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Estranged Space Appropriated

Sana Murrani

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In everyday life once the spatial and social conditions are enacted in spacetime they reveal, with varying clarity, worlds that are constantly re-presented, re-structured, re-made, re-appropriated and re-interpreted. To borrow Nelson Goodman's metaphor, worlds melt into other versions of worldmaking, and thus the emerging worlds have relational existence rather than self-existence, i.e. the spatial and temporal position of the created world is nothing but a node in the field of networks of spatial and temporal relations. Simultaneously, the "re" in the re-presentation, re-structuring, re-making, re-appropriating and re-interpreting refers back to the social characterised in the multiple selves and connotations of the body that we encounter throughout our everyday physical, digital, hybrid and augmented participatory experiences. Hence my proposition for this chapter is ontogenic as much as it is ontological. The chapter unthreads the characteristics of the overlaid conditions between the spatial and the social in participatory architecture praxis via a critical discussion into the effects of active perception, network society and participation on the construction and re-constitution of a spatial-technological installation: Overlaid Realities. The theoretical context is based on Goodman's ideology of irrealism and Leibniz's relational theory, and is realised through an interrogation of the ideas implemented in Overlaid Realities installation. It is through this interrogation that the chapter develops into a triadic enquiry of the overlaid ontological (represented by notions of active perception and cognition and their effects on alternative experiences of the world), ontogenic (represented by the relationship between body/self, spacetime, and social flow), and in return, the behavioural conditions of spatial-technological worlds. This work reveals a new theoretical analysis to the way in which we perceive and conceive of spatial-social and technological installations.

The main proposition for this chapter puts forward an argument that is ontological as much as it is ontogenic. For this reason a combined methodological approach has been adopted in order to follow the complexity of both the being and the becoming of spatial-technological worlds. The assembled methodological approach addresses second order cybernetics in relation to the observer as an active participant within a system

and phenomenology relating to perception and the interpretations involved in the making/remaking process of experiencing the world around us. From an outside perspective, one might notice an overall tension and, to some extent, a contradiction in the methodology used here. Perhaps what emerges can be described as a third way philosophy, a dualism that combines the main principles of second-order cybernetics and the fundamentals of post-phenomenology as a methodological approach.[1] The way we behave in a vastly connected and networked society is driven (affecting as well as being affected) by the way we design and experience our spatial and temporal worlds. Therefore, it is necessary to unpack this cause and effect process by applying theories of irrealism[2] and radical relationism.[3] Theories of relationism are dependent on the relational theory of Gottfried Leibniz in which the complex networks of relations between the making/remaking of our spatial temporal worlds in their essence are in fact dependent on our social interaction, interpretations and experiences.

The term Irrealism needs some clarification. I will follow Nelson Goodman's theory of irrealism given the nature of the heterogeneous versions of worlds that we are dealing with. Goodman explains what he means by irrealism in his writings:

"Irrealism does not hold that everything or even anything is unreal, but sees the world melting into versions making worlds, finds ontology evanescent, and inquires into what makes a version right and a world well-built." [4]

Irrealism differs from anti-realism, accepting possibilities of the existence of knowledge acquired beyond the physical senses, and simultaneously renouncing objective reality.[5] In other words, irrealism is more closely akin to cognition than it is to perception, however, it certainly accepts the notion of worldmaking through the making of, what Goodman calls, "versions" of worlds[6], i.e. interpretations. In a way, Goodman's versions are mere active interpretations of things (in the hermeneutics sense) via the act of making in spacetime. The physicist John Wheeler explains that we are creating/making our universe through our observations, which are in fact participations; and he relates such behaviour to the nature of our cognitive system.

"The universe does not exist 'out there,' independent of us. We are inescapably involved in bringing about that which appears to be happening. We are not only observers. We are participators. In some strange sense, this is a participatory universe." [7]

Therefore, irrealities are versions of active participations via interpretations that are constantly changing, evolving and overlapping through spacetime, and are hence ephemeral. Fundamentally, irrealities are relational and exist on a macro and micro level in relation to any world's ontology and ontogeny. Furthermore, they are highly selective of any world's versions, and therefore, it can be argued that the re-making of versions of worlds improves the quality of social, spatial and temporal relations within that space. This extended proposition is built on Goodman's definition of worldmaking:

"Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking" [8]

This action of re-making is in essence the ontological performative theatre known as cybernetics.[9] Goodman's description of worldmaking also denotes W. Brian Arthur's claim that there is an evolutionary process of collective technology whereby the collective evolves through a process of self-creation, where new technologies are constructed from those that already exist.[10] Arthur relates his claim directly to Maturana and Varela's autopoiesis or self-creation which emphasises exactly the same conditions of relational ontology and ontogeny of technology.[11] Second order cybernetics in particular has essentially deepened the cognitive implications and embodiment of "circular causality" [12], and in essence depicts the processes of worldmaking and autopoiesis that are mentioned above. Consequently in this chapter, the term *techné* relates to the mechanisms that govern self-creation whilst allowing relational existence within the processes of making and re-making of worlds. This proposition is explained further in the installation section in this chapter.

A third way philosophy, combining elements of second-order cybernetics and phenomenology, emphasises a clear move away from a mere comparison of the dualisms of subject/object, body/mind, self/world and

[7] Brian, D. *The Voice of Genius: Conversations with Nobel Scientists and Other Luminaries* (New York: Perseus Publishing, 1995), p127.

