilize the subject of conventional movements and routes following the paths.

Through art and digital systems in public areas, we can design new experiences in relation to the cities and our surroundings. In this manner, the intention is to encourage the interest, use, sense of belonging, and dialog in public areas, not only in parks and the usual places of leisure, but in all areas in general. Actions like these also intend to make streets a venue not only for functional moving, that is, to commute from one place to another, but for interactions without previous guidance.

The presence of technologies in areas subject to traffic has produced a new type of temporality and sociability. They have created a new way to perceive these areas and move across them. We generate an invisible and immaterial mesh after crossing electronic and digital technologies in these areas – no longer considered strange objects, but incorporated into the area itself.

In *Paris: Ville Invisible/Paris: invisible city* (Latour & Hermant, 1998) the authors show in text and image a perspective of these invisible meshes that cross the subsoil and the air of the cities. Data are provided by sensors installed in the urban areas, with remotely located monitoring rooms. Safety cameras are installed to monitor the traffic, traffic lights, telephone transmissions, water volume in dams, sewage,

airplanes, etc. Everything required to keep the city functioning and in supposedly stable conditions.

In the project *Rivers & Streets*, (Campos Junior, 2013), the author develops a process for the rivers that have been canalized and are hidden in the city of São Paulo. Many rivers and streams that, being concealed and out of our daily lives, are in a type of non-existent state as they are not in our field of vision and perception. Well, these controlled or uncontrolled systems are only noticed when they become defective or when catastrophes, natural phenomena or interventions occur that affect their – and our - routine.

It should be noted that all these new processes, that attest to the presence and influence of information and communications technology in the routine of contemporaneous citizens, represent new contexts for reflection and for the arts, with huge space for public intervention. It is a social and artistic imaginary world at stake and in transformation. As transitional spaces, they act as enablers or catalysts of actions that are sequentially triggered. According to Roy Ascott (2001), “meaning is not something created by the artist, distributed through the network, and *received* by the observer. Meaning is the product of interaction between the observer and the system, the content of which is in a state of flux, of endless change and transformation.” The artist proposes a context, an exploration of the relations between beings and things, a sensitive frame in which something may or may not be produced (Prado, 2003).

Insofar as the individual moves, its radius of action, of belonging can be activated by other elements. We can then think of the permeability of these shared spaces, by seeking a more poetic approach to the city, to allow exchange, discovery, creation and experience, recalling O’Rourke that “the environment map encompasses both the immediate, physical and urban surroundings we often walk by, our own actions and perceptions as pedestrians, and the cultural or ideological filter through which we see this experience” (O’Rourke, 2013. p. Xviii). This leads the individual to feel like belonging to the street, the square, places, that is, the public spaces, regardless if they do not have a large infrastructure, wrapping him in a state of harmony and commitment in his daily interactions with the city.

One of the intentions of the projects described is to conduct interactive pieces possessing a hybrid structure (not necessarily transformed with direct and prompt public intervention), the actions for which, however, are

incorporated into a larger system. This is an integration of normal or routine elements, like trees, antennas, vases, etc., with devices and apparent prostheses, electromechanical or cellular devices, etc., into the same piece. (Prado, 2016). People don’t know what to do, indecisive whether to interfere or not, touch or not, transpose or not. Is it allowed or not? This question is always present in our life, always hybrid in all senses, with its frontiers, matrixes and nuances.

Also, the relationship of a constructed group/object to an almost non-direct action in systems ensures a *quasi*-contemplative space in contrast to a very frequent obligation of action/intervention in interactive areas. Such *quasi* includes noises, either for the fascination in possible deviations, or for the poetic discovery of different ways to perceive the other and our complex position within these networks and systems. (Prado, 2013).

### Desluz

How Insects use the moonlight and starlight to mark location, maintaining a constant angle to get to and from their breeding places (Barghini, 2010). Insects are confused by the artificial light of our light bulb, trying to get closer to the source of light, flying in circles, forming clouds, attracted by the light in endless loops.

The light that attracts them is the ultraviolet wavelength that the human eye cannot see, but which acts as a sexual attractor of insects. Moths are attracted by the infrared light wavelength that our human eyes also cannot see, but for them it is a potent sexual attractor. Thus, electromagnetic frequencies have been covertly perceived through the ages under the moonlight or electric light, perpetuating the survival of species.

