

# The Echoing River; A DRS 2023 Lab

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*This DRS lab was a ten-day project carried out at Espacio Open on Zorroztarre in central Bilbao in June 2022. The Echoing River sought to address the theme of Creative Industries and Public space through sonic placemaking. With this paper, which reports on the Lab outputs, we hope to demonstrate new ways of activating abandoned and overlooked public spaces in creative ways. The lab exemplifies a way for Bilbao to involve people in experimental, hands-on creative work that reveals the value of an enriched shared public sphere. Interdisciplinary international collaboration is fundamental to our approach. The Echoing River convened students and staff from three different universities, and partners from more than five other organisations. The immediate outputs of the Lab include a series of sonic artworks that were experienced by more than 250 people over two days. Outcomes include an increased awareness of the value of culture in overlooked urban places, and an appreciation of the power of exploratory creative practice to bring people together. Outputs include videos, furniture, installation, ceramics, and sound design.*

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**Keywords:** Cultural placemaking, sonic placemaking, sound design, practice based research, participative design, co-creation.



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## Introduction – Precedents and Team

As previous attendees and contributors to DRS (2016, 2018) we were interested in exploring alternative submission formats that offered the opportunity to carry out site specific practice based research. For us this holds the possibility to engage with local concerns and stimulate participation on the ground. We first became involved when project lead Dr John Fass (LCC) contacted conference organisers to ask about the parameters of the new Labs format in June 2021. John then spent a year corresponding with conference organisers, visiting Bilbao, and drafting a project outline along with colleague Alastair Steele (LCC) and Dr Tyler Fox (University of Washington). As design researchers in practice based institutions we were seeking opportunities to demonstrate the ways design research extends beyond academic papers, symposia, keynotes, and panel discussions. A key part of this was building an international team of potential partners and participants. We did this by drawing on the existing relationship between University of the Arts London and the Mondragon University Global Digital Humanities course in Bilbao. We also contacted the Basque Bio Design Center led by Adele Orcajada. Together we drafted the outline of a collaboration between our three institutions that would take place over ten days at Espacio Open, a Makerspace on Zorrozturre island adjacent to Mondragon University and well known to students in Bilbao. This collaboration centred on students working together to make exploratory creative responses to the immediate local environment. The three institutions recruited 14 students from MA User Experience Design (LCC), Basque Bio Design Center, and Global Digital Humanities (Mondragon University) with diverse disciplinary backgrounds including product design, sociology, film production, and archaeology.

As a focus for the activities undertaken and for the lab we chose the relationship with the River Nervion. The river surrounds Zorrozturre but there is no direct access for people to the water for either leisure or work. The activities undertaken involved students working in pairs and groups to generate experimental creative ideas, to prototype those ideas then evaluate and realise them in ways that could be experienced directly by a visiting public. For example, one project chose to materialise sonically the changing levels of the River Nervion using metal water bottles suspended to create a grid of chiming sounds. Another group created a soundscape inside the building comprised of recordings from the river, underwater light effects and a rising sun. These outputs were the outward result of the activities undertaken, the sum of which we consider to be the more valuable outcomes of the collaboration, in other words the design is not the design.

Some of the dominant influences on a place can be what Bedoya (2013) calls 'disbelonging'. We observed this happening in the Zorrozturre location with many people expressing their alienation from their places of living and working by the rapid and disempowering progress of gentrification. We are influenced by Silberberg's (2013) notion of 'places-in-the-making' and how cultural practices contribute to the emerging relationship to place enjoyed by citizens. Similarly, we draw on Courage & McKeown's (2018) work relating to social material in cultural placemaking, in particular the importance they place on 'citizen-led agency, new conceptual frameworks and practical methodologies'. The Echoing River sought to enact some of these ideas through collaborative practice-based situated design work. The Echoing River can be considered to demonstrate McKeown and Courage's (2018) argument that cultural placemaking is now beginning to move out of its traditional spaces; artists' live-work spaces, cultural quarters, and landmark arts centres and engage with more street-level and improvised urban settings. These may be less regulated and so less likely to be subject to top-down policy making. These new spaces for cultural production offer an increased chance of involving non-traditional audiences for culture and those who may feel excluded from the more established venues.

