

## Artikkeli II

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ROUTLEDGE ADVANCES IN ART AND VISUAL STUDIES

# ARTS-BASED METHODS FOR DECOLONISING PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH



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## 12 Paint That Place With Light!

### Light Painting as a Means of Creating Attachment to Historical Locations— An Arts-Based Action Research Project

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#### Introduction

This chapter explores whether participatory light painting workshops conducted at cultural heritage sites can increase the participants' emotional attachment to those sites. 'Lights On!', funded by the Central Baltic Programme and active from 2015–2018, sought to create a joint network of historical tourist attractions in Finland and Estonia. Altogether, 'Lights On!' included eight sites rich with cultural history from the Central Baltic Sea region. All of the sites had previously fallen into disrepair and were largely ignored by the public. The structures had ceased to fulfil their original purposes long ago.

Our goal was to familiarise a larger audience with these sites by means of novel inclusive approaches. Several creative and interactive techniques were piloted during the 'Lights On!' project. One of the most successful endeavours was a series of light painting workshops organised at all the sites during 2017. The concept was to create images with light painting that would illustrate the historical events and legends associated with each location. Each location's unique ambiance had an intuitive influence on the participants, and the resulting stories and images illustrated an ongoing reaction of decolonisation linked to the various sites.

This chapter is based on art-based action research (Jokela, 2019) and positions itself within the theoretical framework of place attachment by means of participatory art-based playfulness. The authors argue that light painting as an art-based method has great potential in developing place attachment. The project proposes that by performing participatory art-based action—light painting workshops—historical locations can attract new enthusiasts and visitors. The participants developed emotional bonds to the heritage sites by giving new meaning to them after having visualised stories in them, and later, the shared images transformed the vista of the sites.

'Lights On!' was a project designed to develop a joint network of historical tourist attractions in Finland and Estonia. The sites chosen for the 'Lights On!' project all have interesting histories, but these were unknown to wider audiences. All eight of these historical sites are manifestations of colonial power on both sides of the Gulf of Finland. Their histories illustrate how domestic and foreign powers, colonisation and political intrigue have shaped Estonia and Finland throughout the centuries. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) states, history is mostly about power. It is a story about the powerful, and how they use the power to dominate others (p. 34).

Prior to the advent of Christianity, a tradition of worshipping nature and natural spirits was pursued in both countries. The advent of colonisation brought with it a wave of Christianity which sought to convert the population of the occupied countries from their pagan beliefs. Thus, the use of light painting techniques in historical settings opens a conversation between the past and present, re-energising folktales by illustrating their narratives.

Nature has begun the slow and steady reintegration of these historical ruins, thus opening another time-related topic of discussion focusing on the nature of existence: life, afterlife and the brevity of the lifespan of any human undertaking. As these relics inexorably decay, nature reasserts its dominion and inevitably seeks to heal scars, altering her complexion.

This transitional phase of the different sites affords a look back through time while also allowing a glimpse into the future. The superimposition of light painting features over the different ruins hints at a post-apocalyptic world, as vestiges of ancient cultures that remain are explored by various energy elements. This exploration of spaces and landscapes by light 'beings' allows for the creation of canvases that blend fantasy with reality.

Moving light shapes can literally be painted in the air to create striking images. Relying on imagination and trial and error, participants work collaboratively to produce creative effects to enhance the photographs of these mythical and historical locations. Playfulness is a key element in this process as the light painters, models and photographers interact, suggest, negotiate and ultimately achieve a form of consensus which generates a pleasurable feeling and an emotionally engaged mindset. The various costumes, elements and tools used in the light painting are akin to toys found in the play boxes in children's playparks. The participants are enticed by the possibilities originating from their choices, and they inevitably ask themselves: 'What should we try next?'

Our idea was to investigate whether participating in the light painting process would help foster attachment to these forgotten and unused historical sites, giving new meaning to them by bringing tales, myths and beliefs to life via light painting fantasies. We also wanted to establish that light painting workshops could be conducted to help unearth the forgotten pagan traditions which have been eradicated by successive waves of colonisation.

Following sections of this chapter are structured as follows, beginning with the introduction of the project that frames these participatory art workshops. This is followed by a section introducing the background then a section discussing light painting workshops as participatory art methodology. The subsequent two sections analyse samples of the light paintings produced during the workshops. The results of the qualitative questionnaire are presented in the next section, and the final section is a discussion of our findings and future possibilities.

## **The Project and the Locations**

### *The 'Lights On!' Project*

The goal of the Finnish–Estonian project was to improve visitor experience and turn these little-known historical sites into viable tourist attractions. During the project, infrastructure improvements were made with new trails, high-quality information

points and boards posted with site-specific cartoons that would keep the tales and legends alive. The name of the project was not just a clever pun: the project literally brought permanent lighting to four project sites. The intent was to substantially prolong the tourism season and improve the visitor experience.

The cross-border 'Lights On!' project developed innovative marketing tools, as well. It used fresh approaches, such as gamification, and invited visitors and local people to a series of light festivals and re-enactment events. The goal was to increase visitor numbers, attract new visitor groups and encourage visitors to travel amongst the sites.

The owners of these sites, Metsähallitus and Estonian State Forest Management Centre (RMK), carried out the infrastructure work, whereas the new experimental methodologies for these sites were developed by the cultural management educators: Humak University of Applied Sciences and Tartu University Viljandi Culture Academy. The ideas for the engagements were developed by the project group and by the participants of international student camps. The idea for the light painting workshops was developed by the authors in the autumn of 2016.