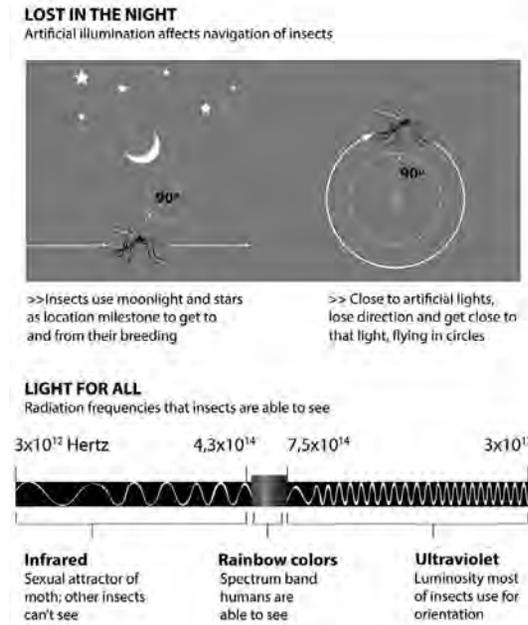


Figure 1. Infographic based on an illustration published in the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, 04/21/2009

Our exhibition space features a cube of transparent LEDs (8X8X8) that emit infrared light and loudspeakers that respond simultaneously to the flow of passers-by; in another place, a region of housed red lights, as attractors, conceal a hidden game of seduction. The flowing movement of the visitors in the red-light area is captured by a camera located on top of a structure, which films a top view of the area, a network, a mesh which scans an area and the flow of people passing by. The acquired information simultaneously feeds the system installed in the exhibition. This system consists of a cube of LEDs that emit infrared light, an Arduino board which creates the relationship between analog and digital data, and two computers that process and handle all data (input and output). Thus, the data sent by the remote camera that turns the lights of the exhibition cube on and off generate movements and flows. This process is dynamic, simultaneous, and occurs in real time. Meanwhile, nothing is seen or heard in the exhibition space, however the body perceives these other frequencies.

Sound is another important component of the work. Although the speakers are clearly seen, they emit

sound frequencies that cannot be heard by human ears. Although this distant flow is converted to sound frequencies which cannot be “felt” by the ears, when we approach the work we can feel the reverberation (and some discomfort) in our body. Yet we cannot see or hear it. The lights apparently remain transparent and dull, and the speakers emit sounds that are not audible to humans.

We note that the LED lights of the cube are not visible in the spectrum of our vision, which will require an additional device for them to be seen. In this case, we are counting on the cameras of personal mobile phones belonging to the visitors of the exhibition. By pointing at the LED cube with the mobile camera, visitors can ‘see’ an entire cloud of movements, which represent the flow of pedestrians in areas captured by the camera remotely and transmitted in real time.

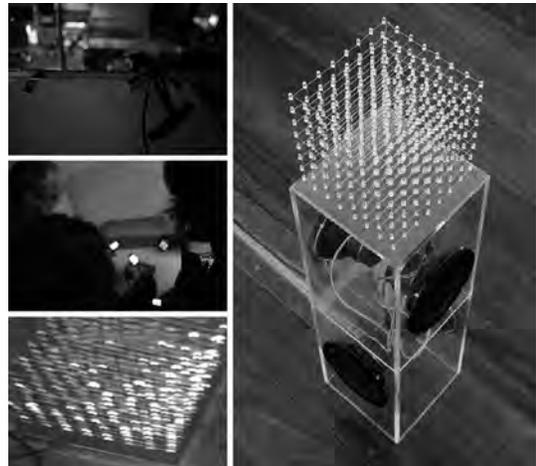


Figure 2. Desluz – Red Light district camera overview/movement of passers-by captured by the mobile phone camera/ Mobile phones pointing at Leds cube/ The flow of the pedestrians viewed through the mobiles/ The installation Desluz at Luciana Brito Gallery (photos: Poéticas Digitais and Érika Garrido), São Paulo, 2010.

As we approach and surround the exhibition, we are placed in such a restlessness, this endless flow, in search of light.

The work is subtle and the perception of the intensity in the change of lights is delicate. Desluz is a work of contemplation, and the public in direct contact with the piece cannot locally interact with it. There is only the LED cube and the sound system in place. It is a work of

reflection on interaction and sharing with one another.

Desluz is a non-light, an intense desire that burns but does not illuminate; it is felt but not seen, in the same manner as a dazed Icarus looked at the sun while it melted his wings on the path that lead to nowhere. The light is only visible through mobile cameras that move around the LED transparent cube, in an unveiling operation that the eye cannot see.

The work is about the discovery of the invisible, our provisional places, our flows and grids, layers that subtly overlap, that lure us but do not let us see them, betray our hidden yet so apparent senses, and bring to light our desires in an endless pursuit of the stars.