[8] Goodman, N. *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978), p6.

[9] Pickering, A. *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p381.

[10] Arthur, W.B. *The Nature of Technology: What It Is and How It Evolves* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), p167.

[11] Arthur, *The Nature of Technology*, p170.

[12] von Foerster, H. ed., *Cybernetics: Circular Causal and Feedback Mechanisms in Biological and Social Systems*. 1 vols. Vol. 98, *Macy Foundation: Transactions of the Tenth Conference* (New York: Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation, 1955).

[1] Murrani, S. 'Third Way Architecture: Between Cybernetics and Phenomenology', *Technoetic Arts: A Journal of Speculative Research* 8(2011), 267-81.

[2] Goodman, N. *The Structure of Appearance*. ed. by 3rd (Boston: Reidel, 1977).

[3] Northrop, F.S. 'Leibniz's Theory of Space', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 7 (1946), 422-46.

[4] Goodman, *The Structure of Appearance*, p29.

[5] Bunnin, N. and Yu, J. eds., *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004).

[6] Goodman, N. *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978), p36.

[13] Ontological conditions are represented by notions of active perception and cognition and their effects on alternative experiences of the world. While ontogenic conditions are represented by the relationship between body/self, spacetime, and social flow.

[14] Pallasmaa, J. *The Thinking Hand* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), p101-2.

[15] Hill, J. *Actions of Architecture: Architects and Creative Users* (Oxford: Routledge, 2003).

[16] Gombrich, E.H. *Art and Illusion, 4th Edition* (London: Phaidon Press, 1972), p307.

towards an approach that considers the overlaid ontological[13], ontogenic, and in return, behavioural conditions of spatial-technological worlds.

Contextual Territory

Juhani Pallasmaa highlights the importance of the haptic senses, especially touch and vision, in relation to the architectural experience:

“Touch is the unconsciousness of vision, and this hidden tactile experience determines the sensuous qualities of the perceived object.”[14]

This approach to the relevance of hapticity to the experience of spaces, as much as it is supported by widely known figures in philosophy and through theories of architecture, it is still limited in its relevance to an understanding of the architectural experience with reference to a cognitive conceptual interpretation of meaning through ephemeral representations. In essence, architecture is experienced through the collective users’ experiences and interpretations of its different environments. These users vary from the passive to the active and creative, and their changing consciousness is transient due to their differing backgrounds, experiences and memories, as well as their history.[15]

The architect is considered here to be the designer of the seeds and rules of interaction of the game of worldmaking, which are portrayed in spaces and in different worlds through their varied expressions and media of representation. Sir Ernst Hans Gombrich wrote extensively on the subject of art criticism and the interpretation of expression. Gombrich explains the importance of habitual interpretations to the process of perception and describes how interpretations are in fact composed of different stimuli sectioned and grouped in a particular way. By attempting alternative interpretations, i.e., sectioning and grouping stimuli in a different manner, an alternative reading is imposed on reality. Gombrich suggests that “*the adventurous artists*” who use alternative interpretations of stimuli have a greater chance of “*exploring the dazzling ambiguity of vision*”[16] and by this, making their work more open for further interpretations. What is significant here, are the overlaid possibilities of the convergence of

different structural constructs to a piece of work where the designer/artist and the viewer/participant have a relationship in determining the emerging situations and events. It is vital for such structural constructs to exist within a field of relations that implies organizing rules designed by the artist to assist the participant through a framework for their emerging interventions.

In essence, this is the main characteristic of the notion of the “*open work*” described by Umberto Eco. Eco speaks of the incompleteness in works of art, or what he termed “*the open works*” and the “*works in movement*”. Eco speaks of “*works*” that are not mere constructs of random components emerging from chaos in which they previously had no relation to each other and were allowed to assume any form whatsoever.[17] Instead, he promotes the openness and dynamism of a work that is an “*open’ situation, in movement*” that installs new relationships between the contemplations of the participants and the creations of the artist/designer.[18]

“The “openness” and dynamism of an artistic work consist in factors which make it susceptible to a whole range of integrations. They provide it with organic complements which they graft into the structural vitality which the work already possesses, even if it is incomplete.”[19]

In spatial architectural terms and following Leibniz’s and Henri Lefebvre’s propositions, the notions of “*open work*” and the “*works in movement*” become apparatus for the re-production of social spaces that are both dominated and appropriated by their participants, and it is in turn necessary for these spaces to be “*occupied*” and re-appropriated[20] in time. Lefebvre unpacks the underpinning of the social relationship between the senses and the material elements, between the body and the drives of subjective and objective articulation of the social relationship[21] based on Leibniz’s relational theory where space is substantiated by the mere coexistence of things and bodies in time.[22] Therefore, before us we have a system with dual processes of ontological and ontogenic characteristics that are constantly influencing each other, one being the construct of the incomplete spacetime and the other being the emergent social space via its interpretations and re-appropriations. This system embeds the very essence of irrealism that is both relational and progressional at any instant in time.

[17] Eco, U. *The Open Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p20.

[18] Ibid, p23.

[19] Ibid, p20.

[20] Lefebvre, L. *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991).

[21] Ibid, p405.

[22] Barbour, J. ‘Relational Concepts of Space and Time’, *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 33 (1982) p.251-274.