The work that arises from this confluence of factors is characterised by its temporal fluidity, often existing for a week or an evening, but nevertheless based on weeks, months or even years of careful

collaborative nurturing. Lind (in Jackson 2015, p. 65) says that curation in this context is ‘a more viral presence consisting of signification processes and relationships between processes and relationships between objects, people, places, ideas, and so forth, a presence that strives to create friction and push new ideas’. We take this idea further and suggest that the co-creation context is a self curating one. Certainly we worked hard on the mise-en-scene of the final presentation evening of The Echoing River, but we took the more essential creative work to consist in the processes of sharing, communicating, ideating, and realising of the preceding ten days, again: the design is not the design.

## **Theme: Creative Industries and Public Space**

We chose to address the *Creative Industries and Public Space* submission theme since the research and design practice we have respectively pursued over the previous decade has been focused on the application of creativity to real world situations. We are particularly driven by the challenge of taking experimental and exploratory creative work to urban settings. This work includes configuring the characteristics of externalising instruments (Fass, 2016); building shared understanding through physical artefacts (Fass et. al. 2020); and making as a pedagogical practice (Mengist et. al. 2020). In addition, on MA User Experience at London College of Communication (on which all authors have been lecturers) we have completed over fifty student partnership and knowledge exchange projects that place experimental design practice in real world contexts including with Axa Insurance, IBM, BBC, and Extinction Rebellion. With this work we seek to open a space for contextual provocation (Steele, 2023 PhD pending) by which we mean applied design that problematises creative praxis in real world situations. This work is in sympathy with the principles of meta-design (Giaccardi, 2005) and social design (Manzini, 2015) in that it situates design processes and designers as convening and empowering participants to consider the social sphere as a shared communal space enlivened and reified by cultural production.

The ways we tackled the challenges of the theme can be summarised as; situated, participative, and critical. Situated design (Greenbaum and Kyng, 2020, Suchman 1987) has traditionally referred to task-based workplace analyses that attend to the details of how people carry out tasks with technologies. Instead we refer to the notion of cultural situatedness which Rehm et. al. (2003) call ‘the interplay between context(s) and situation’. In other words The Echoing River Lab existed in an identifiable place, Espacio Open, which occupied part of a shared multi-use repurposed post-industrial building. We expanded outwards to include the adjacent buildings, the inhabitants of the building and the surrounding area, their interests, work, and everyday practices of socialising and communicating. We expanded further to include the cultural and economic predicament of Zorrotzaurre island currently subject to a process of gentrification and development (Hernandez, 2021). One of the driving illusions of this process is that it assumes culture does not exist in a place unless it is officially sanctioned and recognised in the form of institutions and organisations or in the new masterplan for a place. One of the side effects is cultural erasure (Gordon, 2018) as old buildings are demolished, established businesses close, and new residents move into an area whose identity is planned out in distant boardrooms. The Echoing River was an attempt to counter this story, to demonstrate that culture is everywhere, that there is much to be valued in existing social practices and informal creative work that takes place outside galleries and art schools.

The second way we tackled the theme of *Creative Industries and Public Space* was by placing participation at the centre of our approach. This unfolded in three main ways. Firstly, students from three different institutions worked together to create a series of sonic interventions in public space. We take collaboration to consist in a kind of radical participation, one which is reciprocal (beneficial to all parties), generative (creative outcomes are produced) and prosocial (Kou et. al. 2020) (relationship and community building). In addition, the students were from different disciplines, in some cases with very different notions of meaning, sense making and generativity. MA User Experience Design is a professionally focused, design-led course that equips students with the specialist skills to conceive, prototype and produce human-centred experiences. The Basque Bio Design Center takes a strategic approach oriented towards the innovation of sustainable materials.