### *The Project Sites*

The 'Lights On!' project aimed to include four Estonian and four Finnish ancient monuments that symbolise power. Many of these sites are monuments of settler colonialism (Wolfe, 2006) erected by Swedish, Russian or Danish military regiments. The project illuminates seven castles, hillforts and forts, as well as one manorial park. Together, the history of these eight fortresses of power draws a continuum from the twilight of prehistory into the twenty-first century (Metsähallitus, n.d.). What follows is a summarised version of the key points of the history of the Finnish sites (as only the Finnish sites are addressed in this chapter) written by historian Georg Haggren (2016) for the purpose of the 'Lights On!' project:

In a similar way, the past of the hillfort of Rapola (Finland) is mostly based on guesswork even though several hillside burial sites from the Iron Age have been excavated by archaeologists. The Rapola castle fort is a nature destination surrounded by a one-kilometre long stone wall left over from the original castle. The first people arrived on the Rapola ridge during the Iron Age, probably in the 5th century.

The medieval bishop's castle of Kuusisto (Finland), founded in the late 13th century, was both a stronghold and an exclusive residence. During the middle ages, there was a manor in Kuusisto where the bishops, who at that time were influential political leaders, could stay. The castle and its estates belonged to the Bishop of Turku, the leader of religious life in Finland during the Middle Ages.

The Castle of Raseborg (Finland) was founded as a stronghold of the Swedish Crown as well as to serve as the administrative centre of Western Uusimaa in the late 14th century. The first written mention of the castle was in the year 1378. The castellans of Raseborg kept watch on the trade over the Gulf of Finland. They were also responsible for the defence of the southern coast of Finland.

Vallisaari and Kuninkaansaari (Finland) have protected the city of Helsinki through the centuries and, beginning in the 19th century, they protected St Petersburg, then the capital of Russia, as well. In the beginning, the islands were not

very fortified but later on they became an eminent part of the Fortification of Sveaborg, and later still, a part of Peter the Great's Naval Fortress. Soon after the Crimean war (1854–1856), the imposing Alexander Battery was built in Vallisaari, to demonstrate Russia's military might.

(p. 1)

However, in all the history and stories related to the sites, there is a remarkable gender imbalance: thus, we needed to imagine the female characters and history, since there was hardly any written evidence that women even existed. The existing narratives of the sites are the narratives of the conquerors and invaders: the Danes, Swedes and Russians. The stories of the Indigenous tribes were often considered of minor importance or even seen in a negative light. These attitudes and tales were passed down from generation to generation. By creating these visual images, we wanted to reimagine and redesign the history of these sites. Our goal was to appreciate the region's cultural heritage and harness their creative energy based on the concepts of Enquehard and Clair (2015): 'culture is not just a frozen legacy of a historic past, but a vibrant present which can be reinvented for contemporary audiences' (p. 6). 'Contemporary processes transform the meaning of cultural elements of the past and invest new values in them' (Birkeland, 2015, p. 163), and as 'an act of geographic imagination' (Howitt, 2001, p. 165) with an ability to read place as the complex records of interaction and interrelationships.

## Background

It's as though there's a wonderful secret in a certain place and I can capture it. Only I, at this moment, and only me.

Walker Evans (Freeman, 2007, p. 137)

This project positioned itself within the theoretical framework of place attachment by means of art-based playfulness. Playfulness is a fundamental element of art, and approaching a participatory art-based activity as play instead of art, enables the participants to act more freely without restrictions: everyone knows how to play from his or her own childhood experiences, whereas creating art is a term laden with the burden of responsibility which can lead to feelings of inadequacy. We refer to Thuli Gamedze's (2015) thoughts, which are linked to art-based action research:

We can expand art to the extent that when we talk about art, we are speaking of a conscious, creative approach that is in response to images, and through response, creates its own images. Art thinking, art behaving, art conversing, art writing – these are activisms of art production that make use of our innate creativity in decolonising and re-imagining our space.

## *Light Painting*

Light painting is a creative form of night photography in which the photographer uses different light sources to illuminate objects or scenes while capturing a long-exposure photograph.

In his book *Night Photography and Light Painting: Finding Your Way in the Dark*, the renowned night photography expert Lance Keimig (2016) details how to capture creative and eerie photographs in low-light conditions. In addition to discussing the wealth of opportunities nocturnal photography offers, in this edition of the book, he also introduces light painting and drawing techniques. He adheres to the common usage of the general term ‘light painting’ which refers to lighting added by a photographer and combined with a long exposure to make an image. He also gives clear definitions of other light painting terminology:

Light painting includes both using added light to illuminate a scene, and any lights pointed back toward the camera to create patterns of light. The term ‘painting with light’ is defined as the use of a handheld light source that is usually moved during the exposure to light part or all of the scene in a photograph, and the term ‘drawing with light’ is used when a handheld light is pointed back toward the camera to create shapes, text or abstract designs. In painting with light, the added light illuminates the subject. In drawing with light, the light added by the photographer actually is the subject. Light painting includes both painting with light and drawing with light. (p. 5)

According to Jason D. Page (2018), the history of light painting stretches back to the late eighteenth-century photographers who used artificial light in their images for scientific rather than artistic purposes. The great surrealist photographer Man Ray made what may have been the first photographs using the technique of drawing with light for artistic expression in 1935. In his series *Space Writing*, he used a small penlight to create swirls and lines in the air as part of his self-portrait. The self-taught photographer used stroboscopic light to capture the motion of everything from dancers to jugglers in a single exposure. His photoflash techniques are still very much used today in light painting photography. Gjon Mili used this technique to study the motion of dancers, musicians and figure skaters. In 1949, while on assignment for *Life Magazine*, Mili was sent to photograph Pablo Picasso at his home. While there, Mili showed Picasso some of his light painting photographs of figure skaters. Picasso was immediately inspired and took a penlight and began to draw in the air. Mili set up his camera and captured the images. This brief meeting yielded what would become known as Picasso’s ‘light drawings’ (Page, 2018).