Towards the end of this chapter this dual process will be developed into a triadic process of ontological, ontogenic and behavioural characteristics.

This oscillation between the relationship of the process of generating social space and its perceptual constructs has been heightened by the introduction of digital and interactive media in architecture through cyberspaces, augmented reality spaces, and other spatial-technological practices. In turn, this has pushed the boundaries and rhythms of analysis and construct of the social space from the body to a meta-level and back, governed by the acts and processes of perception and conception. Relevant examples can be seen in the works of Cedric Price and the Archigram group in their attempt to implement the social and the spatial of the construct of the architectural practice[23] under a less developed technological world than the 2010 Venice Architecture Biennale project, *The Hylozoic Ground* by architect Philip Beesley[24] which has implemented the social and the spatial in a technological environment at its best.

The above was a brief overview of the issues surrounding the states of overlaid realities and unrealities present in the processes of worldmaking in architecture, now I will focus on the correlations in-between such states in a collective complex perceptual system.

Overlaid Realities: Spatial-technological Participatory World

Overlaid Realities, the project, was initiated as a response to a call for projects by Plymouth University in collaboration with Plymouth City Museum directed at architects, designers and artists to design interventions that question the relationship between the arts in cultural institutions and their public perception. Building on the ideas of perception, cognition, and appropriation of social space on which this chapter pivots, a multimedia installation was designed. This spatial architectural installation (co-authored and designed with architect Mathew Emmett and technician David Strang), was submitted for *The Cabinet: Changing Perceptions Exhibition 2011* held in the Peninsula Arts Gallery at Plymouth University.

The installation was inspired by the work of Dan Graham[25] and in particular his piece *Opposing Mirrors and Video Monitors on Time Delay* 1974, in which the viewer becomes both a performer and a spectator at the

[23] Cook, P. *Drawing: The Motive Force of Architecture* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

[24] Beesley, P. 'Hylozoic Ground'2010) <<http://www.hylozoicground.com/index.html>> [Accessed July 2010].

[25] Graham, D. *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999).

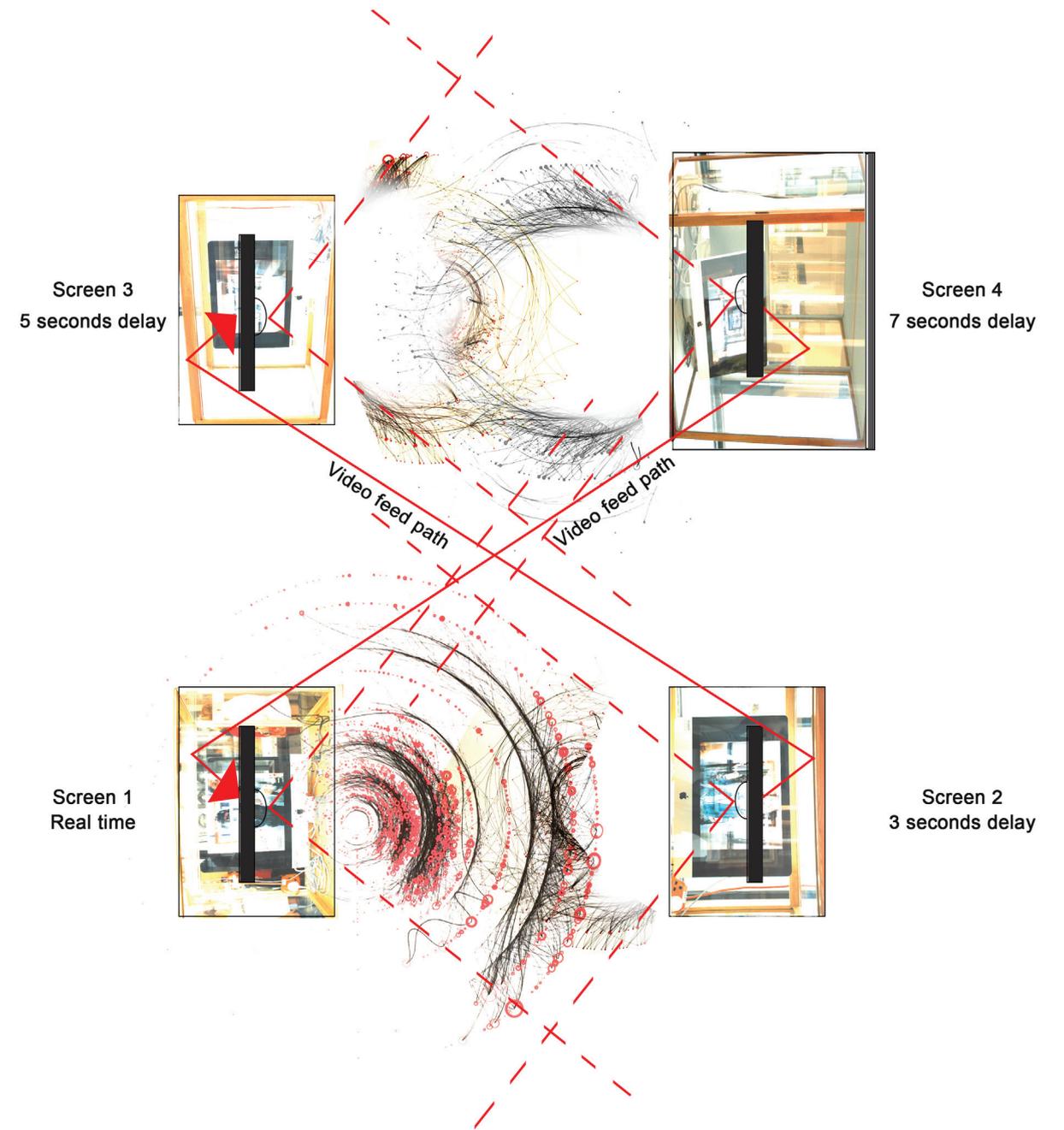


image 1

same time. In a similar way, the installation challenged the ideal and the pristine state of the exhibits we normally come across in museum cabinets and introduced notions of the everyday, the social and the unpredictable.

