

Alicia Velázquez

A TEMPORARY PLACE CALLED HOME
Building a laboratory for emotional affordance

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ABSTRACT

My practice is focused on the creation of homes: temporary places to be inhabited... emotionally. Exploring the concept of emotional affordance has been the overarching focus of this practice-based research, which follows Adapt-r methodology. The original title of this Ph.D. was: "Intimacy with materials as a laboratory for emotional affordance". While the overarching title is still in progress, today's title starts tackling one centric notion in the practice, around which other key elements gravitate: HOME. More precisely, temporary home. I thus intend to use this presentation to explore "temporary home" as the centric notion for the practice, and will temporarily inhabit it through the preparation, performance, and production of the material for this conference. The presentation becomes then a research moment in itself. The notion will be the body or structure through which to articulate what the practice is about, how does it host a selection of case studies, and how does it position the practice within the context of art/performance/design practitioners.

Interior. Structure. Day.

She enters an ample space with shiny floor. It's a large and spacious structure with high ceiling. The walls are rather scaffolding-like structures and are open, yet she gets a strong feeling of being held and protected. She has entered.

Welcome to Hotel Emotions, a temporary place called Home.

This paper gives an outline of the practice-based PhD in progress of Alicia Velázquez: where the research is at the moment, what was presented in this conference, and where the research is planning to go in the next phase.

The original title for the PhD is “Intimacy with materials as laboratory for emotional affordance”. It started in September 2015, with the beginning of Alicia’s Adapt-r fellowship (Architecture Design Art Practice Training research, between September 2015 and December 2016) and this CA2RE presentation marks the 5th biannual public presentation conducted during the research. The PhD is practice based, therefore taking Alicia Velázquez’s practice, embracing art and design, and which she runs under her own name (Alicia Velázquez Atelier or AVA), as the research field. The PhD follows Adapt-r methodology for practice-based research.

AVA started as a design practice with the intention of relating materials and emotions, and through this research she intends to build the artistic dimension of the practice. AVA’s artistic works are self-driven and are grounded in material and emotional experimentation. AVA’s “physical” Laboratory for Emotional Affordance as a steady experimentation space happened during the Adapt-r fellowship period (in LUCA School of Arts, Brussels) and was the trigger of 2 of the case studies taken for the PhD, one of which is presented in this paper.

“Alicia Velázquez is a performative designer embracing the worlds of art and architecture. By producing objects and spaces in front of audiences or camera, and inviting others to do so, she searches to provoke emotional reactions. She invites to inhabit situations by creating either the environments (interiors) or objects (sculptures). As trained and experienced architect, her purpose is to create homes for stories to happen, emerging from processes she designs where a common space, between human and human, or human and thing, can be built and experienced. Scaffolds for unspoken stories, individual and shared, perhaps forgotten, that may find in this tangling their unique storage, their unique expression. A dialogue through bodies¹.²”

Emotional affordance is a coined term that I brought as focus of this PhD, and admittedly, up until now, without knowing precisely what it meant. I used

1 Body, definition in this practice: A container, a holder. Of thoughts, memories, emotions. A physical presence with a skin (texture) susceptible to relate to other bodies. Human body, organic body, material body. Bodies change through time, and also through time their storage increases as it fills up with new experiences, thoughts, memories, emotions.

2 Communication text written by Alicia Velázquez for AVA, June 2017

it because it had a “spirit” into a direction that was **bringing together two worlds**: the inner and the outer, that of my internal feelings and embodied sensations, and that of the outer objects and the actions I was making and performing in the physical realm.

Emotions are understood in this practice, and I use the term emotions in this research, to describe the embodied sensations, memories, thoughts and connections that occur during a performative moment of making. A moment in which there is an action of physical connection through or with a material/object/texture, and (my, sometimes others) human body. I take emotion as a dynamic entity following the definition given by Dr. psychologist Robert Augustus Masters in his book “Emotional Intimacy”: “emotion, more verb than noun, is a process in which a feeling (sensation in the body) connects with a series of cognitive, social, contextual factors and our personal history of related action tendencies, including the interplay between all four. Emotions have been described by some theorists as discrete and consistent responses to internal or external events which have a particular significance for the organism. Emotions are brief in duration and consist of a coordinated set of responses, which may include verbal, physiological, behavioral, and neural mechanisms”³.