Global Digital Humanities at Mondragon University aims to reflect on the application of technology in favour of people and to anticipate upcoming changes. Students were required to negotiate the different interpretations of meaning and knowledge exchange implied by these diverse disciplines. Secondly, in the course of designing and realising their projects students involved the other people around them including passers-by, visitors to the building and other creative practitioners in the vicinity. This meant that influences from outside the group of students found their way into the works, creating a mini ecosystem of interested extra participants. Thirdly, at the end of the Lab we invited people to come in person and experience the work produced by the student groups. This resulted in a live audience of 250 people over 4 hours; DRS attendees, Espacio Open regulars, friends and family of the students, additional collaborators and participants. In this way The Echoing River supported the participation of a wide constituency of people; from the building, the island, the conference, and the city.

The third way we tackled the theme of *Creative Industries and Public Space* was by working critically. Belsey (2002) proposes that critical practice and understanding is characterised by an awareness of theory. That is, working critically means proceeding with an appreciation of the ways theory deepens and contextualises creative work. Going further, Bardzell and Bardzell (2013) say critical design ‘foregrounds the ethics of design practice, reveals potentially hidden agendas and values, and explores alternative design values’. In the context of The Echoing River working critically meant acknowledging the wider systemic forces that shaped the Lab. These included the DRS conference, availability of funding through our respective institutions, and the post-industrial conditions of the physical and social environment we were working in. Addressing one of the questions posed in the theme text; ‘How do neighbourhoods provide citizens with opportunities to enjoy everyday relationships with the city’s space at the same time as they seek innovative and creative development and lively activities?’ we questioned whether this adversarial positioning for culture is accurately reflected in Bilbao. Instead of seeing *innovative and creative development* and *lively activities* as separate and different to *everyday relationships with the city’s space* we seek to provide experiences that involve people in situated culture making in the city, building belonging and connection to place and people.

The specific needs of Bilbao were addressed by The Echoing River in a few ways. Being visitors to the city we recognise these insights are contingent. Bilbao has long positioned itself as a place for culture. This implies the context of large cultural institutions such as Guggenheim Bilbao that draw visitors in large numbers (Franklin, 2016). It also implies more intangible cultural assets such as cuisine and gastronomy, language and identity. With the decline in heavy industry of Bilbao the city consciously built a reputation as a culturally rich environment (Medeiros, 2019). In the specific area of Zorrotzaurre, a long overlooked industrial zone with few inhabitants cut off from the rest of the city, Bilbao has embarked on a process of cultural reclamation (Olazabal and Broto, 2022) at the same time as it supports and sponsors land-use redevelopment through building new educational institutions. This approach risks confining creative industries to these new buildings, and denoting public spaces as those places which have received specific municipal attention. The Echoing River aimed not just to question these assumptions but to demonstrate through embodied experiences how creative industries can be domestic, unexpected hybrid practices taking place in informal settings. In this way we hoped to draw attention away from particular cultural forms such as street music or graffiti and to suggest that grass roots cultural work that is situated, participative, collaborative and exploratory can contribute meaningfully to public cultural policy making.

## Structure and Process

We were excited about the DRS Lab format. The initial call for DRS seemed to us to be an opportunity to create the conditions of situated, emergent, creative research. We began by talking to DRS organizers to understand the goals of the experimental format, and to ensure we were aligned. Once the Lab themes were publicized we coalesced around the “creative industries and

public space” topic; our shared interest in applying creativity to real world settings fit well with this topic. In this call, we noted a number of sonic and musical examples (street buskers, MTV music awards, etc.) that helped us find creative direction. We began by seeking exemplars of creative practice, relevant theory, and most importantly seeking local partners.

We referred initially to experimental, participatory workshops that resulted in creative outputs. This included Felix Blume’s “Site Specific Workshop” (2019), the Festival of Site Specific Sound Art (2011), Dprime’s Mobile Bioenergy Lab (2015), and more. These projects shared an emphasis on situational and relational encounters between artists and designers and places. That is, the creative outcomes are emergent based on time, place, passersby, and interlocutors. Creative practitioners are facilitators of the outcomes, rather than sole creators of disconnected aesthetic output. We knew that our goal would be to facilitate emergent, creative experiences.

