



Re-scaling living spaces: an analysis through a Spatial Empathy

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Abstract:

The immateriality of spaces and how it interferes in the actions of the body and in the spatial experience is as important as technical aspects involved in the conception of its physical dimension. However, when dealing with the spatial conception in Architecture is it is usual that quantitative measures are prioritized while the influence of the body in space is less explored. The present work is based on the idea of Spatial Empathy, which considers that the joint spatial experience arises from the multisensory, embodied and emotive encounter amidst space and place. The term Empathy first appeared in architecture in Aesthetic studies developed by Einfühlung, an approach from the second half of the 19th century. Einfühlung is the genesis of the concept Empathy and deals with the relationship between the subject and the object from the feeling fostered by the latter. According to Einfühlung's theorists, the arts could be analyzed through Empathy due to a 'dye' that appears as a fusion between what is seen and what is felt. This understanding can be applied to urban spaces, which also have their tonality, their coloring, their ambiances. In order to collaborate with the study of urban ambiances, this article explores the idea of Spatial Empathy as a means of analysis and understanding of lived spaces. The results of field works showed that the body immersed in the environment can help to rethink public spaces and collective experiences, since it is on the human scale that the body interacts directly with the surroundings.

RE-THINK WAYS TO RE-SCALING SPACES THROUGH EXPERIENCE

A special mode of our emotional bond with the world, Einfühlung refers to our propensity to project our feelings onto objects, leading us to identify both with the inanimate and with ourselves (Cazal, 2014). In the core of Einfühlung is the concept of “Stimmung”, that can be understood as a result of the encounter between subject and object, representing the idea of mood, atmosphere. This ability to motivate an emotional reaction through projecting oneself, or the opposite, projecting oneself to internalize an emotion, describes what later was translated by the neologism Empathy.

According to Einfühlung, works of art can be examined from the perspective of Empathy due to a tone that emerges as a fusion between what is seen and felt (Vischer, 1994). In painting and sculpture, for example, there is a whole atmosphere that, through its colors, composition, and geometric rhythms, can cast their impact in different ways. This would be the evidence that art has the might not only to affect us, but also our propensity to internalize physical elements innerly and emotionally; or even that we have a propensity to project our emotions onto elements that we take as symbolic (Pallasmaa, 2014).

As aesthetic objects studied under the Einfühlung, each urban space has its own atmosphere, its own ambience. Related to the various sensations derived from places, the ambience results from the junction between the physical aspects and the senses they bring into perception (Augoyard, 1979). Based on the study of ambiences, this work explores Empathy in the urban spatial context, a Spatial Empathy, as a means of analyzing the foundation of joint experiences in public spaces. In order to explore how the body is affected by the experience of space, it is presented a case study as well as an ongoing methodology developed within a field work. For considering the Other's body together with our own, the intention is to contribute both to the study of ambiences and to re-think the scale of space when the body is immersed in a social milieu.

Einfühlung and ambience in the construction of the idea of a Spatial Empathy

Genesis of the concept of Empathy, Einfühlung corresponds to the generic description of a knowledge that sought to understand the emotional expressiveness of works of art. The aim was to discover the conditions and premises under which the subject was affected by the aesthetics of the object to the point that it aroused a feeling from the onset. According to Einfühlung, it is possible for the viewer to have an active participation in a work of art or in other visual forms, being a mutual experience of exchange between the body and the perceived object (Worringer, 1996). From this point of view, the viewer is placed at the center of the discourse, where from an observer, becomes the “being” projected in the work.

Initially the empathic process appeared based on perception and thus related to eye movement (Vischer, 1994). However, in Worringer, (1996) studies where Lipps (1994) is a reference author, Empathy implies that the observer sees himself in the object and becomes emotionally involved with it. Objects were felt rather than just perceived, highlighting motor mimicry – the body – as the second moment after the experience of interior imitation – mind (Lipps, 1994). The projection mechanism would be a process that mainly deals with the objectification of the subject in the object, where the whole body participates.