All these artists used light painting creatively, which gave their work a timeless quality. Creativity, surrealism and the element of surprise continue to be features of the works of contemporary light painting artists around the world.

During a long exposure, the camera records moving light sources, allowing shapes to be painted in the air to create striking images. There are numerous light painting techniques, each of which provides different results. Light painting can utilise a variety of tools, anything from mini flashlights to steel wool, enabling limitless creativity. The final images are not the result of photo manipulation involving the alteration of a photograph in post-processing. There is no trickery—all the effects are created on location in the moment by reacting to the location and atmosphere. The images are captured using long exposures. There are limitless possibilities to be explored with light painting; what makes it fascinating is that it always involves some trial and error. It requires not only moving lights in the dark, but also illuminating the setting. Orbs, circles and electroluminescent wires function as storytelling tools.

*The Playfulness of Art*

Broaching a topic as sombre as the historical effects of colonisation on Indigenous populations could be a rather intimidating venture. The subject is rife with disheartening realisations, which can easily be disconcerting when reflected upon. Yet, playfulness allows us to engage with serious topics in a light-hearted manner.

The modern study of play can be traced back to Dutch historian Johan Huizinga's groundbreaking study *Homo Ludens* (1955). Huizinga states that play is the primary formative element in human culture, a free activity done for its own sake. However, in spite of this element of freedom, play can create structure. Huizinga introduced the idea of the 'magic circle'. Magic circles are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart. In a very basic sense, the magic circle of a game is where the game takes place. To play a game means entering into a magic circle, or perhaps creating one as a game begins (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003). The concept of the magic circle has also suffered a number of criticisms (cf. Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008, pp. 24–25). Despite some confusion about how the term is defined, it is useful when describing the difference between play and non-play. It engages one's mind in a creative way and obviously creates enjoyment in a place and time distinct from the normal perceived reality (Lammers, 2011; Mainemelis, 2006). Art, as a form of play, can uplift and raise us beyond our everyday existence if we surrender ourselves to its particular rules (Dönmez, 2017, p. 174), so art and play can draw magic circles.

Ellen Dissayanake proposes a biological explanation for the origin of art: the creation and appreciation of art more generally are advanced adaptive behaviours that are key to social survival. In her book *A Hypothesis of the Evolution of Art from Play* (1974), she describes the common characteristics shared by art and play: both involve imagination, surprise, non-predictability and self-satisfaction. Her art theory is based on the quality of art: it is essential to ask how art affects one's life and why the arts are important to humans. The relationship between play and art is considered phylogenetically—art is said to have originated as a kind of play, gradually over millennia acquiring its own independence and individuality.

Light painting encourages role playing and leaves space for creativity and imagination. It enables the representation of invisible worlds and characters, as well, such as spirits and ghosts. Participants seem to experience states of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), which often include affective, cognitive and physical immersion while doing the actual light painting, no matter which role they are assigned. Time becomes irrelevant as the participants drift into an imagined reality. In Csikszentmihalyi's view, flow is a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it, even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.

Being photographed in a chosen role can also lead to empowerment and increased understanding of one's strengths (Savolainen, 2009). Savolainen's workshop was based on the idea of empowerment and the belief that everyone has the right to feel unique and special. The fairy tale or imaginary quality of the photographs often reveals a truth obscured by daily life. Accepting one's own portrait, even though taken when playing a chosen role, is a metaphor for accepting one's own personality.

From the decolonising perspective, a playful approach might look bold or even foolhardy: How dare we play with such a grim topic? We suggest that these images,



created intuitively and through playful processes, turn remorse and shame into empowerment and contribute to creating a manifesto for a new narrative, a new vista. And, we are not alone: there is evidence supporting how both playing and photography have therapeutic capacities (Bratchford et al., 2018; Horovitz, 2015; Kopytin, 2008; Martin, 2009; Ward-Wimmer, 2003; Tonkin & Whitaker, 2019). South African artist Anthea Moys refers to the concept as ‘playful decolonisation’ in which one strives to play with history in alternative ways and remake it (Carvalho, 2018). Combining this information with a sense of discovery and a desire for knowledge might contribute to generating the change needed to create new methods for creative placemaking (Beck & Taft, 2017; Borrup, 2016; Redaelli, 2018), especially in rural and heritage contexts. Even though, as Matahaere-Atariki (2017) points out, it is not culture itself that requires revitalisation but the values that underpin culture; she also argued that cultural revitalisation is an inadequate term for the right to continually remake our culture and identities in ways that we may yet not even imagine.

Place can be viewed as the chorus of a place which includes the summation of a place’s events, environments, actions and its horizon of possibilities (Häggström, 2019, p. 1335). In order to reimagine and remake a place, we might search for conceptual help from surrealism. According to Maggie Ann Bowers (2004), surrealism and magical realism both explore illogical or non-realistic aspects of humanity and existence. Surrealism seeks to express the subconscious, unconscious, repressed and inexpressible. Magical realism, on the other hand, rarely presents the extraordinary in the form of a dream.