Emotional affordance holds secondly the term coined by Gibson in 1979: “the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill”. Donald Norman⁴ added to it “action possibilities that are readily perceivable by an actor”⁵. I take affordances in the relational way that Gibson originally described relating the physical presence of the body-object and bodyhuman, and the immaterial and momentary presence of emotion. And connecting with Norman, the **emotional possibilities** that are triggered in a moment and perceivable by the actors. Emotional affordance comes then, in the works of this practice, through the interplay of:

- human bodies: mostly myself, and in the most recent works also other human bodies (see study case While Making It Together / WMIT).
- material bodies: the object and/or texture that is being created or transformed, or used to transform (in WMIT: the pink thread, each object brought by each guest, the existing sculpture) plus the objects in the environment or set
- the willingness and openness (generosity) of these bodies/actors to give and receive, without preconceived goals, and to perform an act of interaction, of making something together
- a place (set, environment), designed/constructed or existent
- a ritualistic process (protocol, set of actions designed and performed/

3 Augustus Masters, R.: 2013, Emotional Intimacy, Sounds True, Boulder, USA

4 Norman, D.: 1988, The Design Of Everyday Things, New York: Basic Books

5 Gibson, J. J.: 1979, The ecological approach to visual perception, Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

- co-performed by myself), and
- serendipity.

Study cases - 4 rooms

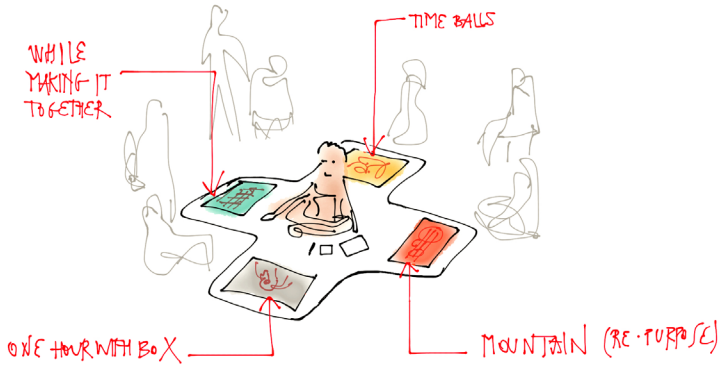


Figure 1: Sketch for presentation CA2RE Ghent, April 2017.

Time Balls One Hour With Box While Making It Together Mountain

Even though my CA2RE presentation brought these 4 study cases, I will focus in this paper only in one of these rooms: **While Making It Together.**

WHILE MAKING IT TOGETHER (WMIT)

"She enters a hangar-like space. It's pitch black in there. She can see the shadows of two room-like structures divided by a thin dark corridor. Her host takes her hand and ushers her towards that aisle, a wooden, backstage-like structure with one door on one side and a tiny door on the other. She can see the shine of light through them. Silently, they enter the bright white space on the right."



Figure 3: While Making It Together, silent wrapping sessions. Laboratory for Emotional Affordance, Brussels 2016.



Figure 4: While Making It Together, reflections.

A sculpture grown by the addition of different objects - personal, meaningful objects brought by 9 guests, plus a first one by Alicia Velázquez- and thread. Each object held together by wrapping it to the previous ones using thread, during silent intimate acts of collaborative wrapping, one guest at a time with Alicia Velázquez. Each person was invited to do this as long as he/she wanted to. A pink set offered a chair and the invitation to speak and share thoughts, feelings or reflections. In a second epoch, WMIT was part of the exhibition Adapt-r (London, November 2016) where the current (chair-sized) sculpture

got wrapped to its exhibition table. Alicia invited the Adapt-r community, present in the event, to do so during a collective and festive performative event. WMIT is at the moment waiting to continue its growth by being wrapped to new objects in new locations.



Figure 6: While Making It Together, collective performance. London, 2016.

WMIT: Where do you think I am pouring from?

AV: Desire. Of tending connections. Of drawing lines - relationships, temporary dances, embodied moments of communication, threads of discovery, of surprise, of connecting to past moments, to existing experiences, to new or invented ones, to disappointment, to awe, tending a line to catch deep fish inside, the bigger fish from the deeper waters. (Type 1)⁶

Lenses - the Hotel guests

I selected 4 lenses that I am looking through to these study cases, of which I bring to this paper two of them:

- **Interviews**

“At the end of a film - or a conversation, like this one - we are no longer the same person as at the beginning. We are as dynamic as our memories are. Conversations and encounters create new memories, new dynamics of the self, and new understandings of what already is. Conversations and interviews protest against forgetting.”⁷

Interviewing proved to be a revelatory format, which happened spontaneously, usually starting from a reflective or descriptive writing after one doing (all or instances of) the works. By interviewing the works themselves, as well as terms, colors or materials repeatedly present in them, and myself, I embody both parts during a written conversation. This format reveals deep, unconscious, tacit knowledge and I believe it does so because of bringing the two parties in an equal level, in an intimate moment of connecting verbally to each other.