Considering that the human being is not static, Schmarsow (1994) states that the connection between architectural aesthetics and the subject arises when there is the possibility of bodily movement. For the author, architecture is ‘space configurator’ and is manifested when the subject is projected into the void space, and not only in massive forms. Because its aesthetic experience is conditioned simultaneously by the body in movement and by the mental apprehension that occurs from the displacement, architecture does not only act on how we feel. More than other visual arts, it participates in the structuring of our relationship with what surrounds us (Cazal, 2014) and radiates from the capture of the subject's feeling, which is both an oriented and moving body. It is in its movement that the body is affected by the immateriality of space, influencing the apprehension of the scale of the physical environment.

To understand the aesthetic experience of architectural space, Schmarsow (1994) explains what he called ‘space intuition’, which arises when the observer placed in the center position intuits the spatial logic of each situation. The corporeality is established from intuition, resulting in a projection that constantly builds ‘the space that surrounds us, wherever we are, the space that we are constantly building around us and that represents us more than the shape of our body (Schmarsow, 1994, pp.55). At this point, is understood that the body assumes a role of reference in relation to the scale which could be changeable from the experiences provided by the environment.

Based on neurological experiments on the study of Empathy, Berthoz (2006) studies showed that the Other is a preponderant factor in the bodily perception of space. The Other's body can empathically assume a role of spatial reference, not only of location, but of action, conditioning the way in which we become a body in space to the others. In addition to confirm the vital importance of the body, it leads to a correlation between Empathy and how we locate ourselves spatially. It shows that the Other is a primordial element not only as a body in space, but in the perception of spatial scale and in the foundation of an experience in a common ground.

When immersed in an urban space, we can experience a series of practices and dynamics. To exploring the relationship between body and space, this work seeks to explore what was outlined as Spatial Empathy. Starting from the Einfühlung studies,

Spatial Empathy emerges as mean to study the foundation of collective experiences in public space.

Sensitive Wanderings

As the empathic experience derives from the sensitive apprehension of the subject, the affected body became the core of the development of theoretical and methodological approaches to Spatial Empathy. In the search for approaches where bodily engagement was possible, a method based on the experience of walking was developed, with the active participation of the researcher. From the body that wanders as a strategy of spatial exploration, the method of 'sensitive wanderings' emerges as a mixture of the situationist drift (Debord, 2003) and the go-along interview (Thibaud, 2004).

The method was constructed experientially as an exploratory process based on walking. The paths, changes of itinerary, and the decision to stay or continue was guided by affectation. The diary was the way of recording this experience. It was developed through documentation, as an expression of the rhythms and tones of the different experiences and affectations. One important thing was not to document what was seen, felt, but that the capture was a consequence of what was felt and experienced.

The walk is initiated by the researcher in a solitary way and without any analytical posture, in what was called 'I speak' moment. The rhythm of the experience had moments of calmer, faster walking or even quick stops or long stays. However, during the solitary journey could happen some interruptions. Sometimes, especially in moments of pause, the speech was taken by the other person who 'interrupted' the first-person's narration. In other situations, the researcher felt the need to 'pass' the speech, talk to other person as an intuitive decision, adding the 'you speak' moment.

Whenever the 'you speak' moment appeared, the researcher invited the person to participate in the attempt. The invited one was asked to guide the researcher to a point in that public place which represents a feeling or sensation felt at that moment, without a pre-established itinerary. Until reaching the final point, the researcher asked the person to narrate their path, explaining their decision-making and sensations along the way. Besides recording the guest's narration during the journey, the reactions and actions of the body were also documented.

Among the documented facts was the variation in the pace of walking, the stops, as well as the sensations and feelings aroused in the researcher in activity. This moment was called 'we speak' moment, since the path is taken from the point of view of two people: the researcher and the guest. In the end it was possible to map points of pause, permanence and/or passage, as well as the sensations mentioned by the interviewees in space.