Surrealists believed that art is created in the unconscious mind’s blending of serendipity, irony and play. The French poet André Breton wrote the *Surrealist Manifesto* to describe how he wanted to combine the conscious and subconscious into a new ‘absolute reality’. The central themes of surrealist art are motion and stagnation, the energy of colours and imaginative forms in its never-ending search for the power of dreams (Uzzani, 2010). Surrealism’s depiction of the anomalies of everyday life offers unexpected twists and forces us to think differently (Kaitaro, 2015, p. 80). The exploration of randomness was a crucial creative strategy for many artists who associated themselves to the concepts and artistic methods of surrealism. These concepts represented a release from the constraints of the rational world and had parallels with their interest in dreams (Gale, 2018).

Many visual and methodological ideas open up a time channel to an earlier time 100 years ago, to the birth of surrealism or the moments just before it. With their colourful lighting and blending of physical elements, light painting images take on ethereal qualities. Light painting, full of spontaneity and unpredictability, reveals fairy tales, fantasies and dreams.

### *Place Attachment*

The study of feelings that people develop towards places is a relatively new research field which has been brought to prominence in recent years by environmental psychologists. Place attachment can be defined as an ‘affective bond or link between people and specific places’ (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001, p. 274), or a positive emotional bond that develops between individuals or groups and their environment. Emotional interaction with a place leads to satisfaction and attachment (Low & Altman, 1992; Mesch & Manor, 1998) or emotional engagement (Russell, 2013) to that place.

Päivi Granö (2004) suggests that a playground is formed by the relationship between play and space. When someone later brings those images from the past into mind, they become personally meaningful. In a similar way, art-based methods can create a stronger attachment to places. We also suggest that light painting works as a possible action methodology for the playful mapping of a place by enabling encounters with space, place and culture to stimulate flow, ingenuity and creativity (Playful Mapping Collective, 2016). In many Indigenous cultures, time and space have no distinct words as in Western thinking that views space as being divorced from time (Smith, 1999, pp. 50–52). Thus, through the art of light painting, we intended to present narratives that would call forth and enact connections amongst people, places and practices in time and space (Sundberg, 2014).

Increasing migration and urbanisation have led to rootlessness and longing for feelings of connection to places. Also, while organised religions continue to lose members, there is increasing interest in new forms of spiritualism and traditional beliefs. By recreating the myths and legends of heritage locations, we are aligned with these two current megatrends.

Place attachment is not something people are necessarily aware of. Even fictional mythical worlds—such as Oz, Narnia, Middle-earth and Westeros and Essos—provoke empathetic reactions amongst their audiences. This has led to an unexpected rise in the popularity of the real-world locales used as settings for those imaginary worlds.

Playfulness unleashes the imagination. It enables one to see the invisible and, by illustration and animation, to bring it to life. It can help recreate the hidden and forgotten past, making it visible once again. A meaningful place, whether imaginary or not, engages us emotionally by means of storytelling. We understand life and places through stories.

### **Light Painting Workshops as Participatory Art Methodology**

We used an art-based participatory methodology centred on collecting stories, visual storytelling, conducting workshops and assessing responses to a qualitative questionnaire. Subsequently, we applied a semiotic-based analysis, and for the qualitative questionnaire, a content analysis. As Mirja Hiltunen (2009) states, art-based participatory action research is predicated on encounters amongst environment, history and participants, and the aims are to increase the understanding of oneself and to make a change.

One of the most exciting endeavours of the ‘Lights On!’ project was to arrange light painting workshops in April 2017 at all four sites in Finland. Altogether, about 35 participants took part in the workshops. There were no restrictions on participation: the workshops were free, and there was no prerequisite knowledge or skills needed—just a curious mind.

The idea was not to show how ruinous these seats of power look these days, but rather to evoke emotion and revive the sites with light and images. The participants learned the basics of light painting and then went on to work in small groups. Some of the participants had previous experience with light painting and were able to create very impressive photos using the lights which had been brought to the site for the workshop.

With live models, it was much easier to make history come alive through the creation of our ghostlike light portraits. Light painting was also used to highlight architectural details and to capture the movements of the ancient spirits as well as to add dramatic touches to the scenes. Real characters from the past were also brought to life by light painting.

In these light painting workshops, participation in stories was experienced collectively.

Before the workshops, all the participants were informed about the history of the sites to increase understanding of the past and to become part of the process (Jokela, 2018, p. 96), and they were told about the dignitaries who had influenced the sites and who had wielded power there, as well as all the legends surrounding the sites. It was hoped that these stories would fuel the participants' imagination, allowing them to see the sites from a new perspective; hence, the primary aim here was to revitalise the perception of the places. They had to review each image after taking it and make mental notes about potential improvements. It was often necessary to take several photos until all the elements came together. It takes time and effort to master light painting techniques to achieve the desired effects.

When we engage in light painting, Pentti Sammallahti's (2019) concept about how 'a photograph is given, not taken' comes into play. Mustonen (2019) suggests that providence can also play a role: how the pure chance of having been there to witness the magical moment is of utmost importance. Aina Landwerk Hagen (2017) suggests that the interplay of nature, serendipity, humans and technology results in works of magic we call art; or, they can even result in re-enchantment (Elkins, 2008) and esotericism (Kokkinen, 2019). The most rewarding part of all the workshops was the various groups' dedication to working together to create the images. The workshops exceeded all expectations and produced many remarkable light paintings.

Key elements of playfulness can be found within this art-based participatory activity (Holm et al., 2018; Leavy, 2009), and as usual in participatory art, the journey always matters as much as the destination (Matarasso, 2019, p. 17). Also, creativity, artistry and playfulness can be beneficial in finding equal ground (Van Klaveren, 2018). Using lights as play objects necessitates openness and experimentation, and extends beyond the production and interpretation of images into sensations and light movements as it engages with the material environment (Kullman, 2012, p. 6; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 104).