The installation consisted of four museum cabinets; within each there was a computer display and a connected webcam. Pairs of cabinets were arranged facing each other creating a space of 1.5m x 3m. The four computers were networked to each other while each of their webcams was configured to feed its video stream into its computer display. Each of the four computers was displaying the output from its webcam, however that display was delayed for three of the webcams while one streamed in real time. Video signal paths and delays were chosen to create video feedback loops across screens, showing Droste effects. One of each pair of the displays also fed its output into the opposite display of the adjacent pair, which was then blended with the webcam output on that computer, thus creating an infinite array of feedback loops and Droste effects (Image 1). This meant that a person wandering within the created space would be projected several times as they were captured by the cameras and would appear on all the computers repeatedly and in motion even after they had left the scene. A simple software tool using Max/MSP/Jitter was used to program the interaction between the cameras and displays. The cameras had a wide range which exceeded the actual space of the installation and this meant that even people who were not within the boundaries of that space still appeared as participants.

Overlaid Realities acts as a spatio-temporal participatory and social architectural installation. The project merges the sensory experience of the museum with the environment of the observers, hosting participatory relationships, whilst converging interdependent experiences. The piece exposes elements of participatory and interactive technologies of projected space that put the observer/participant, their body and consciousness at the heart of the subject exhibited through time-based delays and Droste effects. It overlays dualisms of: subjective/objective, real/virtual, and real-time/history archive, in one spatial installation. It integrates principles and processes from the fields of cybernetics, perception, and cognition that are evident in the design, making and experience of the piece. Feedback loop processes are at the heart of its making. Through a state of technological

flow and by acknowledging the fact that technology has become an integral and prosthetic part of our lives, the social space created becomes a worldmaking mechanism of multiple overlaid realities. The installation blurs the defined boundaries between museum exhibit and visitor by locating the observer within the system being observed and creating an ephemeral architectural experience.

In time, as the observers become active participants within the installation, their experiences shift from the merely perceptual to cognitively constructed irrealities. Within the territories of the installation, the participants' interpretations of their worldmaking are in fact processes of grouping of different stimuli from what is being observed, projected/represented, and appropriated in spacetime. Evident firstly in the single and thereafter the collective experiences of the observers is the process of self-creation of their world around them that becomes overlaid on others' via the Droste effect thus producing an irrealism with strong relational existence. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the meaning of *techné* within the context of this work. *Techné* relates to the mechanisms that govern self-creation while allowing relational existence in the processes of making and re-making of worlds to emerge. The mechanism of grouping the interpretations of different heterogeneous stimuli (self-creation) within the installation, which are constantly changing their position and meaning (relational existence) become the driving force for the generation of different versions of the world inside the world of the installation.

Active Perception: Indirect

In order to delve into the territory of perception and its influence on architectural spatial worldmaking, an account of the theories of perception is required to untangle the perceptual system. More importantly, this section highlights the development and the vital acknowledgment of the move from notions of direct to indirect perception and its impact on the development of the installation presented in this chapter.

A common definition of *perception* in psychology which is useful for our discussion is:

[26] Soanes, C. and Stevenson, A. 'Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 11th Edition', (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p1063.

[27] Winters, E. *Aesthetics and Architecture* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 2007), p115.

"The neuropsychological processes, including memory, by which an organism becomes aware of and interprets external stimuli." [26]

With the focus shifting from discussing haptic senses on their own, to the integration of both haptic and neuropsychological processes, perception emerges as a far more complex process than a mere observation related to a particular phenomenon. In agreement with the above definition, Edward Winters explains that perception does not depend only on the haptic senses but also on the conceptual construction of their meaning as interpreted by the cognitive process:

"That is to say, there is something it is like to perceive something – perception essentially involves a phenomenology – and that in representing the world, perception is conceptually structured; and is thus constitutive of the propositional attitudes that we take up toward the world represented." [27]

Hence, in essence, perception and cognition constitute a twofold process that occupies spacetime. The process of perception then requires a subject-matter (body and space) in an environment, and an observer with his/her own consciousness or conceptual knowledge. All of this does not only depend on the haptic senses in a given environment, but rather, on the extension of the connections and patterns of interpretations between our pre-experiences, our memories, history, transient consciousness, and our active creative self. Many architects and theorists such as Pallasmaa and Holl, and before them, Arnheim and Norberg-Schulz, were and are still locked in the 'direct' interpretation of perception, the Gibsonian perception, which asserts that senses and their stimuli (i.e. body and object) are the only way to interpret perception. However, later on in this chapter and through the discussion of the installation, it is established that the act of perceiving and conceiving an architectural world is in fact an active rather than a passive process.