The participative aspect of our strategy with regard to The Echoing River was in the first instance to recognise that as visitors we were outsiders to the places, people and structures we wanted to work within. Secondly, we were clear that it was our intention to convene a group of students to work together to realise the outcomes of the Lab. In between these two aims we identified the need to liaise between DRS conference organisers, our respective institutional networks and the ‘ground truth’ possibility of forging new personal and professional relationships. The success of the Echoing River would not have been possible without the collaboration and generosity of our local partners. Our partners helped us find students from the University of Mandragon and the Basque Bio Design Center, provided tools, introductions to artisans and citizens working and living on the island, and local knowledge of where to source materials. Espacio Open provided studio and exhibition space. Without these we would not have been successful. Yet garnering these partnerships requires a specific kind of emotional labor, which should be noted by anyone seeking to host or do this kind of work.

The critical aspect of our strategy was to problematise and externalise the complex relationships to place that our many partners brought to the Lab. These included the precarious status of Espacio Open and its resources, the push for more creative methods to be used by Digital Humanities Students and the material engagements of the Basque Bio Design Centre. Critical creativity implies not just practice informed by theory but an analysis of prevailing social and political conditions. In this context we placed relationship to place at the centre of our critical approach. Similarly, material compensation is a critical component to ensuring these relations are not extractive, but mutually reciprocal. For example, as we worked with Espacio Open, it became clear that high attendance on the night of the exhibition would benefit them. This was not only having an influx of hungry and thirsty conference attendees at the cafe, but an opportunity to show cultural relevance to their city.

The development of the Lab ideas involved a series of online meetings between the three principal organisers, convened by Dr John Fass. Through these conversations we gradually aligned our diverse interests and articulated what we might wish to do in Bilbao. As experienced design researchers we were particularly interested in research outputs beyond the conventional paper presentation, symposium or workshop formats. The next phase was building a local network. John did this initially through emails and then online meetings, explaining our aims and asking what partners might wish to do and how best they could participate. One early contact, Agirre Lehendakaria, had clear institutional aims in place already and so did not end up being an active collaborator for us. Next John made an in-person visit to Bilbao to visit Espacio Open and Mondragon University. He also made personal contact at that time with Adele Orcajada of the Bilbao Bio Design Center. This visit was crucial in understanding the limits of engagement, the physical nature of facilities at Espacio Open and the appetite for participation from students.

Our respective roles on the project involve much crossover, we are close collaborators with adjacent skills. A rough division of responsibility resulted in John Fass doing most of the organization work, building partnerships and collaborators, communicating with students and raising funding. Alastair

Steele assumed responsibility for the pedagogical structure and process when the Lab started, guiding and supporting students through a co-design process towards creative realisation. Dr Tyler Fox acted as a critical friend, providing creative direction and provocations to the students as they developed their ideas and materials. Ronnie Deelen, a sound artist provided on site technical support and also contributed significantly to critical articulation as the projects took shape. Up to the onsite delivery we worked closely together to articulate our aims and to relate them to the particular context we were interested in. For example, Alastair Steele conducted a site survey remotely to understand the various physical characteristics of the island and the river, Dr John Fass researched precedents and examples to communicate our ideas, and Dr Tyler Fox pointed us towards theoretical and critical resources.

## **On Site Experience**

The Echoing River DRS Lab was scheduled to dovetail with DRS 2022, to maximise interaction between Lab participants, conference delegates, and workshop outcomes. We began at Espacio Open on Zorrotzaure a week before the DRS conference started, with the work culminating at an event on the second evening of the conference. Our hope was that participants would engage meaningfully with Zorrotzaure, its culture and people, with each other, then share their experiences in design form with DRS delegates on an evening suited to discursive, collective exploration.

We had aimed to connect to the conference keynote on the topic of Ecosystems by positioning the river as an urban ecosystem in balance with people and culture through sonic placemaking. Unwittingly, we had considered it in ways consistent with what Haraway terms the 'god trick'; top down, from a distance, at scale (1988). What developed through the participants' work was allowing the place, the people and the culture to activate us. The DRS lab format enabled us to create a kind of virtuous circle, where the Lab was animated by the life and culture of the river, the biscuit factory and all its makers and creatives, the island of Zorrotzaure with its broken statues and birdsong and echoes, then in turn we invited DRS delegates and others, sharing the precarious creative culture of Zorrotzaure.



