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► **To cite this version:**

Marilla Chaves. Entangled Ambiance. Bodily Practices as a Fundamental Instance for Founding the Places. Proceedings of the 4th International Congress on Ambiances, Alloaesthesia: Senses, Inventions, Worlds, Réseau International Ambiances, Dec 2020, e-conference, France. pp. 332-336, 10.48537/hal-03220335 . hal-03220335

HAL Id: hal-03220335

<https://hal.science/hal-03220335v1>

Submitted on 11 May 2021

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Entangled Ambiance

Bodily Practices as a Fundamental Instance for Founding the Places

Marilia CHAVES¹

Abstract. In face of changes on living collectivity and human bonds on the informational age, we question which mechanisms preserve the capacity to promote a shift in the centrality of the subject towards the acceptance of alterity and differences. This operation is important for maintaining social cohesion and constructing public spaces as truly democratic places. In this sense, we briefly analyze the Maua Square, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, a touristic spot that contains many layers of history and uses. This study shows how the same physical space can be characterized by an entangled ambiance that simultaneously harbor distinct microenvironments, offering multiple possibilities of engagement and indicating that the mode of attention can be decisive in establishing the constitution of the place.

Keywords. Cities, Collectivity, Multiplicity, Social Bonds, Entangled Ambiances

Ambiances, Heterogeneity, and Complexity

The concept of ambiance embraces heterogeneity: of sensorial stimulus, of lived experiences, of diverse relations on (and with) space and built environment. Instead of being a clear and one-sided perception, an ambiance is more defined by a wholeness in which our bodies are immersed, and it is not possible to completely distinguish the ends and beginnings of an ambiance, because they are formed in the micro processes of appropriation, on daily life, continuously. “An ambiance has no contours, no precise shapes and no defined limits” and all ambiances are at the same time “spatialized and spatializing” (Thibaud, 2017).

These statements are essential for understanding the complexity of the lived experience and the relevance of human activity as an indissociable component of the quality of built environment. In other words, “Ambiances allow to complexify the sociology of action [...] developing a sensitive approach towards forms of life” (Bonicco-Donato, 2012). Here we understand complexity as defined by Edgar Morin (2015, 13): A fabric of heterogeneous constituents inseparably associated, placing the one and the multiple in paradox, composing an infinite game between actions and retroactions that constitute our phenomenal world. To name this game, the author adopted the term ‘tangle’ - in the sense of a system that is relational in a non-linear way. Facing the uncertainty and contradiction that this tangle contains is one of the biggest challenges when it comes to understanding the logic of complex thinking. According to the author, “not only is there no longer a simple empirical basis, but also a there is no simple logical basis (clear and distinct notions, unambivalent, non-contradictory, strictly determined reality) to build the physical substrate” (Morin, 2015, 19). Situating the built environment from this perspective advances in an understanding more linked

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to an inclusive logic, that accepts the users' role on shaping the character of places, instead of creating towards the figure of architects and urban planners a mythology of purity and complete control over the city. As Donato said, "it is more deep to think of the intertwining of urban atmospheres and forms of coexistence to reflect on the design of places where urbanity marks coincidence not only spatial and social, from the perspective of the sociology of action, but also of the sensitive aspects" (Bonicco-Donato, 2012).

Thinking about these intertwined atmospheres, or this tangle, seems a reasonable way to discover other methods to conceive the urban design of a city that is also marked by other new influences, such as a change in modes of attention, due to facts as the immersion technological and informational in everyday life and the increase in communication and transport flows in a globalized society. In the metropolis of virtual information networks, our existence is, more than ever, abstract, virtualized, generally with a great tendency to reduce tactile bonds, and always walking on the limit of what could be characterized as a process of de-realization (loss of material reality), and the constitution of a "disembodied" universe where our physical body is no longer the strongest and only anchorage of life: it surrounds us and disturbs us the construction of an aesthetic of disappearance, as treated by Paul Virilio (2015). Guattari (2012, p. 150), on the other hand, understands that subjectivity is threatened with paralysis: at the same time that people more than ever physically move between places, they maintain a paralyzed existence, a false nomadism, which cannot actually move our subjectivity. However, although many authors see disembodiment as a catastrophic threat, Lipovetsky and Serroy (2015, p.407) understand that, in a paradoxical way, the more the world becomes virtual, the more it hopefully ascends a culture that seeks to value eroticization and the pleasure of existence. The more virtual communication tools there are, the more individuals try to meet, see people, feel a quality environment.