Richard L. Gregory believed that perception, especially visual, required intelligent problem-solving based on knowledge which is an active as opposed to a passive process. Furthermore, Gregory puts forward a description of perception, which relates directly to our neurosystem:

"Perceptions are hypotheses, predicting unsensed characteristics of objects, and predicting in time, to compensate neural signalling delay, so 'reaction time' is generally avoided, as the present is predicted from delayed signals." [28]

Gregory established that perceptual and conceptual knowledge are both vital to the overall cognitive experience and at the same time are largely separate as each process occurs in time on a different schedule to the other. Perception works faster, in a fraction of a second, to aid survival; on the other hand conception might take minutes, or sometimes years. [29]

Theorists such as Max Wertheimer and Kurt Koffka intended to discover the principles that govern how the configurations of whole patterns determine what we perceive, and to provide a theory of brain organization. [30] Early principles in the field of Gestalt psychology aimed to explain perceptual experiences in relation to figures in space through the laws of proximity, connectivity and relativity to its components in its space or environment. However later on, it was established that for each unit or entity in space, there might be a behavioural environment and/or a geographical environment. [31]

The idea of the behavioural environment or the behavioural field was first introduced by Kurt Koffka in 1935. Koffka established that some entities exist in the geographical environment but would not necessarily have behavioural fields of existence, and vice versa. The behavioural field is the reflection of the actions, sensations, and meaning of an entity on the observer, while the geographical environment is the actual positioning of the unit in space in a certain time. Koffka explains the independence of the two environments through examples. In the first, he states that by looking at a fragmented figure, our behavioural field will establish that it is a unit, for example a cross, but in reality and in the geographical environment, there is no cross and instead there are eleven dots arranged in a certain geometrical way and there is no connection between them that makes them a unit. On the other hand, Koffka establishes that the existence of real unity is neither a necessity nor an important cause of behavioural unity, as is illustrated in his second example. Here he states that, if a gun is covered with paint in three different parts to blend with the background that it is placed on (in this case the background is made out of a tree, leaves and ground), then

[28] Gregory, R. 'Knowledge in Perception and Illusion', *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. Lond. B*, 352 (1997), 1121–28.

[29] *Ibid*, p1121.

[30] Hochberg, J. 'Visual Perception in Architecture', in *Architecture and Visual Perception*, ed. by A.G. Read and P. Doo (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983), p38.

[31] Koffka, K. 'From Principles of Gestalt Psychology', in *Perception*, ed. by R Schwartz (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), pp. 50-64.

[32] Ibid, p53.

the gun will no longer appear to the observer as a unit but rather as a multiplicity of much less important objects.[32]

These two examples explain the move from perception into cognition; this happened at the same time as Gestalt psychologists began to believe that a new theory of brain organization might emerge. In reality Gestalt theorists managed to explain the figure/ground phenomenon as well as some of the laws of organization but they struggled to establish reasons for illusion and other major problems of perception. This was the beginning of the 'direct' theories of perception, which followed in the footsteps of the classical theory that states that our visual system responds to wavelengths and the intensity of light falling on the eye rather than the actual properties of the objects being observed such as, size, colour, form, etc. In addition to this, perception psychologists established that this response is then added to our memories and past experiences to generate more complex perceptions of objects and spaces, which in turn, emphasises the notion of our perception of the world to being 'direct'.[33]

[33] Hochberg, 'Visual Perception in Architecture', p40.

Despite their disagreements as to the way in which information taken from the environment is perceived and interpreted, perception psychologists and theorists seem to support the existence of the dualism of the factual environment and the conceptual, or a physical image/ environment as opposed to a mental or conceptual one. The notion of a physical environment is closely related to Koffka's ideas of the geographical environment and the haptic and mental environment is a reflection of Gibson's 'direct' notions and beliefs, while the conceptual relates to the interpretations of Helmholtz's 'indirect' theory.[34] In effect the processes of perception, conception and cognition are complex and multiple rather than dual or twofold, therefore, a multiple process, temporally and spatially connected and collectively ephemeral could be established between the physical and the sensory as well as the conceptual in order to explain cognitive perception.

[34] von Helmholtz, H. 'Concerning the Perceptions in General (1866)', in *Treatise on Physiological Optics, 3rd Edition* (New York: Dover, 1962).

"Percept and concept turn as one, spinning the fabric of experience, looking always ahead and always back, 'there is no vision without thought.'"[35]

[35] Merleau-Ponty, M. *The Primacy of Perception*. ed. by J Edie (Ohio: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p175.

This evidence confirms the collectivity, connectivity and circularity of the perceptual system, which brings the field of perception even closer to the notions and principles of cybernetics.[36] Arnheim states that our perceptual experience is far from trivial, regardless of the object or environment being observed due to the openness of the system.[37] These active interactions between the three main elements of a perceptual field; the object/space, the environment around it (its context), and the observer's consciousness, are confirmations that the perceptual experience is an active open system. Despite establishing ontologically that the perceptual field and the visual apparatus in general are active processes, it is not sufficient to explain the dynamics of the perceptual experience as an ephemeral system. The observer and the context or their world(s) being percept and concept are both very important variables in this system. According to Jonathan Hill there are three types of user or observer, the passive, the reactive and the creative. All three of Hill's user styles could be observed in the behaviour of those who entered the installation:

"The passive user is predictable and unable to transform use, space and meaning. The reactive user modifies the physical characteristics of a space as needs change but must select from a narrow and predictable range of configurations largely defined by the architect. The creative user either creates a new space or gives an existing one new meanings and uses. Creative use can either be a reaction to habit, result from the knowledge learned through habit, or be based on habit, as a conscious, evolving deviation from established behaviour." [38]

[36] Murrani, 'Third Way Architecture', p271.