*Figure 1. Espacio Open workspace and Lab collaborator, creative director Karim Asry*

## **Participation & criticality**

On the first day of the Echoing River Lab, staff and students were welcomed at Espacio Open by creative director Karim Asry, and given a guided tour and history of the iconic Artiach biscuit factory it occupies. The remainder of the day took the form of a one-day workshop. Staff and students introduced themselves. Initial groups of three or four were formed, and were tasked with exploring their surroundings. The groups were set based on even distribution of disciplinary backgrounds and institutions, to maximise knowledge exchange and catalyse interdisciplinary working.

First, consistent with an asset focused approach (Harrison et al., 2019) and appreciative that culture is everywhere, and embedded in the everyday (Unsworth et al., 2011), groups were asked to survey the cultures, social practices and creative activities of the surrounding buildings, yards and open spaces, paying particular attention to sound. They were encouraged to deploy their disciplinary knowledge from BioDesign, User Experience Design and Digital Humanities, as well as intuition. This initial exercise based on immediate, instinctive responses, started a process of ideation that developed with Lab participants' experiences of the location, materials, each other, and other people living and working there. On returning to Espacio Open, students discussed their experiences, then were guided through rapid production of multiple sketches for initial design responses. These were displayed and reviewed by staff and students at the end of day one. Ideas to be progressed were chosen by vote.

The following day new groups self-selected to develop specific ideas and discussions. By collectively evaluating and appreciating shared observations, and valuing synergies between participants, it was possible to re-organise quickly, to evenly distribute disciplines and set the goal of producing rough prototypes by the end of the day. Each new group was tasked with materialising their proposal as quickly as possible. We encouraged participants to 'learn' the materials available on site through handling and manipulating them, and to improvise ways to combine existing skill sets through



making. The resulting low-resolution prototypes were presented to staff and students at the end of the second day to gather feedback from the wider group and to reinforce the quick cycle of production. The remainder of the week followed the pattern of iteration with regular, informal peer and daily staff reviews. This process guided the production of successive, increasingly more resolved, prototypes.

Over the ten days different combinations of smaller groups of 2-3 participants formed to pursue side-projects. These smaller groups and projects grew naturally amongst gaps in production, whilst students waited for processes such as 3d printing and laser cutting, and deliveries to arrive. This work was self-initiated, reflecting the emergent conversations and relationships that were taking place. The recombinatorial, productive atmosphere of the Lab encouraged staff to make works alongside, and responding to, developing student projects.



*Figure 2. Participants review and comment on early design ideas; material exploration of river water, light and bluetooth speakers*

Participants deployed technologies agnostically and combined disciplinary knowledge in postdisciplinary ways that acknowledged but moved beyond historic applications), e.g. 3d printing clay, fishing with hydrophones. The processes and local expertise available on the island and in the biscuit factory encouraged a kind of ‘institutional disobedience’ (Ings, 2019, P.52). Reaching across departments in the academy can feel contrived or effortful. On the island knocking on doors felt conspiratorial, even, in Graeber’s terms, a little piratical (Graeber, 2023).

## **Realisation**

Over the ten days of the Lab, participants developed strategies to participate with each other and the Zorrotzaurre environment. Students worked together to conceive, make and present sonic experiences across a range of media engaging with the site conditions and realising in physical, audible and tangible forms their interpretation of and response to the place and the people they met. Physical and material engagement was used widely to build understanding between participants and the people and situations they encountered (Fass et. al. 2020).

Final outcomes, presented at the event on the second evening of DRS 22, embodied situated ‘material speculations’ (Wakkary, 2015), speculative in that they reflected alternative, sometimes hidden versions of the island’s life, formed from local materials, to the economic and urban speculation of the pending urban plan. A final review of the works by Lab members took place just prior to the evening event. Mise en scene for each outcome was provided in part by immediate surroundings. For instance, the echoic qualities of an upper corridor amplified and transformed recordings taken from under the surface of the Nervion and played through a borrowed PA system

## **Results and Outcomes**

Our lab culminated in an evening-long exhibition of 10 immersive, sonic installations. Each piece responded to the island of Zorrotzaurre, its residents, physical relationship to the city of Bilbao, and



proposed plans for gentrification and speculative economic revitalization. Close to 250 people, DRS conference attendees, locals, and other visitors to Bilbao attended the event.