The study was carried out in two different countries, in four public spaces at different times and days. From the analysis of the mapped points indicated by the interviewees as potentially aggregating, it was possible to observe how these places were spatially abstracted by the users. It was observed that elements of spatial restriction but visual permeability, such as the bandstand, and expressed by the words like 'socialization', 'conversation', 'people', marked the collective meeting. The places pointed out as prone to collective sharing when the body was in accommodation or of a spectator posture-taking, were related to the landscape and contemplation. In this case the interaction was the interaction was made from the exchange of glances. Being able to visualize the space in its totality seems to enhance the ability to imagine oneself there. It is also observed that more the physical space is permeable (gazes, displacement, and scale transition) the greater seems to be the possibility of climatization and to engage collectively. At points where permeability is not possible, with elements that 'bar' the view, it was observed that the shorter the permanence, being the walking the most recurrent action.

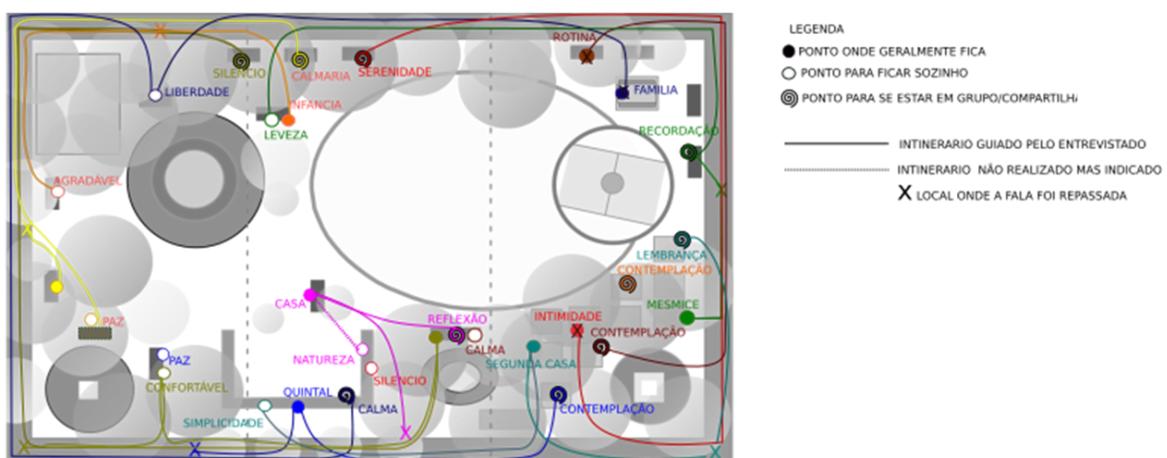


Figure.1: Mapping from the field study : Public space 'A'

The arrangement of urban equipment can cause the groups aggregation in a punctual space and separation from other activities, due to the distance provided by the space obstacle. The probable hypothesis that arises from field work and the readings is that the greater the possibilities of spatial use, bigger is the probability of the body being immerse in a collective ambience.

The field sketches also bring elements of analysis from the color matrices. The color variation – sometimes warmer, others cooler – is perceived in practically all the drawings. This was observed at the end of the field study, how the visual and social aesthetics of the sketches were associated to the rhythm of events and the ambiences. The spaces represented with cooler colors were associate with pauses and slows rhythms, with words as memory and contemplation. The warmer colored

places seems to have a more pulsating rhythm. In this sense, we can say that space 'calls us' from its sentimental tone, with the spatial base providing conditions for the actions that result from the affectation to be carried out.

CONCLUSION

From spaces studied based on Spatial Empathy, it is observed that collaborative experiences have their own dynamics: actions that are sometimes directed by use, by the social group or by the action/event that takes place there. These dynamics at times seem to expose different folds of the same ambience, since they participate in the construction of a totality of the space. In other words, there seems to be a rhythm in place, where each event that takes place there, or the event, becomes a cog in a larger context. In this relationship between space and the body immersed in the social milieu, it is understood that the potential experience of engagement provided is an additional factor that can be considered when analyzing the spatial scale. It's not just how we locate and localize ourselves, but also how the other body contributes as a spatial element which lead us to be a part of the scale as a collectivity.

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