In our workshops, we created a space for participants to experiment, take risks and break the rules. There is no right or wrong way of doing things when either playing or light painting. This method of art-based action encourages the—often hidden—playfulness in adults. There is a strong element of surprise—you never know what the actual light painting will look like until you see it. The familiar sites might look completely different under starry skies, with ephemeral elves, ghosts and spirits wandering about. Playing reveals hidden, slightly surrealistic insights: the ruined structures are visible, but by playing with light, we open doors to magical realism and make the surreal and imaginary levels of these places visible (Figure 12.1).

The light painter remains invisible even though he or she can either paint the environment or stand behind the model while holding a light sword and drawing shapes with lights. People tend to take considerably more risks in front of the camera when they know they are not going to be visible in the final image. The same can be said from the models' point of view: wearing period costumes, posing in historical sites, not being themselves, but being hidden in a role, allows them to be more playful and spontaneous.

In light painting, the physical dimensions are totally different than in traditional painting and drawing done with oils and watercolours. All traditional painting is based on a two-dimensional canvas, whereas in light painting, the painter is able to physically step inside the canvas. The whole world, all three dimensions, can be used as a light painting surface.

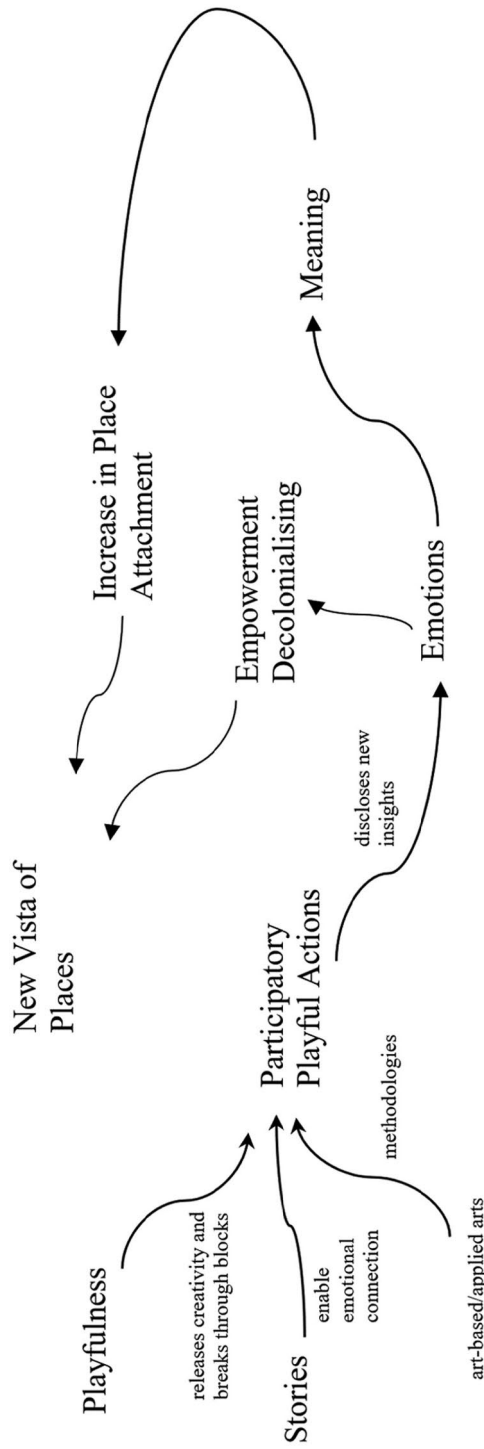


Figure 12.1 Mind map depicting an increase in place attachment as a result of art-based activity.

## The Light Painting Images

The images presented here are the artistic outcome of the creative processes employed at the workshops. Five examples of light painting photographs created during these four workshops are analysed here using a semiotic approach (Barthes, 1977; Fiske, 1994; van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001). By using the Barthesian distinction, we are able to open up (the) denotations and connotations of each image to determine how the light painting process might have increased the participants' emotional attachment to the respective sites.

We also showed the same photographs to a limited number of non-participants and studied their answers to a questionnaire within the framework of reception analysis (Hall, 2009), in order to understand the communicative power of these photographs as an end result of the creative work.

## Methodology and Analysis

All of the historical sites are vestiges of colonisation, which exhibit the visible remains of occupation by foreign powers. Thus, one of the goals of the 'Lights On!' project was to delve deeper and attempt to uncover the invisible history hidden beneath a layer of factual eradication.

Viewers can perceive multiple interpretations of the same image. Our mission was to entice the viewers to come up with their own interpretations. Each image attempted to tell a story. The viewer had to keep an open mind, but there were no wrong responses. Knowing the history of the location was important for constructing reflective images. In our interpretation of the images, we were mindful of Kalha's way of interpreting surreal photographic fantasies in early-twentieth-century postcards (Kalha, 2016; Kalha & Tahvanainen, 2017). Roland Barthes describes the 'chain of associations' or signs that make up a picture's narrative: 'the text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, and imagination' (Barthes, 1977, p. 26). We invited people to experience the images, to let them resonate in their mind. We offered our insights and interpretations to guide this journey.

Each photograph included here will be analysed using three different approaches. First, we will describe the techniques that were implemented to realise these light paintings. Composition is one of the most important skills for any photographer to master. A good composition is essential to guide the viewer's eye towards the most important elements of the image. Second, we will discuss important composition elements in each image in more detail. All our light paintings can be seen as literary tales. There is a story, a theme and a specific setting. Third, we will give our own interpretation of what the picture expresses.