**Earwave (Siyuan Li, Olatz Pereda, Nabil Kaoutli Sainz)**

This project used tangible amplification of the surroundings through 3D printed ceramics. Students designed different ear horns and an accompanying sound walk through the building and site. They worked with a local artisan to print the ceramics, creating relations between students and locals.



*Figure 3. A visitor practices close listening with a ceramic ear horn*



*Figure 4. Visitors using earwave to explore the site, holding these 3d-printed clay forms to their ears, new, hyper-local sound-worlds were revealed.*

**Illuntasuna (Miren Pascual Beltran de Heredia, Vicki Sun, Eduardo Loreto)**

Students created a space to explore dynamic movement, change and instability in a shifting soundscape. Their goal was to destabilize assumptions through playful interactions.



*Figure 5. Illuntasuna used every day materials, lights, and a sound composition to transform the space*

**There are People There (Sofia Alexiou, Dany Garcia Solano, Elsa Gil, Maialen Borrero)**

A two channel video that bridged the river with sound and performance. The work draws attention to the geographical and cultural distance and disconnection between the island and the rest of the city.





*Figure 6 Video still from “There are People There,” a participant waves toward Zorrotzaure*

### **A Place to Sit (Alistair Steele)**

Humanising the riverside by providing a place to sit and listen. The parasitic architecture of this work sits lightly on the site, providing subtle commentary on the lack of accessibility to the river on the island. The table, which disassembles easily, was gifted to Espacio Open in the hope that they are able to use it in the future.



*Figure 7. Two people enjoying the table on the day of the exhibition*



### **Hydrophone Fishing** (John Fass, Ronnie Deelen)

Listening to the river from beneath the surface. Interactants are encouraged to detect the invisible, and to experience the river in new, embodied way. The work upends a familiar pastime, focused on the hyperlocal of the island and the river.



*Figure 8. Two attendees fishing for sound in the river*

### **Drift** (Dora Álvarez Domínguez, Farah Zia, Ekain Mendiola Ardanza)

A sound and light installation designed to emulate being underwater in the vast hallway of old cookie factory. The artists sought to emulate immersion of the river, and the building, through a poetic experience while being parsimonious with materials.



*Figure 9. An exhibit attendee walking in the transformed tunnel*

**28 de Junio** (Sofia Alexiou, Dany Garcia Solano Elsa Gil, Maialen Borrero)

Depicting the rivers tidal data of that day, with one historical high point due to flooding (which also prompted the closure of the old biscuit factory), this work strives to provide a playful way to feel and experience data. The work is participatory, situated, and inviting participants to engage through playful means.



*Figure 10. Exhibit attendees activating the playful sculpture*



**Confesionario en la Ribera** (Markel Crespo Ramos, Nabil Kaoutli, Sainz Siyuan Li)

A site-specific narrative developed from interviews with inhabitants of Zorroturre Island. Local stories told in Basque, but not translated, increase the localized nature of the work. The artists, from Bilbao, create critical commentary on gentrification and the island through their interviews with local residents, but shield it from outsiders by avoiding translating what is said.