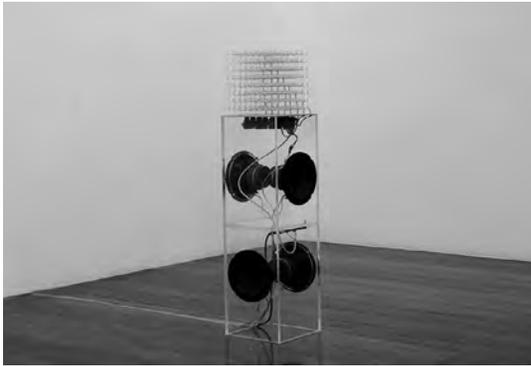


Figure 3. Desluz –Luciana Brito Gallery, São Paulo, 2010 (photo: Érika Garrido).

The work was presented at Galeria Espaço Piloto 16 on 09/30, # 8.ARTE, UnB, Brasília and a new version was displayed at Galeria Luciana Brito, in São Paulo, at the Galeria Expandida exhibition, curated by Christine Mello, from April 5 to April 20, 2010.

The *Poéticas Digitais* Group in this work, is composed by: Gilberto Prado (Coord.), Silvia Laurentiz, Andrei Thomaz, Rodolfo Leão, Maurício Taveira, Sérgio Bonilha, Luciana Kawassaki, Claudio Bueno, Clarissa Ribeiro, Claudia Sandoval, Tatiana Trivisani, Lucila Meirelles, Agnus Valente, Nardo Germano, Daniel Ferreira and Luis Bueno Geraldo.

## ZN: PRDM

### (Neutral zone: A river passes through me)

In its initial configuration, this artistic action was designed for the ZL Vortex Symposium: Urban Interventions - Laboratory, coordinated by Nelson Brissac Peixoto, Ary Perez, Gilberto Prado and Ruy Lopes, at the Maria Antonia University Center of USP. The laboratory cycle for the symposium took place from April 03rd to June 26th, 2013, at weekly meetings, bringing together specialists from different areas - engineering, urbanism, technology and the arts - to discuss and rethink one of the areas subject to the most intense urban transformations, the East Zone of São Paulo (Known as ZL – Zona Leste – in Portuguese). The Vortex chosen for the undertaking of the project was a portion of the suburb of the East Zone of São Paulo, a huge neighborhood (298.8 Km<sup>2</sup>, 3,620,494 inhabitants).

The ZL Vortex Project is delimited by rivers and avenues: Aricanduva, Verde-Jacú and Tietê (to the north), near the Ecological Park. Therefore, it represents a vortex that begins at Carmo Park. The area is served by different transportation systems: the subway, highways and passenger/freight trains. It is an articulation axis with Guarulhos airport, the South beltway and with the Port of Santos. The East Zone is undergoing an intense transformation process, due to large investments in infrastructure and public facilities. This is the place where new productive and urban arrangements and new social practices are emerging. But it also presents river basins and lowlands affected by occupation and extraction activities, improved buildings, industrial exploration, landfills and waste deposits. [4].

The area chosen to carry out our artistic action ZN:PRDM (Neutral zone: A river passes through me) was a small patch of the Vortex; one of the many areas of the ZL lacking in resources, one of the pockets with poor infrastructure and little political and government support. At “ZN:PRDM”, through distinct markings and maps, we seek indications and signs of underground streams, in addition to water ducts, sewers, wires and cables, garages, the subway, all in the overlapping paths and grounds of our cities.

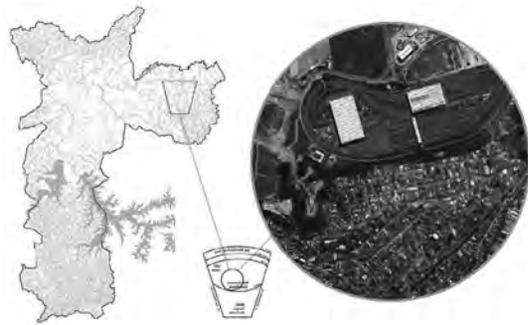


Figure 4. ZNPRDM - The area chosen to undertake our artistic action in the East Zone

### How to Listen to the Sound of the River Running Right Beneath Our Feet?

Before we talk about our walk in the East Zone, we would like to discuss some issues that guided our project.