We offer one possible interpretation of each image. However, inside the mind of each viewer, other unique interpretations are possible.

## Between Two Worlds

1. Two different techniques were used for this light painting. The first light painter lit the walls of the building with a multicolour flashlight, illuminating various areas of the buildings from the side and changing colours while moving along the courtyard. The second light painter created orbs using a light sword with a flashlight that had colour filters inside. The sword was held at arm's length, and the light painter drew small circles in the air while spinning his arm in a circular motion to draw a bigger circle. The photographer set the exposure setting to ISO

100 with an aperture of  $f/5.6$  to achieve the best possible quality. This was the last image of our evening, and we were delighted that everything finally went as planned (Figure 12.2).

2. There is something about the number three which works well in compositions. It was obvious right away at the beginning that we would need to do three similar spinning wheels in order to make the image interesting and visually striking. The wonderfully rich colours and abstract forms created a surreal effect.
3. In this image, on the denotative level, you can see a red brick wall, which is part of the most important landmark in Vallisaari, the Alexander Battery. The wall has been lit with different light sources and colours. In the foreground, you can see three concentric circles floating in the air. Even though these fortress walls illustrate excellent Russian brick masonry work and architecture, the image suggests a series of questions. What on earth is happening? The secondary meanings, connotations, emerging from this image lift the image to a different level. The connections we make are both cultural and societal.

This abstract light painting combines elements from the tumultuous historic past and the present day. The spinning wheels appear as portals to another world, blending fantasy and reality, bringing forward the silent stories from the past.

### The Spirit of Raseborg Castle

1. For this light painting, the light painter circulated around the courtyard and climbed up the staircase with light sticks, creating interesting ghostlike shapes which represented the ancient spirits of the castle, and the photographer used a



Figure 12.2 *Between Two Worlds* (2017), light painting by Jani Lainio and Martine Sarret-Talvela; photography by Kirsi MacKenzie (ISO 100,  $f/5.6$ , 167 s).

flashlight to light the walls of the castle afterwards. In order to achieve the depth of field needed, the aperture was set to  $f/10$  (Figure 12.3).

2. We see the dark castle walls, spacious inner courtyard and even some stars shining up in the night sky. The simplicity of composition gives the image a powerful impact. The elements and framing become a part of the picture's denotative message.
3. There is something magical about historical sites and castles. Castles are symbols of enclosure, dominance, power, safety and wealth. They are also associated with wandering spirits and restless ghosts. One can immediately feel the spirit of ancient times and even sense spirits on the castle grounds. In this image, light encompasses a spiritual quality. Fluttering bands of light might symbolise spirits returning to revisit their old stomping grounds. This transitional phase of the castle thus affords a look back through time while also allowing a glimpse into the future. The superimposition of light painting features over the ruins seemingly hints at a post-apocalyptic world as vestiges of ancient cultures that remain are explored by various energy elements. This exploration of space and landscape via light painting allows for the creation of canvases that blend fantasy with reality.

An 1874 article in *Suomen Kuvalehti* [The Finnish picture magazine], a weekly Finnish language family and news magazine published since 1873, mentioned that prisoners' cries, wails and moans could be heard emanating from deep down in the castle's cellar. It also mentioned that mysterious figures could be seen, particularly the White Lady, wandering about in archways and on embankments (Raseporin rauniot, 1874, p. 224). Thus, this image could be taken to represent the White Lady leading the oppressed native communities out of the prison to freedom so that their voices may finally be heard.



*Figure 12.3 The Spirit of Raseborg Castle* (2017), light painting by Kirsi MacKenzie; photograph by Sari Vahersalmi (ISO 100,  $f/10$ , 45 s).

### Lord, Have Mercy Upon Us

1. This light painting is a relatively short exposure. While the photographer captured the image, the light painter moved behind the bishop with a light stick, creating a halo surrounding the bishop's head (Figure 12.4).
2. The triangular composition, reminiscent of the Holy Trinity, depicts the power hierarchy of the Church and subordinate position of the devoted in relation to it. A resemblance to religious imagery in icons, altarpieces and stained glass can be observed.
3. A bishop, or perhaps a simple priest, leads the faithful, guiding their prayers. The holy man is the vessel transmitting God's message to the followers gathered on their knees. One supplicant, traditionally covered, sees her appeal acknowledged by the bishop. The uncloaked body and fiery mane of the second woman casts her as a rebellious presence who the holy man turns away from, ignoring her pleas. Perhaps her pagan, matriarchal, ancient faith, deeply rooted in nature and place, has now come under scrutiny as she is being forced to adapt to the patriarchal beliefs of the conquerors. The image portrays traditional Catholic male dominance, which remains pertinent in present-day Catholic countries and regions. Kuusisto was formerly a Catholic bishop's castle.



*Figure 12.4 Lord, Have Mercy Upon Us* (2017), light painting by Eki Tanskanen; photograph by Matti J. Niemi (ISO 100, f/22, 2.5 s).



## The Burning Woman

1. We had wonderful models in Rapola, dressed in authentic Iron Age dresses and holding old traditional instruments. Several steps were involved in creating this light painting. First, the model was lit by a flash; second, the light painter created fire with a light tube around the model who was by then gone; third, the background was lit with a flashlight (Figure 12.5).
2. The central placement of the woman makes the image strong. Her yellow dress and the fire contrast against the dark background, drawing the viewer's eye to her. Symbolically, fire represents both productive energy and destructive power.
3. A woman, seemingly on fire, is situated in the middle of a clearing at dusk, preparing to launch into her final song. Cleansing flames contrasting with the peaceful setting belie the hidden drama which brought her to this point. The darkening path leads us to wonder whether an unseen presence, perhaps Cuningas de Rapalum himself or one of the wolf hunters, lurks somewhere in the shadows. The image has a slightly surreal quality evoked by the circular clearing stretching around her peasant throne.