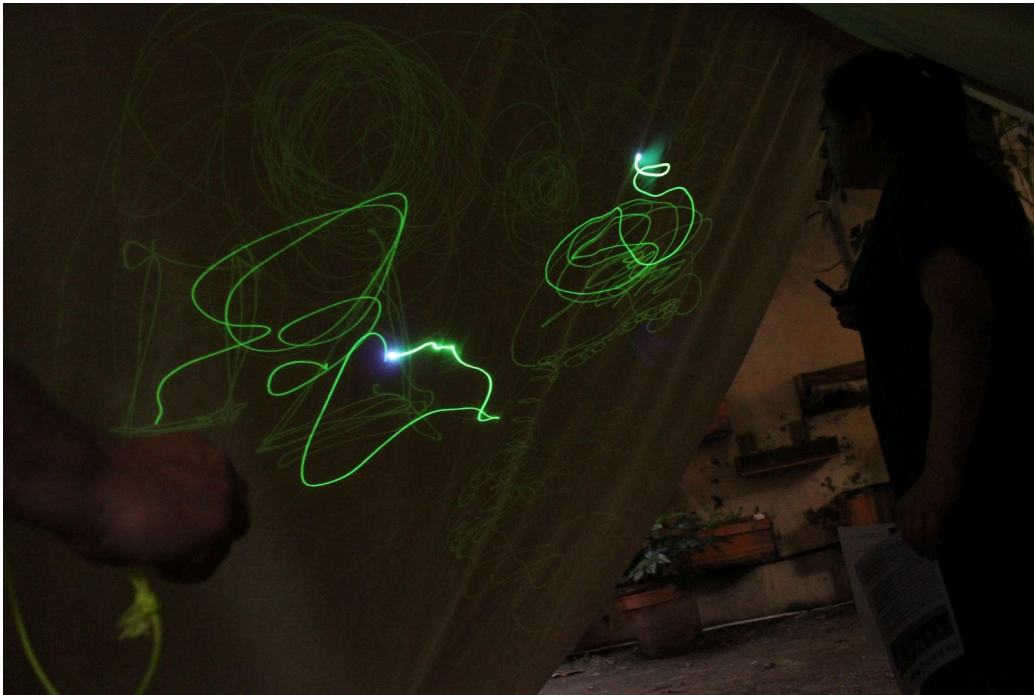


*Figure 11. Passersby watch the site-specific video installation*

**Drawing the Echo** (John Fass, Ronnie Deelen, Tyler Fox)

Transitory playfulness: using UV lasers and photo-sensitive paint, a canvas is turned into a playful tent where attendees create ephemeral drawings in the cafe garden.





*Figure 1. Two People sketch ephemeral drawings with a laser pointer at night in the tent*

### **Inside the Biscuit (Ronnie Deelen)**

When you enter the building you enter the biscuit via a site specific sound installation. Manipulated recording of the artist eating one of the biscuits made by the same company that operated in this building previously.



*Figure 13. The Artiaku biscuit box hides electronics and a speaker for the installation*

The response to the installations was overwhelmingly positive. For example, one attendee posted the following to Twitter:

“Absolute highlight of #drs2022bilbao so far, and it's going to be hard to beat, was the @EspacioOpen @mauxlcc and others' "The Echoing River" - incredibly well-executed, thoughtful critical site specific works all done in ten days! Thank you @johnfass @tylersfox and all! ✨✨🐼” (Cowlshaw)

Placemaking is active involving people, practices, and the material qualities of the site making such experiences difficult to quantify (Cohen, et al, 2018). The ephemeral nature of our temporary sonic installations further increases the difficulty to quantify our results. Perhaps we missed an opportunity to capture the qualitative response to our exhibit more robustly. That said, we believe our Lab was quite successful as a part of the conference. Several things contributed to this success.

For conference attendees, the Echoing River offered an experiential counterpoint to the typical conference activities. Many conference attendees commented on how much they appreciated the event after spending the day giving and/or listening to conference papers. The novel juxtaposition of watching research presentations and walking through a massive industrial hallway transformed by light and sound would likely be welcome at any conference. Yet, a focus on the novelty of our exhibit would disregard the critical lens the DRS audience brings to such an event.

DRS is a collection of design research experts. Makers and theorists in their own right, such an audience is primed to be thoughtful visitors. Conferences suggest that knowledge is in the papers and sessions, that is formally constituted knowledge. Yet, as design researchers also understand that embodied experiences are also generators of knowledge. The situated, embodied installations provided insight and perspective to a little-known slice of life in Bilbao that expanded the borders of the conference. As such, The Echoing River was successful as an experiment in cultural placemaking, arguably more so for the conference attendees than others.

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