⁶ Fragment from (written) Interview to While Making It Together, by Alicia Velázquez 15.10.2016

⁷ Obrist, H. U.: 2010, Interviews, Volume II, Edizioni Charta, Milano.

- **Keywords:**

those which have appeared and appear regularly and insistently throughout the making of these works, through their preparation, performance, post-production and written reflections. They are terms that have different degrees of presence and fascination within the practice. Some of them are holding a warm, embracing presence, others are fearful and far-fetched, others appear as metaphors, like old friends that give a feeling of belonging and togetherness, of “wrightness”.

4 main keywords: Material, Home, Death, Body

Material

“Objects speak. In our home we only had one white table cloth”

Juan Cañizares, artist, reflection fragment from his intervention in WMIT.

AV: Is it relevant what you are making? I mean, does it matter whether you make bread or embroidery on a feminine pad?

AVA: No, not really. The object, the production is only a means. It acts on another level. It projects other truths, other questions, other dialogues beyond the moment. It is a holder.⁸

Body

Several bodies interact in WMIT. Each human body. The sculpture at its current state. The body of the thread, its physical affordance and emotional affordance (symbolism, metaphorical meaning, personal connections with its color, mass, reactions to its handling like clumsiness or easiness and the inner reactions linked to that). The interaction of these bodies during that time, the sequence of moments.

Home

AV: I thought that thread also helps me to build a sense of home.

Pink: No, not really. Thread helps you to pull those desires, fears and contradictions out into a physical form. But cannot build a home for you. Only you can do that.

The moment while we are together is born, and it is the moment that hosts us. I am thus not the host, only the medium for the moment to happen. It serves as our temporary home.

(Interview II)

WMIT: I am part of you. I am an expression of a part of you.

... our experience working together is that, while we are also creating a home, a room, it is not representing our thoughts, our dreams or fears. I think it is more a home to tangle all those things together. It is not really containing but entangling. What means, it is not representing a real space, or how we build spaces and homes in real life, but an organic space, somehow what we would have inside if we can travel and navigate through the home of those thoughts, knowledge, dreams, trash, disposable and valuable stuff, our innocence and also our decadence. I wish not to represent those things with you, or using you, but rather to export those as feelings to be embodied, and therefore “understood” or impersonated by the experience of being, of experiencing that place. Perhaps a storage of all those. Or even further, the linkages between all those. I do not believe those things exist in the same place and in the same format. I imagine them as fibers, immaterial and yet able to form rocks, to connect to each other, to establish impossible links, impossible past present and future links.
(Interviewing Thread, 22.06.2016)

Death

WMIT: You almost said it yourself already. White is a background. Is a color for a ritual. A ritual that brings souls together, a ritual of creation, and of destruction. A ritual of dying while creating something new.⁹

We enter the moment, we leave it. Our connection was born next to that table cloth, to die again after we left the room. A new connection was born next to each one movement, one hand handing the spool of thread to the hand of the other. To die again one moment later.

And what about emotional affordance? The moving moment.

AV: What about emotional affordances? Why aren't they in the surface?

WMIT: No need for. There is much more than emotional affordance here. There is symbolism. Connection. Truth, and lying to each other. There are invisible threads of transformation. Many of them are emotional, yes. But not all of them. And not all of them are important neither for you, nor for others, or even myself to be emotional. As I said before, emotions come and go. (Moving Moment Type 1+2)¹⁰

9 Fragment from (written) Interview to While Making It Together, by Alicia Velázquez 15.10.2016

10 Fragment from (written) Interview to While Making It Together, by Alicia Velázquez 15.10.2016

“Moving” in latin comes from the term *commovēre*¹¹, which is form by “com” or “con” (together) and “movere” (moving). The first part, “con”, is not present in the English term. But I point it out as I believe is relevant to the meaning of this experience in the practice. A *moving moment* for me means **a momentary emotional response in the body, triggered by an external event, accompanied by an embodied distinct sensation.** Through this research I came closer to understand that *moving moments* are the ones that have me hooked and I chase to experience with each work. And that the emotional affordance that the moments I envision, ideate, stage, perform and invite to perform may hold is linked to triggering a *moving moment* in myself, myself with others and in others.