Or is this a depiction of a witch-hunt? A woman with too much power and skill was considered a threat, and sometimes treated as an abomination whose inner demons needed to be expunged. Her smile may indicate that she is unafraid of what comes, perhaps confident of a heavenly future, or maybe relieved to be released from her torment.

## Ghosts

1. Here, the light painters used electroluminescence (EL), which is an optical and electrical phenomenon in which a material emits light in response to the passage of an



Figure 12.5 *The Burning Woman* (2017), light painting by Jani Hannuksela; flash by Erkki Penttilä, photograph by Kirsi MacKenzie (ISO 100, f/8, 127 s).



*Figure 12.6 Ghosts (2017), light painting by Jukka Laine and Jani Lainio; photograph by Kirsi MacKenzie (ISO 100, f/3.5, 45 s).*

electric current, or to a strong electric field, to create ghosts and a flashlight to light the background afterwards. A large aperture ( $f/3.5$ ) was used in order to create a relatively shallow depth of field with the main subjects in focus (Figure 12.6).

2. The composition of the image draws the viewer's eye first to the ghosts and then to the architecture, across the geometrical shapes in the vault framing the central elements. A combination of warm red and cold blue creates a contrasting effect.
3. Two diaphanous lights illuminate the vault. With little prompting, the figures are easily perceived as ghostlike spirits, transporting the viewer into the realm of fantasies, dreams and fairy tales. Ghosts live in Vallisaari. The tale of a headless colonel who was hanged in 1906 from a massive linden tree on the road leading to the Alexander Battery has circulated for over 100 years amongst the inhabitants of the island. The other version from the lore is that the ghost haunting the fortress is A. D. Notara, who was shot during the Viapori mutiny (Kairulahti & Kouvola, 2018, p. 49). This light painting has captured both of these ghosts who gathered to share a brief encounter and escape their loneliness.

Follow this link to more enchantment: [www.flickr.com/photos/154016370@N03/albums](http://www.flickr.com/photos/154016370@N03/albums)

### Qualitative Questionnaire

The selection of workshop respondents was based on convenience sampling. Convenience sampling (also known as availability sampling) is a specific type of non-probability sampling method that relies on data collection from population members who are

conveniently available to participate in a study. This type of sampling can be done by simply creating a questionnaire and distributing it to the targeted group (Dudovski, n.d.).

We interviewed participants, who had acted in different roles, as models, photographers or light painters, about their light painting workshop experience. We also interviewed people who had neither participated in the workshops nor visited the sites, in order to find out how they perceived these places after having viewed the photos.

We decided to send the questionnaire to only 14 participants, concentrating in the first part of the questionnaire on those participants who had been involved in many of the four light painting workshops and who could be easily reached. The questionnaires were sent by email and completed independently by 12 participants. The information gathered by these questionnaires had to be useful and easily interpreted. Thus, we used open-ended questions, as we wanted the respondents to express their ideas and feelings without restrictions. Since the respondents could freely express their ideas, there was also a risk of receiving less pertinent information. However, most of the respondents answered all the questions despite the effort and time it took. While sorting through the answers, we identified common themes.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. In the first part, we wanted to determine the participants' reactions to and feelings about the workshop experience. In the second, we wanted to know what kind of thoughts and emotions the light painting images produced in the viewers. The questions can be seen in Appendix 12.1.

## Discussion of Questionnaire Responses

We deliberately chose convenience sampling as our method here. Farrell stated that convenience sampling is helpful in the generation of hypotheses, but vulnerable to selection bias. The most important benefit of open-ended questions is that they allow you to find out more than you anticipate: people may share motivations that you did not expect and concerns that you knew nothing about. Thus, you can gain unexpected and significant information (Farrell, 2016). We managed to gather some insightful, reflective responses and learned several things we did not expect (Figure 12.7). In fact, some spontaneous reactions that we received surprised us the most. All respondents expressed satisfaction with having participated in the workshop, while some mentioned not having enough time to carry out the activities.

These places can't be forgotten anymore (Respondent 1).

Certain themes recurred in the open replies. From a technical perspective, there was discussion about textures, shapes, tricks and how to technically accomplish a shot, but also philosophical thoughts about light painting being a forgiving activity which enabled the participants not to have any fear of failing, and how it inspired new experiments which reflected their own personality. The most repeated words in the replies were words describing enthusiasm: 'inspirational', 'interest', 'curiosity' and 'intriguing'. Based on this, we concluded that the workshop had truly promoted a sense of playfulness and feelings of liberation: one cannot fail either when playing or when creating light painting. The participants had also used the camera as a toy and had been inspired by the endless possibilities, while seeing how the other participants visualised their impressions of the place (Figure 12.7).



Figure 12.7 Selected direct quotes from the participants describing their workshop experiences.

The most significant question in our survey was whether participating in the light painting workshop changed the participants' relationship to the location. This question attempted to elicit anecdotal experiences from participants, trying to stimulate and provoke people's memories and to elicit instinctive responses (Snowden, 2018).

The responses were varied, as some participants did not feel an emotional connection to their place of residence or adopted country, while others did. Four respondents specifically mentioned that their attitude had changed. Their responses showed that, through these images, we had created memories through fascination, and this indeed increased attachment to the places. We read statements relating how 'These places can't be forgotten anymore' (Respondent 1) and how 'The images have the power to tell a story' (Respondent 1).