Many rivers and streams that once meandered through cities are no longer visible (nor audible). For various reasons, attempts to tame them have multiplied, repressing them into linear and underground hidden paths, in long straight rows of pipes, channels and cement ducts; in rectified paths that sometimes suddenly explode during rains and floods, when the original spaces, beds and paths are reoccupied. Among references to this work is the “Rivers & Streets” project regarding the channeled rivers hidden in the city. Campos Junior (2013), one of the creators of this initiative, manifests his indignation at how much is spent to hide a river, because it truly is an “absurd engineering effort mobilized for this”, noting that, in an urban space such as the capital city of São Paulo, there is a sort of nonexistence of many rivers and streams that, being hidden and out of our daily lives, no longer belong to our field of vision and perception.

Another question that has concerned me for a long time is the direction of the drain in the vortex. When we, who are located under the equator, observe water drain from a sink, we see that it rotates counter clockwise, unlike what happens in the Northern Hemisphere. And what happens in the line that crosses between the two hemispheres?

Some years ago I went to the equator to see what occurs when the water does not rotate either way, when the whirlpool was at that crossed moment, when it is neither

here or there, but both, when these forces neutralize each other. These are interesting situations and moments, as in art: crossing this imaginary line, from one side to the other, this brief moment of intersection, of silence, the moment of being suspended in a whirlpool.

Then another question came up: where did the water that descended after the forces were rearranged go? Where did it go after it left our visual field?

To accomplish the project “ZN:PRDM”, we employed some dowsing principles, “evaluation technique and control of energy” (Hartman, 2006, p.50) which in its GrecoLatin etymology means sensitivity to radiation rays or waves and is commonly known as an effective technique (Mendonça, 2005, p.10) to find rudimentary water with the use of pendulums and forks. In this same perspective, we built an antenna to point to and “neutralize” the places where there is a perceptible energy variation through dowsing. Neutralizing the resend effect, re-circulating that energy from below, creating spaces from Neutral Zones (ZNs) that tell us that we should stop and keep to what surrounds us, and not necessarily to what is explicit and visible.

What attracted our interest was to create and handle this energy field variation. How could someone sense that and how could we find these points, make them visible and neutralize them? How to apply a force in the opposite direction, what tension would be required? Then, we realized that it was necessary to ground it. We had to join the Earth. This energy attracts ones interest the moment that everything stops and that tension is somehow in suspension yet it is there, still in our bodies.

Then we created our copper antenna to be nailed to the wall, the nail directed towards the magnetic north pole. The energy entering a spiral end crosses it and leaves it through the other end and goes to back the ground. In this manner it would be possible to create not a West, North, South or East Zone but a Neutral Zone (ZN).

Thereafter, we had some fields we wanted to cross:

A search for underground rivers and streams, secret paths of our invisible metropolis;

A forked stick, to sense the energy fields that indicate the presence of water;

An antenna, to neutralize these zones.

We then went to the East Zone in a randomly chosen area within the great vortex, walking without a destination and looking for the curves of rivers and streams that were left behind, not the linear and straight or corrected flows.

At first, we did not use any map or indication, because we wanted to try to find signs as we walked. It was a question of seeking and discovering, of tuning feelings and perceptions. We will get to a place we do not know, that we have never been to, and the shapes, nuances, ways and indications will guide us. It was a question of searching. Trying to identify riverbeds and streambeds now running in pipelines and constructions erected as a consequence. Then, we started to randomly look for any sign of underground water and hidden rivers. We went there during the weekend, in the middle of the week, and we came back through straight, long, empty streets... others were crowded, with many people, traffic, noise, in a state of confusion, and others were narrow, difficult to access, alleys, slums, unfinished and provisional constructions that have been this way for several generations.



Figure 5. ZN:PRDM – The water flow emerging in the back of the house...That was our starting point.

Then, one day, suddenly, from a raised area, we saw one street that had a curve design, a different structure from

the others, and we could visually identify the water flow emerging and then it disappeared in the back of a house...

It was a stream appearing from nowhere and then disappearing.

That was our starting point.

After that, we looked for a cluster of mulberry tree in the outskirts, which was removed by “water seekers”, namely Vô - Grandpa (Geraldo Francisco Ribeiro) and Jocimar Carlos Batista, our special collaborators in this project that preceded the locations of water in that area. We marked the sites where we sensed its presence.



Figure 6. ZN:PRDM – dowsing

Then, we asked local people to use the fork, and sense for the water, and thereafter we asked them to tell us about their experience and memories.