Could the *moving moments* be the result of the emotional affordance? They are indeed the emotional action that happens inside my body, a set of spontaneous and instant physical sensations that that which I see, hear, touch, experience or remember trigger and connect with in my private history of thoughts, memories and sensations. *Moving moments* have also been shared in some of the works (WMIT, Mountain) when having the experience with others, like if an invisible thread would link his/her thoughts with my thoughts, feelings with feelings, in **a experiential unison.** Therefore this research intends to unravel what have been the moments in the practice that “moved” me, that “moved” others, what were the scenarios that made that possible, what were the particular events and conditions of that happening, and if it would be possible to replicate them.

WMIT: The acts are the holy grail. The opportunities to tend those connecting threads: person to person, person to object, object to object, arm around chair passing thread spool to arm, pink to green, green to coral, plant to microphone, cable to book, expectation to improvisation, discomfort to impatience, silence to words, and also emotion to articulation.¹²

11 Refs <https://definiciona.com/conmover/> /
<https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/commoveo#Latin> /
<http://dle.rae.es/?id=AM41ICK>
[16.11.2017]

12 Fragment from (written) Interview to
While Making It Together, by Alicia Velázquez
15.10.2016

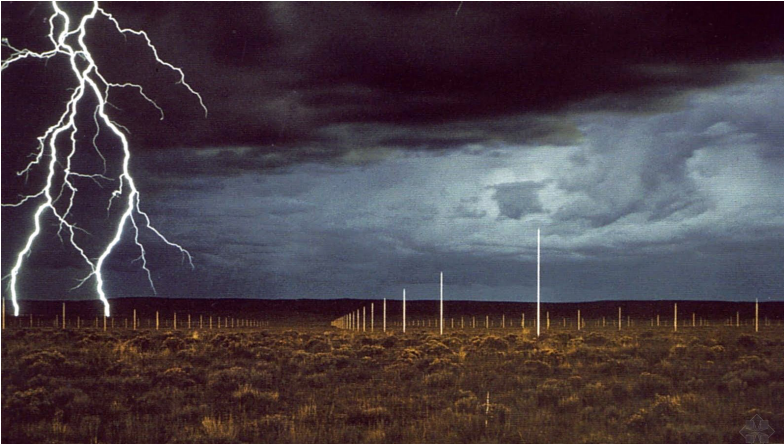


Figure 7: Walter de Maria, Lighting Field. Catron County, New Mexico, 1977.

There is a work that has fascinated me for a long time, and that keeps coming back to my thoughts during this research: Lighting Field by Walter de Maria¹³. I am coming to believe through the learnings of this research that my practice and its intention is what de Maria's installation would represent as physical metaphor: a series of rods, spread in a vast field of time and particular positions in space, **trying to attract the electrical currents that emotions are**. The works developed in this practice form **a physical set of actions and decisions that set the field** - the rods - for these emotions to be manifest, to appear, and to be triggered. They still happen, of course, without my works (like the lightning do, up in the clouds), but it is my interest as artist to put them out there. Not as much to capture them but **to trigger them**.

How does the *moving moment* manifest in my body

Reviewing the written material of this case study, While Making It Together, I have identified **3 types** of physical responses in my inner body. The place, actions and degree or "volume" varies¹⁴:

- Type 1 - stomach pinch
- Type 2 - light-head feeling, sensitivity and expansion in the temples
- Type 3=1 + 2 - next to the above, breath accelerates, nostrils open wider, the stomach pinch becomes an electrical current that goes up the throat and fastens the heartbeat.

When one of these moving types happen, I identify this to a **deep connection**. As in having reached a deep well, like oil or water in the deep ground,

¹³ Catron County, New Mexico, 1977

¹⁴ In this paper I give a first approach on how I have identified these "moving moments" in one of the recorded materials (Interviews) of one of the case studies (WMIT). The interview fragments that appear in this paper are the ones that triggered one of these types of responses when reread.

something valuable, a “life truth”, a stream of knowledge, something that goes beyond the material experiment at play, something connecting the material experiment with a philosophical, tacit revelation.

Next steps for the research - in search of the *moving moment*

Analysis of moving moments within the documents of these case studies, in depth - texts (reflections, data recording, interviews), videos, audio recordings, photographs, post-produced photos and video segments.

Review all recordings from the 4 study cases to unveil precise moments and their connection with materials (objects, set)

Role playing identification and how those different roles influence the emotional affordance

Review interviews and conduct interviews with the works that haven't been done yet.

Review postproduction of material and its difference in the moving moment, how they construct a moving moment on themselves even though the original material does not. The importance of the (moving) image.

My own presence and image of my own face and body. The difference between “being there” and “using my presence” there. In and out of my own body.

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