With our final question, we wanted to discover whether people saw these places differently through light painting and whether they were likely to visit these places after looking at the images. These questions were also answered by people who had not participated in the workshops. It was surprising to learn that just seeing the images inspired and aroused the curiosity of viewers who had not participated in the workshops.

This idea of curiosity could be linked to either colonising or decolonising effects, depending on the vantage point from which we direct our gaze and what we use these images for. On the one hand, this is not surprising: images and photographs have a long history of being used to advertise places (as in tourism promotional material) and to change attitudes towards locations (attitude manipulation or even propaganda). More recently, the power of social media has also been utilised in a decolonising context (Young, 2014). As Smith and Donnelly (2004) declare: seeing is believing. It is our choice to make: Whose story will be told, and in what kind of light will these sites be re-illuminated? Should we concede the narrative to uncaring authorities, or is there room for polymorphous interpretations of the sites based on the folklore and playfulness of the imagination? To guide our choice, we could learn from the research by Laura Kim Sommer and Christian Andreas Klöckner (2019) which showed that art can change our feelings when it encompasses a hopeful message, something containing colourful depictions and inspired solutions. We also wondered if, by applying the concept of decolonising nature by T. J. Demos (2016), light painting could become an effective and multifaceted tool in the effort to revitalise places.

The implementation of convenience sampling may have introduced bias into the answers. In addition, the small number of answers made it difficult to obtain conclusive, statistically significant results. But, combined with the visual message, we were able to perceive from the images that the actual light paintings themselves and the results pertaining to increased place attachment were very promising. The photographic explorations revealed a surrealist quality, one that flowed from the creative and imaginary input of the participants.

It was interesting to note the upsurge of curiosity and interest the light painting images evoked when shown to people who had not participated in our workshops and who did not have prior knowledge of light painting. Successfully arousing people's curiosity can be counted as a positive achievement directly related to the original purpose of the 'Lights On!' project from a tourism perspective. The stillness of a photograph allows our minds to move freely and build associations. What makes a picture powerful lies completely within the mind of the beholder. It is subjective, not objective. It is personal, based almost entirely on the experience of the viewer.

## Conclusion

With this art-based action research, we aimed to determine whether participatory light painting workshops conducted at cultural heritage sites could increase the participants' emotional attachment to those sites. Based on the results gained during this research, it seems that light painting works well for this purpose. The results might even be improved upon if the activity were to be further developed into a longer process (a weekend-long intensive course, or regular meetings over months) because learning the techniques and interpreting the stories proved to be quite an undertaking for one night, even though some participants continued working into the small hours.

Based on our experience and findings, we propose that an increase in place attachment leads to a greater desire to act on behalf of these places, enhancing people's willingness to visit the places and to support their existence. Using art to bring forth silenced voices would work well as a revitalised placemaking method for forgotten places by giving them an impressive visual representation in order to redesign the vista of a place and thus work towards the eradication and the 'unlearning' of the 'wrong' history. There seem to be numerous possible adaptations of this methodology for other purposes, as well. This kind of participatory art-based activity with light painting could easily be transposed to other settings and groups of participants, such as working with immigrants or marginalised groups, thus creating magic in their local settings. In light painting, everybody can succeed in spite of age or disability. For example, if you are not able to draw because of physical limitations, you can still do light painting by attaching different light sources to your wheelchair. Light painting is a group exploration which is best conducted collaboratively.

These images can work as a bridge between the forgotten past and a more empowered future. In these times when modern civilisations pursue the rampant destruction of nature, more than ever, we need people who are strongly emotionally attached to places: primeval forests, heritage sites and pristine Indigenous landscapes. Light painting workshops and collaborative forms of creating light painting art represent a viable method to animate visual stories that enhance emotional attachment. By interpreting the folklore and myths of a specific place, by role playing or dancing with light in order to create a unique artistic representation, participants might also gain new insights into themselves. In the future, before initiating these kinds of activities, it would be good to consider taking a quiet moment to kindly ask for permission from the places as well, so as not to be guilty of perpetuating colonialising attitudes.

## Acknowledgements

When planning these workshops during fall 2016, we thought that April 2017 would be the perfect month to hold them since the nights would be pleasant and warm. We were wrong. April was unusually cold in Finland. Despite the cold weather, however, we managed to entice many individuals to take part in our workshops. We are grateful to them for joining our journey into night photography and light painting. There were a lot of discoveries and innovations while we experimented with different light painting techniques. Some of the workshop participants had prior knowledge and experience with light painting, and with their help, we were even able to attempt a few more complex light paintings. There are many individuals to thank, but we would like to especially acknowledge our most active and experienced light

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There are many light painting artists who are fuelled by the desire to make something truly original and unique, taking the art form to the next level, such as Jukka Laine, Janne Parviainen and Hannu Huhtamo, who together form the light painting art group Valopaja. We were pleased to have Jukka Laine leading one of our workshops in Vallisaari. Jukka also teaches light painting to children and various groups with special needs including the blind. He is an inspirational force who has been able to combine light painting with socially engaged community work.

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# Appendix 12.1

## The Questionnaire

### Light Painting Workshops

What was your role in the light painting workshop?

- photographer
- light painter
- model
- other

What was your relationship to this place/location prior to the light painting workshop?  
Describe your experience of the light painting workshop.

Did your participation in the light painting workshop change your relationship to this place? If yes, how?

### Light Painting Images

Look at the following pictures. Do you recognise any of these places?

Did you see these places differently through light painting? Would you be more likely to visit these places after looking at these images?