[37] Arnheim, R. 'Gestalt Psychology and Artistic Form', in *Aspects of Form*, ed. by LL Whyte (Burlington: Lund Humphries, 1968), p203.

[38] Hill, *Actions of Architecture*, p28.

During the construction of the installation, *Overlaid Realities*, the initial intention was to provoke the norm, to challenge the static condition of the exhibits within a museum cabinet and instead to place the viewer within the cabinet to trigger interpretations and provoke interactions. By focusing on the most direct haptic sense, vision, the streaming of participants' self-projections triggered the creative users to explore their environment while the Droste effects allowed for the conceptual cognitive interpretations of 'their' space to emerge. This was one of the installation's main goals. The exposed technology revealed a network of connections and cables which appeared naked before the participants helping them to solve the puzzle

of the 'illusion' projected onto the four screens (Image 2). The intention of this exposure was to trigger active perception through participation and experimentation. One participant's view was: "Your installation made me pause and think, thank you". However, not all participants were active or creative participants. This was part of the appeal of the installation, allowing the social to appear in its messy, everyday, unaffected behaviour. In this instance, mess was certainly a condition in the life of the installation; this notion is supported in a statement made by Jeremy Till in his quest to define the various conditions that architecture as a praxis field depended on, where he states: "Mess is the law".[39] The spatial and social interactions between the participants meant that their creative and passive input could overlap to produce a better understanding of the world or versions of the world created through the installation, or in other words, irrealities.

Multiple networks of body/self(s) and spaces(s): The Social Mess

Roy Ascott opposes the need for the centrality of the existence of the body in the system of perception but rather suggests that networking takes the physicality of the body out of the system by linking the mind to a kind of timeless sea[40] and by doing so, the focus moves onto the transformation of the artwork, or as Ascott calls it 'creative data', which appears in a constant process of becoming and perceptual motion. However, the relationship between the body, the creative data and perception is in constant oscillation. Merleau-Ponty in his book the *Phenomenology of Perception* confirms the relationship of the body to a theory of perception:

"[...] we need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world through our body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body. But by thus remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall also rediscover ourselves, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception." [41]

Therefore, in order to understand the world(s) around us we need to understand the relationship between our body and its space. This is clearly an ontological and an ontogenic relational proposition. An example of such a relationship is evident in the dichotomy between the proportions



image 2

[39] Till, J. *Architecture Depends* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2009), pxii.

[40] Ascott, R. *Telematic Embrace: Visionary Theories of Art, Technology and Consciousness* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), p187.

[41] Merleau-Ponty, M. *Phenomenology of Perception*. trans. C Smith (London and NY: Routledge, 2002), p239.

of Le Corbusier's *Modulor Man* and the *Sensory Homunculus* in relation to body and space illustrated around them. The Modulor Man relates to the space around it through a direct Cartesian relationship, while the Sensory Homunculus relates to the space around it proportionally via its senses and perceptions. This dichotomy is one of the most effective demonstrations of the multiple representations of the relationships between body, space and perception. Philosophers for centuries debated this relationship and even though Aristotle believed in a rigid physical relationship between body and space, he ignored the existence of a body other than the physical body. Not until Kant, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and later on, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari were the changing human experience and the perception of place and space accounted for.[42]

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari suggest different connotations of the relationship between the body and place with their theory of the '*Body without Organs*'. They describe the *Body without Organs* as the egg before the extension and development of the organism, being defined by gradients, thresholds, axes, vectors, dynamic tendencies and energy transformation, where the organs appear and function out of intensities. [43] By intensities Deleuze and Guattari mean fundamental abstraction, where matter equals energy, when both equal zero. In biological terms this means when a hypothetical equilibrium pushes form and space to the edge between order and chaos, and where emergence begins its non-linear loop again. For them, the *Body without Organs* or *BwO* is:

"A BwO is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities. Only intensities pass and circulate. Still, the BwO is not a scene, place, or even a support upon which something comes to pass. It has nothing to do with phantasy, there is nothing to interpret. [...] It is not a space, nor is it in space; it is matter that occupies space to a given degree – to the degree corresponding to the intensities produced." [44]

Similarly to the different ideologies of the body in relation to space, there are multiple ideologies of space itself that become the direct construct of our worlds, for instance, physical space, cyber space, virtual

space, interactive space, and even empty space. Deleuze and Guattari speak of the smooth and striated space by which they relate space not only to its ontological characteristics but also to its ontogenic condition being heterogeneous or homogenous.[45] There are parallels that can be drawn between Deleuze and Guattari's *Body without Organs* and the empty space that Georges Perec identifies in Lewis Carroll's nonsense poem *Map of the Ocean in Hunting of the Snark*. Perec identifies and lists different species of space which he then summarises in one definition, explaining:

