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Hypermediation: a resonance and a sociality. Consciousness-building in landscape-architectural sensory-aesthetic design processes

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Introduction

Medium modulation is a key generative action in architectural practice and design education. Nevertheless, demands for sustainable solutions in design necessitate greater research attention to how thought is informed by experience and experimentation through sensory-aesthetic experiments, and how such kinaesthetic and synaesthetic impacts on imagination, consciousness and subjectivity-building can be taught. This presentation discusses experiential and experimental actions stirring relationships between students' affects and sensations in-between space and visual forms of expression. Acquisition of such sensory-aesthetic design skills is what we explicitly aim to teach in our courses 'Practice and Aesthetics in Landscape Architecture - Studio' and 'Landscape film – Studio' at Copenhagen University, Landscape Architecture and Planning. Sensory-experience and experimentation assignments throughout the courses working specifically with the shifts between drawings, models, photographs and films form the experiential and reflective spine of the training for bachelor's students and master's students in shaping space for other humans' sensory experiences. Our studio courses are pre-choreographed and at the same time co-produced by the students, who bring to the studio space their sensory experiences in the form of notes, photographs, drawings, collected materials and films from the explored site.

Positioning media and sensory-aesthetic experiential learning in landscape-architectural education the design education is thus framed as more than training students to shape 'objects'. Beyond its construction and functional aspects a central focus of landscape design is to affect the future user's experience of the 'object'. 'First we shape the things, then they shape us' stated by Steen Eiler Rasmussen (Bek, 2012: p. 10), a pioneer in addressing the intersection between our experiences of architecture, architects being we and us being humans in general tends to remain tacit, despite its prominence in design-pedagogic contexts.

Postmodernism inaugurated an interest in phenomenology of experience that is still prevalent in spatial disciplines. In the last decade, theories/discourses of presence, atmosphere and ambiance from philosophy, social sciences and media studies have extended the multisensory and sensory-aesthetic phenomenological perspective into architecture and planning, aided by Juhani Pallasmaa, Peter Zumthor, Alberto Pérez-Gomez, Gernot Böhme, Don Ihde, Giuliana Bruno and Mark B. N. Hansen, among others.

Crucial here is that it is the experience as phenomenon that is in focus. Yet all media mediations—cardboard models, notations, photography and film entanglements—denote bodily involvement based in

the haptic effects of moving at least one sense and often several, e.g. vision and hearing in film, or vision and touch in embroidery, drawing or model-making, penetrating the surface by folding thought, sensation and subject into one. This gestural bodily immersion (Cooper, 2018), where former bodily embedded experiences are reactivated by the moving action—as also happens with hand-drawing—is crucial for the empathetic connection and affect-revealing action that enable a designer to project affective architecture for other humans.

Research question

If knowledge is based in explorative, situated, bodily and intersubjective cognition, how can these actions be qualified as emotional transductions—hypermedia—an immediation context empowered to influence not only the subject, but design and society in general?

Methods

In order to show how a transductive relation between affectivity and perception supports students' own consciousness and how it functions as self-affectation, we present possible transpositions of one student's process in both courses and relate it to positions in philosophy of experience and sensitive cognition, learning and media theory (Kolb, Dewey, Jørgensen, Massumi, Parikka). The assignments in the courses involve '(dialectically) opposed modes of adaptation to the world' (Kolb, 1984: p 29), since various media are used to stir the students' awareness of their own sensing and experience in real environments, as well as in the virtual environment co-constituted by the different media. A weekly focus with assignments as part of an iterative process is the backbone of the exploration of an individual project for eight weeks. Mediation is a crucial focus point in between media but indeed also in between a subject and the 'object' explored and both affecting and being affected in/of the making. Such transcendence is linked to sensitive cognition (Jørgensen, 2015), or context as encompassing affectivity, affection, affect and consciousness as well as the physical context.

Result

In the course it becomes clear that film, drawing, as well as embroidery, work as a strong transposition tool, transforming traces of sensation into threads of experience and back again. It stirs sensory cognition, informing ideation and imagination, and shapes the student's design proposal, especially her work with sensorial, material experiences/interactions and changes in e.g. the terrain (earth surface). In the presented student work visual forms of materiality, sentences and traces of (micro-)thought become visible and productive for the student's further explorations. Her drawings, models, photographs and



films work as separate montages, sentence-images or thought-expressions thanks to the transpositions of their various parts.

Here transposition becomes transduction or duration as the specific aspect of time: the continuous event in which that student becomes affected and consciousness is shaped. This seeking-doing is a thinking-feeling constituting actual experience of own affective actions and emotion, thinking hereof (Massumi, 2017). It is here that transcendence or duration as a resonance (self-affectation) between affectivity and affect takes place. Thus, the earning constitutes subjectivity; and thanks to these emotional transductions, a meta-sensory cognition becomes visible and productive for the student(s), who use her(themselves) as self-affective media.

Discussion & conclusion

The Parallel emphasizes on the student, the study ‘object’ (actual and mediated sites, media), and the student’s learning environment makes the course operate with what could be called a double sensual ‘spatialisation’/sensation—an individual and collective affective event framed by the courses.

Working with media mediation means working in-between experience and cognition—‘in the gaps in knowledge’, moving ‘thought-expression into the unknowns of the situation, where its effectively infinite potential self-reports’ (Massumi, 2017: p 139). This denotes a radical pedagogy, and what sets it apart from mere learning is ‘a collective-seeking that honours the autonomy of expression and tends to its intense impersonality, experimenting with very precise speculative-pragmatic techniques for

staging it and caring for its process’ (Ibid). Such movement deals with the ontological status of how visual mediation works: a permanent, continuous ‘becoming, emergence, event. Here you’re not in your subject position, you’re in becoming’ (Ibid: p 108). In an educational context, that event of becoming can be seen as the object of thought-expression—when the event has taken the position of object and context simultaneously. It imbues empathy as a possible ethical stand. It can inform society through students’ mastery of themselves as affective media, and through the sensory-aesthetic or resonant learning (design) habitus becoming a ‘hypermedia’ or ‘immediation’ context intertwined with the design field.

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Figure 1. Traces of sensation: threads of experience

