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Body, Culture, Identity

Session 4 – Introduction

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The objective of this thematic session is to explore how the relationship between artistic and scientific tools can overcome divisions and conceptual schemes that do not correspond to our contemporary condition, exploring the complexity of its open, broad and varied development.

The city, apart from being a potential receptacle of images and sensations dealing with all the senses, experiments deep social, political or technological changes (a reorganization of structures, fluctuations and populational migrations, an architecture of cultural spaces, etc.) in such a quick way that there is hardly time for a critical reflection or for creating a state of consciousness about it. Moreover, in a culture submitted to the power of images, we hardly pay attention to the perceptual complexity of our body. Our perceptions are submitted to geometry, and to discreet and simplified observation, which enables a better control by means of prototypical designs and remote control, handling our interaction with the environment, of our desires, aligned bodies.

There is a common consensus about the need of interdisciplinary or rather, transdisciplinary approach to research, but often this agreement does not correspond to a real application of this idea. The criticism of the Western schematic, quantitative and reductionist tradition is maintained within the criteria of tradition itself, usually limited to a mere disciplinary and methodological juxtaposition. This does not address the complexity and it does not facilitate the construction of a common language nor the achievement of common objectives.

The challenge of this session is to stress the importance of a collaborative and participative way to understand through our senses.

The direct experimentation of space helps us understand it, as well as “to perform it,” it helps us understand the aesthetic and emotional relationships we have with it. A new approach to the knowledge could be the basis of the conception, formulation and construction of a new landscape capable of highlight the role and diversity of embodied expression. We invited papers (theoretical, actions, field studies...) that address the above points within themes including:

- How to explore connections between thinking and acting in everyday city experiences,

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- How to develop processes of appropriating public spaces (sensibilization, activism, citizenship...) by means of a sensorial consciousness and the experience of the inhabitants (cultural landscapes, immaterial heritage)?
- How do the collective, community exploration of the vital flow of the urban space, altering the classical relationship between expert, artist, landscape and inhabitants?
- Can we consider our body, not as something defined, but as a flow of relations with the environment? How can we explore this theoretically and methodologically?
- Is it possible to create experiences and experimentations that provide knowledge through the embodiment of urban space?
- How to create new dynamic and participatory performative environment as a dynamic dialogic process, in which a citizen, constructed space and technology are regarded as co-creators?

The authors take ownership the proposed topics along various axes. We briefly summarize the similarities and differences in terms of methods, results, and impact. These are the topics collected in the contributions:

- The æsthetic, and social aspects of soundscape to create alternative and subjective narratives (S. Balbontin and M. Klenner).
- The experience of re-acting contemporary urban routines and rituals through public improvisations and interventions. (R. Atienza, M. Sand and R. McGinley)
- The implementation of a virtual reality specific environment (G. Loukakis, S. Papadopoulos and V. Bourdakis)
- The body-space relationship towards expanded architectural and cognitive perspectives (M. Grigoriadou and E. Mantzari)
- The analysis of interiors as cultural atmospheres and an external history (J. Cunha)

These are partial aspects, complementary approaches that demonstrate the significance of the body in interdisciplinary creation. The situations, the experiences studied and the narratives of the works are multiple and diverse and framed in a singular and precise space-time.

The body-space-culture relationship is captured both in the concrete experiences observed and in the different atmospheres evoked, so the results obtained provide answers, while posing new questions. The “in-situ” experiences developed in different environments raise questions about the research processes themselves. The involvement modes of the actors, experimenters, citizens, experts are of particular interest, whose roles are sometimes exchanged and altered.

The transverse procedures and methods implanted are especially important and delicate. In all of them we can highlight the importance given to the body movement, to the body experiences and the perception in several scientific-creative processes, emphasizing the importance of feelings and bodily actions in a physical and social environment.

The immersive environment of Olympus Mountain is represented by G. Loukakis, S. Papadopoulos and V. Bourdakis with three scale versions enhanced with additional layers of information, narration, interaction and alloæsthetic experiences. These “sediments” of information and interaction provide an additional, unique way to experience the spatial characteristics and the ambiance allowing a new dialogue between the user and the represented environment.

Applying an empirical, case study approach inside virtual reality (VR), M. Grigoriadou and E. Mantzari make up observations about how virtual embodiment can be experienced as an instance of otherness embodiment that generates a sensation of alloæsthesia. The architectural design can be approached with a neuroscientific perspective on perception and æsthetics as the role of embodied cognition through the mirror neuron system is connected with æsthetic responses through sensory perceptions. This post-human condition can be bi-directionally fed into re-establishing the body-space relationship towards expanded architectural and cognitive perspectives.

Three concrete examples an experimental artistic research environment will be presented here by R. Atienza, M. Sand and R. McGinley in which actors and audience were invited to investigate together the rhythmic order of urban routines and rituals, through the re-enactment of daily urban atmospheres. The ateliers presented aims at responding to today's deep physical, sensorial and social transformation of the city by re-acting contemporary urban routines and rituals through public improvisations and interventions.

As an attempt to converge the thinking of social sciences and the theoretical and practices of sound spatialization architectures, S. Balbontin and M. Klenner presented the series of artworks "Resonant Spaces." *Based on different theoretical reflections on the evolution of artistic disciplines around sound and space, they face "Resonant Spaces" as a resignification, from subjectivity, performance and body, to the symbolic, affective and representational apparatus of architecture and, finally, to our society. The case studies for experimentation are abandoned infrastructures in the margins of memory and the urban, inhabitable places with unique and exacerbated acoustics.*

The argument of J. Cunha is that interiors reflect a cultural atmosphere that is neither simply based on tradition nor in state-of-the-art innovation. In fact, they are crossed by history such as are cities, homeland landscapes and countryside settings, pointing to a wide traditional element that can incorporate what the hegemonic cultures have considered for so long as inferior objects from colonized territories.