SATURDAY, APRIL 13
SESSION 10
11:15 - 12:15

ROOM A - SALA DE PROYECCIONES

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Speculative Urban Imaging

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ABSTRACT

The education and practice of architecture and urbanism have been progressively encountering a new design context. The advent of digital design tools, coupled with their capacity for enhanced indexicality of images and digital virtuality, is inducing significant transformations in our approaches to sensing, experiencing, conceptualizing, and producing the multiplicity of urban life. Such a transformation necessitates learning, unlearning, and relearning issues such as how urban environments are produced, how they affect us, and how we, in turn, affect them; and what kind of collectives emerge from the urban environment. This process of learning is not only for students but also for educators; and in this sense, education is dealing with an open system, an uncertain future.

Within this context, the “do as I do” approach hardly makes sense in education, as both educators and learners are grappling with a speculative future, where repeatable and one-size-fits-all solutions may not exist. In this vein, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1994) suggests that a better teaching method would be “do with me,” asserting that the true meaning of education should be reexamined according to its etymology– the Latin word educere, meaning to lead out, implies guiding towards new relationships, responses, and perceptions. It involves creating opportunities to pose new problems and to open up new potentialities (Colebrook, 2008). Leading out or opening up to these potentialities also entails differentiation and problematization (Bogue, 2008). This concept aligns with a term from French philosopher Henri Bergson, “intuition,” which media theorist Alexander Galloway (2021) highlights as one of the most significant “uncomputable” traits often excluded from digital computation and rational symbols. Galloway also ties intuition to “experience”, “flesh,” or “affect,” which are elements that can hardly be captured by a data-driven research paradigm, as it tends to fragment urban life into discrete units like integers, reducing it to numbers, figures, and objects. Contrarily, design is a process of correspondence: it is not about imposing a preconceived form onto a raw material substance, but rather about drawing out or bringing forth potentials that are immanent in a world of becoming (Ingold, 2013).

Sensibility, thus, is a crucial part of learning. It is more than a process that operates only inside the body; rather, it distributes widely through lived experience across both natural and technical environments (Protevi, 2010). Following this idea, experience and experimentation are powerful in terms of cultivating sensibility in design education by inviting both students and teachers to try, feel, and learn together through interaction with heterogeneous materials (Tamke, Nicholas, and Thomsen, 2017). How do we sense the effects of our actions in experiencing and experimentation? Connecting to the previous point about intuition, this research intends to start with Bergson’s idea of intuition, which can be interpreted simply as problematization, or speculatively and deliberately reflective awareness (Deleuze, 1991). Such an understanding of intuition echoes the first characteristic of experiments suggested by Tamke et al.(2017), namely, speculation.

In addition, given that the image and the imaginary play an important part in architecture and urban design, this research intends to focus on the process of imagining. However, instead of thinking of the image as objects, this research attempts to open up the concept as an untapped affective potential, providing more than an account of ‘what has been’ but also an invention of ‘what is to come’. This understanding aligns with Deleuze’s interpretation of film as movement-image and time-image, which is more than a generalized field or discipline. It is rather an arrangement or assemblage of moving images and sound that enables the affective process and sensation across heterogeneous materials (Deleuze, 1986a, 1986b). In this sense, the experimentation with moving images can be a valid starting point to combine the aforementioned ideas and concepts.

This research proposes an experimental workshop as a pedagogical catalyst to disrupt and reconceptualize the perception and memory of urban landscapes. The study is underpinned by the project ‘Speculative Urban Imaging,’ which serves as a critical tool for examining and engaging with urban life through a multisensory experience. The outcome of the workshop will be videos created by the participants, which aim to challenge the viewers’ habitual modes of perception by interweaving various dimensions of urban existence into a cohesive pedagogical narrative.

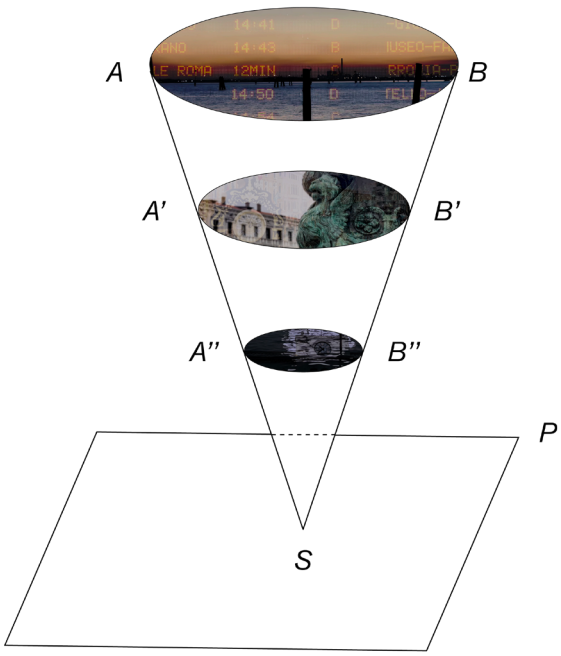
The workshop mainly focuses on five dimensions of exploration: (1) scales, both macro and micro. The workshop attempts to have participants operate the video through a dynamic range of scales, for instance, zooming into intimate details and zooming out to an expansive urban area. It intends

to prompt a reconsideration of perception and scale, encouraging viewers to reflect on their role within the larger urban system. (2) Other-less-ness, namely, to imagine a world that is isolated and full of solitude. In this process, the participants are asked to foster critical awareness and reflection upon their connections to the social network. (3) Audio/Sound. Another important dimension of this research is the auditory dimension, where a symphony of nondiegetic sounds is added to construct a diverse urban soundscape. This acoustic array, from ambient noise to music, seeks to shape the experiential journey, drawing the viewer into the multisensory complexity of the urban phenomenon. (4) Color and relations as haptic. This dimension dives into the effect of colors, particularly with the alteration of the hue and saturation evoking certain atmospheres and tactile engagement. This dimension extends beyond the visual to engage the haptic senses, inviting the viewer to 'feel' the image, to experience the urban environment through a lens that is at once vibrant and visceral. (5) Speeds. Lastly, the experiment focuses on contrasting the varying velocities of urban life, from the rhythmic, predictable patterns of human activities to the chaotic cadences of the natural world. This investigation of speed as a diffractive process encourages an alternative understanding of temporality and spatiality, provoking the viewers to experience time and space as flows.

Overall, this research attempts to experiment with how film, with its multiple components–images, montages, sounds, words, texts–could offer the means to facilitate speculation in design pedagogies. For one thing, film can provide extended parameters for recasting and rethinking earlier concepts, intensifying the affective process by creating a short-circuit between perception and imagination. Additionally, the extended parameters, ranging from words to audio-visual compounds, can convey more direct nuances in the virtual realm, thereby facilitating the transformation between imagination and invention.

REFLECTION

In this research, I expand the concept of experimentation from laboratory thinking into a broader sense and connect it with the experience and the dynamic process of "making". It becomes the nexus connecting critical educational concepts such as intuition and problematization, bridging the gap between sensation and cognitive understanding, and redefining imaging as an active and creative process. Experimentation opens up the possibility of the shift of pedagogical focus towards an immersive engagement with the materiality and potentiality of urban spaces, thereby redefining 'imaging' not just as a visual representation but as an affective, cognitive and creative process.



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