"In short, spaces have multiplied, been broken up and have diversified. There are spaces today of every kind and every size, for every use and every function. To live is to pass from one space to another, while doing your very best not to bump yourself." [46]

The construct of space is dependent on the occupation and appropriation of that particular space which is in turn dependent on the participants within that space and their consciousness, perception, cognition and interpretations. This network and connections of dependencies are in fact the core of what constitutes the messy nature of this work which extends to other dependencies, be they social, economic, political, etc. It is not the core purpose of this chapter to explore different kinds of space or body but it is necessary to build a clear hypothesis of the dependence established between body and space in relation to their representation as well as the overall collective cognition experience. The entanglement in the relationship between body and space in this section is a proof of the complexity of the subject of perception and cognition as well as their construct. This complexity confirms that our problem is ontogenic as much as it is ontological. There are several variables involved in the perceptual system, which act individually and collectively at the same time within this complex ontogenic system. These main elements are, the sensations (the haptic senses), the perceptual field (the environment whether it is a geographical or behavioural one), the body/observer with their own consciousness and conceptual constructive knowledge and the medium in which the world(s) take(s) place. These elements follow principles and processes within the perceptual field, such as connectivity, collectivity and circularity between each other through certain media. The observer on the

[42] Casey, E. *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), p332.

[43] Deleuze, G. and Guattari, P.F. *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 2004), p170.

[44] Ibid, p169.

[45] Ibid, pp474-500.

[46] Perec, G. *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (London: Penguin, 2008), p6.

other hand carries a different status being passive and/or active, present or absent, depending on their preconceptions, conceptions and beliefs as well as different appropriations of their worlds.

The space that was created and the space that emerged (occupied and re-appropriated) out of the *Overlaid Realities* installation were distinct at all times. The emergent space certainly depended for its existence on the participants' interactions (Image 3). On the one hand, the lack of such participations meant that the projections were still and empty and rendered the space dead. On the other hand, lively interactions added the vital element of social mess (to adopt Till's term) that comes with notions of the everyday.[47] The openness of the rules of the game implemented within the installation meant that what emerged was a result of the occupation of space for the sake of re-appropriations and interpretations and not for the celebration of the design of the space itself. The architects of the installation meant to take a step back in the process to allow social behaviours to materialise.

The triadic relationship between body, space and the social resonates with Merleau-Ponty's theory of the corporeal that holds the body and the world to be the fundamental structures of being.[48] Corporeity in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy interconnects the body directly with consciousness and thus provides the framework for social relations to exist between body and world, body and self, and body and space via active perception experiences.

Behavioural Worlds: State of Flow

Manuel Castells establishes that spaces are expressions of society and culture, and emphasises that they are expressions rather than reflections of society. Castells limits the definition of space to the material world on the assumption that:

"[...] space is a material product, in relationship to other material products – including people – who engage in 'historically' determined social relationships that provide space with a form, a function, and a social meaning." [49]