Considering that perceptions and experiences in place are different, deepening the inclusive logic of complexity brings out many other questions, specially related to the plurality of meanings, representations and desires expressed on urban environment today. Regarding the study of ambiances, during the development of my master's dissertation, a particular issue captured my attention: If an ambiance cannot be distinguished with precision; If it is composed of many dynamic components that change all the time; How is it possible to point out certain tonalizations for the places, on a collectivity perspective? Is it possible to recognize a collective pattern for characterizing an ambiance?

With these questions, I do not want to minimize the importance of the subject on apprehending an ambiance, once it is not possible for a subject to put itself aside and make an impartial observation and once we are deeply affected by the environments in which we are immersed, but rather investigate how this phenomenon would occur in a more collective level. My questions refer to the problem of multiplicity, collective memory, and meanings on the city, whose relevance is presented when we observe the necessity of making urban spaces more adequate to human desires and necessities in a fast-changing world.

The Power of the Body: Daily Practices and Extrapolation Capacity

Intrigued by the questions presented before, I developed my master's dissertation between 2017 and 2019, using as a case of study the Maua square, situated on the city center of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Maua square is also a spot place in the city, marked by historical dualism between being a marginal space and a showcase space,

or postcard, revealing on the present two main different dynamics, marked by tourists flux and local users flux. This site was considered an ideal place for conducting the study, due to the fact that there I found hints of an inconsonance between the layouts and languages of architecture of the place, in its newest renewal, and some of the uses founded on place. In the phase of ethnographical observations², I realized the different character potentials that some appropriations established. These uses seemed to be concentrated, precisely in the interstitial spaces, in almost separate universes or microenvironments, which did not always interact and were not always in sync with the message pointed by physical environment.

To base these observations, the notion of agency (Deleuze and Guattari, 2012a, 19-36) was used as key concept. An agency is a set of actions, statements, and interactions that the bodies operate, and that has territorial power. It works, on the one hand, as machinic agency, that is, as a mixture of bodies reacting over each other - in the material dimension of life; and on the other hand, as a collective enunciation agency, that is, any and all act of enunciation through language (code), but which refers to regimes of signs and meanings, operating instantaneous transformations on the character of these bodies. These transformations are incorporeal, they occur in statements, in performances, in readings about the world, in communications, and from the moment they are enunciated, they promote a change in the construction of meaning, so they are instantaneous in this instance. Although they arise from immaterial means - the construction of meaning - they have an effect attributed to bodies on space.

It was possible to observe agencies of groups of people that gather to fish, occupying the gardens at the edges of the square - that were not made to stay, but as a safety margin for water. But also in people who dived in Guanabara bay, despite warnings prohibiting activity; on skate activities; on people dipping their feet in water mirrors (also prohibited), on the hottest days; on groups of urban dancers who suddenly established a festive atmosphere; We also found these agencies on micro adaptations of the facilities of the place: the signal lights on the floor being used at night to prepare hooks, small machine houses being used as bar tables, trees used as hangers, People sitting on uncomfortable postures on the benches, in order to contemplate better the landscape - not the museum. Operations that shifted, even for moments, the utility of the built environment.

