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Théa Manola, Edith Chezel

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Sensory Experience, Environmental Experience and Political Engagement

Session 13 – Introduction

Théa MANOLA[1],
Edith CHEZEL[2]

Considering on one hand, the increase in power of an æsthetic capitalism (Assouly, 2008; Böhme, 2016), resulting from neoliberal logics of production of inhabited spaces, often adorned with 'green æsthetics' (Fel, 2009; Blanc, 2012) ; and considering on the other hand, climate emergency and the injunction to transition, mobilizing various technical objects (Labussière and Nadaï 2018); we are witnessing multiple processes of "smoothing" spaces and experiences (standardization - Manola, 2012; Faburel and Manola, 2016; Thomas, 2018; aseptization - Thomas, 2009; fluidization and pacification - Masson, 2009; Adey et al., 2013) often ignoring our relationships to the "weather- world" (Ingold 2011, 120). [12]

Nevertheless, in a contemporary world enduring various crisis (namely environmental), sensitive experiences can also help understanding spaces in other ways (Thibaud, 2018). Physical engagement(s) in, with and by this world, using the body comprehension of space, might lead both to awareness and to forms of collective action, struggles and resistance (cf. Blanc and Lolive, 2007 ; Chezel, 2018). In this session we propose to discuss these political engagements/involvements generated by the body (Céfaï, 2009) and to question ourselves through the sensitive, on the very meaning of the produced space.

How do we relate to others through sensitive experiences? To what extent do sensitive experiences allow consideration or even awareness of environmental issues (both locally and more globally - climate change, biodiversity loss, etc.)?
Lilia Khelifi questions how surfing includes an intellectual and physical work on oneself, leading to the development of alloæsthesia which allows to learn how to feel movements produced by oneself but also by all kinds of surroundings. Thalia Marou discusses how in the practice of urban home gardening, habits and cultural deposits meet with contemporary environmental concerns and ethics and explores the symbiotic atmospheres of human and non-human entities, ideas, values and perspectives.

The session questions also how sensitive experiences are included in space making, or resulting from a specific space production and their political implications? In this

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sense, Simone Ranocchiari answers by questioning the relationship between ambiances and political engagement through the material atmospheres of "self-managed political-sociocultural spaces" while Eric Crevels questions the presence of labor, skills and techniques in the built environment and their contribution to the creation of particular atmospheres. In the same direction, but approaching the question from a more distant point of view, Olivier Ocquidant discusses the relations of urbanity and atmosphere, based on an ongoing survey on the post-industrial city and Victor Fraigneau addresses the notion of "sensory patrimoine" (by sound and smell), by questioning our control on the natural elements in order to characterize the sound or olfactory identity of a place.

The central preoccupation of these sessions is how experience becomes (political and/or environnemental) engagement and how might sensitive experience be considered as an element of environmental engagement or even of claiming by "citizen" involvement? As a direct response to this question Claire Pelgrims discusses the "infra-politics" of the experience of mobility and the potential of mobility infrastructure to nourish the political engagement of mobile actors toward a sustainable future. In the same sense, Fabian Leveque and Karl Berthelot present elements concerning the singular experience of living with climate change in cities through the sensitive experience of the inhabitants and the relation of this experience with the political and ecological relation to the inhabited milieu of life.

Through those motley contributions, the session tends to understand tensions between the space production processes in times of environmental crisis and the sensitive experiences of our contemporary world, in order to understand the sensitive experiences as potential engagements/involvements (environmental or other). To do so, methodological challenges are discussed as much as theoretical issues.

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