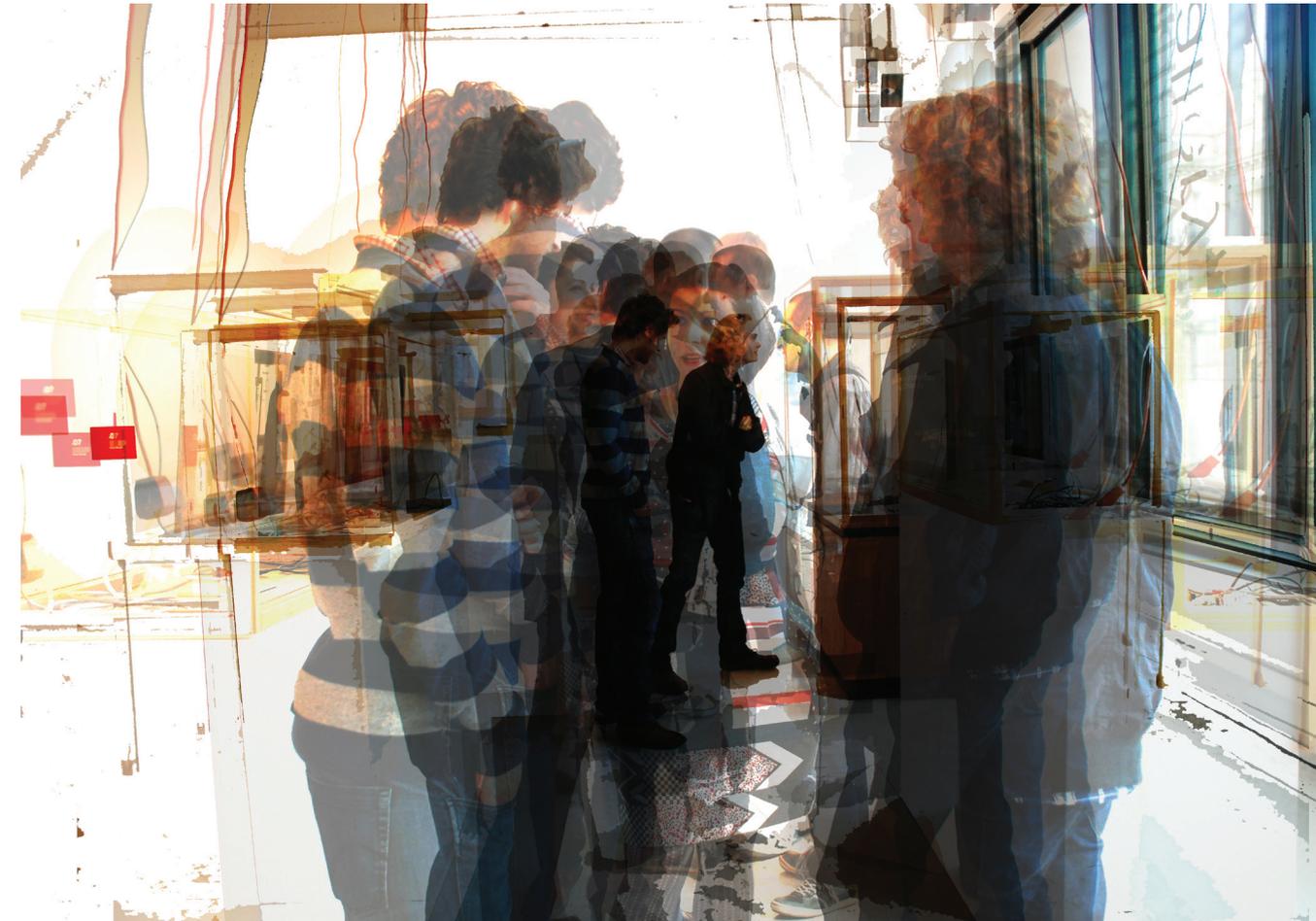


image 3

[47] de Certeau, M. *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1984).

[48] Merleau-Ponty, M. *La Nature: Cours De Collège De France 1956-1960* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), p343.

[49] Castells, M. 'Chapter 6: The Space of Flow', in *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture - the Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000), p441.



image 4

While Castells refers to space as a material product in its relationship to other material products, Lefebvre agrees with Castells on considering space a product but he disagrees fundamentally on what type of product it is. Lefebvre certainly argues, “(Social) space is a (social) product”.^[50] It is important to establish that space is not an abstract matter but rather is based on social assemblages and connections.^[51] Moreover, it appears from the natural development of this argument that space is social. But can we consider the social to be a type of material? According to sociologist Bruno Latour considering the social as a mere type of material is in essence one of the common fundamental errors one can make in its definition. Instead Latour relates the social to two different phenomena, stating that on one hand it relates to materialistic substance, and on the other hand it is a movement between non-social elements and their connections, associations and collective.^[52] Therefore, the social in its definition oscillates between stasis and constant movement, between associations, connections and relations, building up assemblages, appropriations and interpretations and is hence always in a state of flow. The state of flow concurrently occurs between space and the social. Strictly speaking, flow is constantly restructured between a network of spaces and social collectives in time. Our world around us is governed by a state of flow, and this in return is conditioned by our social relations and ultimately by our behaviour. The vitality of the existence of the state of flow in relation to our spatial, temporal and social relations is associated directly with our ability to re-assemble, re-organise, re-make, and re-appropriate such relations, which is what Leibniz, Goodman, Gombrich, Lefebvre, and Latour collectively address.

During the opening night of the Changing Perceptions exhibition, the space of the installation *Overlaid Realities* began to accumulate a number of meanings over time. Initially it became a strange space with participants rejecting the “Big Brother” like observations captured and streamed on the four screens. Later that estranged space became more familiar and the participants tentatively began to explore its material and process at the same time. However, it was not until social nodes began to emerge that the piece fulfilled its potential, when participants began to interact with each

[50] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p26.

[51] Till, *Architecture Depends*, p126.

[52] Latour, B. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p159.

other to trigger different Droste effects over time (Image 4). The installation itself was technically very simple and operated according to fixed rules, however, the emergent behaviours of its space(s) and its participants were highly networked and complex in their relations. According to these relations the installation exhibited multiple states of flow, flow of materials (physical and electronic); flow of movement (people and spaces); and social interactions on a haptic and a collective level. The space of flows began to blur the relationship between architecture and the social.

The installation was built to expose the characteristics of a behavioural world on a small scale. It exhibited a facilitating role, which allowed technology to heighten the definition of simple rules to be played by heterogeneous actors, be it participants, their consciousness, interpretations, fragments of space, or time, etc. The emergent spatial-technological and social praxis of the installation was versatile and could be applied in other contexts and on different scales. The praxis advocates a bottom-up relationship for the designer/architect to their designs and allows the users, participants and inhabitants to occupy, re-appropriate, re-assemble, and re-make their environments. Through a nonlinear system of relations, irrealisms have pushed the re-making of versions of worlds to a state of ephemeral emergence, thus creating new social nodes and spatial flow. The act of re-making, re-appropriation, and re-interpretation improved the qualities of the social in space via a triadic construct of ontologic, ontogenic and behavioural flows. Based on ideologies of irrealism, relationism and third way philosophy, the installation heralds principles of cognition and indirect perception for a state of flow in a behavioural world between spacetime and the social; and hence remains ephemeral and relative.

The intertwined relationship between spacetime and the social is dynamic in its making, or more accurately, re-making, and also in its behaviour. The ontology of spacetime becomes evanescent through the behaviour of the social interactions of the participants, their embodiments and perceptions. Such embodiments expose the nature of the heterogeneous social spaces that influence flow in the wider social context, the network, and the ecology of life; the mess of the everyday.