Figure 7. ZN:PRDM – dowsing

Younger boys did not know about those paths, about underground rivers that used to flow on the surface, the older man said: “There used to be a stream behind my house, it was clean, without waste, but then, when they built...” Our concern at that moment was not to know

if the person could handle the fork and find signs of water, rather it was with the perception of these apparent rivers, most of them poorly treated and polluted, and the development of a poetic map with these stories and memories that were remembered and retold. Then, following the flow, we entered the slums, went over other streams, inside homes, and whenever possible, we took our antenna.



Figure 8. ZN:PRDM – antenna



Figure 9. ZN:PRDM – antenna

We drew graffiti at some of these points, on the walls, in the streets, and we gave the antennas to anyone who wanted to take them or place one of them in their home, to remember these invisible water flows.

With some people of the community we marked these

areas, creating trails and routes of another flow, caring for this river, among so many other possible rivers and streams, seeking to restore forgotten and/or erased memories.

Finally, we developed a mobile application that reproduced the sound of underground water as we walked through these places with our own cell phone. Then it was possible to pass through listening to the sound of water from the hidden river also passing by right there, beneath one's feet, returning it to perception. Trying to at least recreate the invisible water noise. A noise that could make us dream and, perhaps, act.



Figure 10. Neutral zone: A river passes through me. A partial schema of one the mapped areas to walk with the cell phone listening to the sound of the river running right beneath our feet

The Poéticas Digitais Group in this work is composed by: Gilberto Prado (Coord.), Agnus Valente, Andrei Thomaz, Clarissa Ribeiro, Claudio Bueno, Daniel Ferreira, Luciana Ohira, Nardo Germano, Renata La Rocca, Sergio Bonilha and Tatiana Travisani. The ZN work: PRDM was presented on June 19th in the communication of Gilberto Prado, with the description of various steps and procedures of the project at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eas9ZI-nZVw>

## Invisible spaces, Intensive, Fluid and Simultaneous Experiences

The poetic approach to the presented works claims a place for art as a sensitive field of knowledge which is not subjugated to the same scientific validation tools. In truth, art broadens this field of knowledge by including the influence of flows and subtle fields, bringing to light invisible forces and fluxes at play.

There is an interesting aspect to the field of action of invisible space, of unorthodox forces and of poetic deviations which are present in the works by *Grupo Poéticas Digitais*, which we would like to summarize. Among them it is possible to point out that the changes brought about by the invisible space in its intensive experiences of fluidity and simultaneity imply a reflection on the capacity that space possesses of presenting itself and activate feelings in others (Mello, 2009). Under such conditions, the experience of space is created in its provisional reality, in its relationship with the receptor. Space, under this point of view, dislocates senses: from conceiving works that contain an internal space to the conception of works that generate space outside of themselves, that activate other spaces in addition to those perceived in the surroundings. It provokes, with this, a diversity of experiences as much as in the receptor's body as in the sensory space as a whole. It can be noted that, in such circumstances, space is experienced not only as the internal space of a work but also as a sensitive element capable of activating the space outside of the work, in this manner promoting an amplified dimension of apprehension for the environment in which the work is presented. (Mello, 2009, p.282)

In this way the artistic experiences such as *Desluz* and *ZN:PRDM (Neutral zone: A river passes through me)*, activate spaces proposing deviations and bringing out other points of view and experiences that link and amplify reports and fleeting relationships that may occur during these journeys. Under this perspective, the space of the work as well as social space is observed as an unstable conception, as a force field between practices and experiences in our daily life.

Such a procedure acts in the sense of stimulating the receptor to feel (un)familiar, provoking within him a state of strangeness, suspension of time, in a daily life perspective, that can modulate the relationship between people and spaces. The Poéticas Digitais Group makes use of such perceptive devices to activate in the public

critical modes in which to perceive space and the tensions that exist between the work's space, including the influence of flows and subtle fields from the environment and social reality. A shift of balance that also concerns leaving a personal scale for a collective scale of observation/participation, which brings with it a sense of belonging and sharing.

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### **Author Biography**

Gilberto Prado, artist and coordinator of the Poéticas Digitais. Group. He studied Engineering and Visual Arts at the State University of Campinas and in 1994 he obtained his PhD in Arts at the University of Paris I - Sorbonne. He has participated in several art exhibitions in Brazil and abroad. Among his prizes, one can mention 9º Prix Möbius International des Multimédias, Beijing, China (2001); Rumos (2000) and Transmídia (2002) - Itaú Cultural; and 6º Prêmio Sergio Motta de Arte e Tecnologia (2006). He works with art in networks and interactive installations. Currently he is Professor at the Post-Graduate Programs of Visual Arts at the Communication and Arts School at University of São Paulo and PGP Design at the University Anhembi Morumbi.