Overall, we noticed the strong presence of water, as an element that appeals to other temporalities and senses. On the second part of the research, collecting data from interviews and conversations, were founded similar propositions on the enunciated expressions of desiring there some different structures. I evaluated shades and affections expressed that could provide clues in the investigation about the character of the place through affections mentioned in the narratives obtained from the interviews. In addition, people were asked to compare the Maua square to other places in the city. Many local people expressed for example the desire of having a beach there or a place designed for contemplation, meeting, fun, and a more physical proximity and interaction to water. And many people compared the Maua square to landfill of Flamengo, another big urban equipment that has more leisure and sports facilities. One interesting data, is that the tourists couldn't associate Maua with Flamengo (even if they are morphologically similar), and associated Maua with other very morphologically discrepant pairs, such as statue of Christ the redeemer, and "Pão de açúcar" hills - all of them touristic spots.

2. I adopted mixed research methods, that included the etnotopography (DUARTE E PINHEIRO, 2013) and the ethnographical sketches (DUARTE ET AL, 2015) - developed by LASC-UFRJ - in conjunction with interviews.

Was possible to conclude that a “Maua Beach” was already “installed,” intertwined on the square, through the persistency of the uses (dive, fishing, contemplating, taking sunbaths). This confirms the argumentation that “installing an atmosphere is both taking place and giving place, both registering in a place and transforming it, adapting to it while activating it” (Thibaud, 2017). After all, the body is both a rhythm machine and a producer of space, capable of expressing and sharing, in addition to hiding the meaning (Lefebvre, 2004, 102); The folding of the body over itself is accompanied by an unfolding of imaginary spaces, since at each moment we demarcate one here and one now, in layers of heterogeneous spaces (Guattari, 2012, 135). Therefore, is possible to affirm that the body has an extrapolation capacity: of overcoming certain limitations by the physical environment. That is why one could affirm the bodies as one fundamental instance for founding places, firstly because place is directly related to meaning, and secondly because of the capacity that uses and relations have to express reinterpretations, desires, propositions for action that creates opportunities to engage.

The Entangled Ambiance: Memory Networks

The study developed led to a more intense reflection towards the concept of entanglement or intertwine. The definitions in the Portuguese language about the meaning of the word intertwine refer to linking, joining, interweaving, uniting different things in a loop. In the English language, the meaning of the word “entanglement” presents yet another dimension, that of strength: “entwined with” means to be involved in such a way with something or someone that it is difficult to escape; it is also related to capture, being captured in something like nets or ropes. In addition, there is a phenomenon of quantum mechanics, also called quantum entanglement that derives from this meaning of strong bond. This is the phenomenon that occurs when two subatomic particles can become so strongly connected that the actions taken on the first are able to immediately affect the second, even if they are separated by a very large distance (Fuwa et al., 2015). The approach to this understanding served to elucidate the meaning of the words intertwine/entanglement and clarify some effects observed on the urban scale by our research.

Entangled atoms are capable of mutually affecting and matching each other even if they are in different places in space. Making a poetic analogy, it is also possible to perceive in the city the existence of **emotional places** that permeate the physical-visible places. As observed on the research and discussed by some authors (Certeau, 2012; Fischer, 1993; Duarte, 2002;) - the lived space is distinct and not necessarily corresponds to the built space. Therefore one could use the term entanglement to refer to an urban reality where the physical place (a specific point in space) is able to host many different emotional places, both in the individual and collective spheres of subjectivity (non-physical), and that can be linked with memories of faraway places - as was observed in associations of memory networks regarding the character of the square. We also observed that the more collective assemblies establish a place through uses, the more the notion of that place is strengthened, through collective memories and a sense of identity. The quality of possible social ties in the same physical space facilitates the creation of specific emotional places, with specific characters. So, according to emotional places, there are several physical places. There are segregated places from which the different is physically excluded, where the mere existence of the other and otherness is considered a risk and removed physically; There are physical places where the different coexist, in a “democratic” aura, while quality of social ties is not changed. That is, physical places where alterities coexist and mix physically, but not emotionally: the emotional place can be separated from the physical. But

there are times when, in any type of physical place, the possibility of creating new emotional places arises through different propositions about the quality of the social bonds: this is the liberating power of bodies in action.

Acknowledgements

To the Coordination for the Improvement of Personal Higher Education (CAPES) for granting a scholarship during a year and half of this research. And to LASC, for all the support.

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