

Interdisciplinary pedagogical environments in architectural education.

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Interdisciplinary Pedagogical Environments in Architectural Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes the creation of interdisciplinary pedagogical environments to construct creative dialogues in architecture, landscape and performance practice that can be applied to the creation of new intersectional knowledge in various fields. Architectural education has been at the forefront of pedagogies based on studio culture. New interdisciplinary approaches demand new strategies to create pedagogical methods for professionals and students from different disciplines. This paper presents two case studies of interdisciplinary pedagogical environments; 'Urban dramaturgies' and 'Interdisciplinary Macbeth'.

KEYWORDS

interdisciplinary pedagogies, architecture, performance, experiential learning, landscape

Aim and Description

This paper examines the creation of pedagogical environments that bring together students and academics from different disciplines to construct creative dialogues that can be applied to the creation of knowledge in various fields; architecture amongst them. Architectural education has been at the forefront of pedagogies based on the way Architects work in their practices, such as studio culture, and new interdisciplinary approaches demand new strategies to include professionals and students from different disciplines. We have been working on transferring pedagogical methods from performing arts practices – dance, theatre, installation, music. etc., - into architecture to develop a framework for interdisciplinary teaching practices. This paper presents two case studies of interdisciplinary pedagogical environments; ‘Urban Dramaturgies’ and ‘Interdisciplinary Macbeth’. Coming from both Architecture and Performing Arts, we organised these two projects in collaboration with international institutions – Universidad Politecnica de Madrid and the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design – bringing together students and practitioners from different disciplines.

Urban Dramaturgies (Madrid, Spain) took place over four days in May 2017, in the neighbourhood of Lavapies, Madrid. It was a collaborative site-specific performative installation undertaken with a mixed group of students coming from architecture, theatre, and urban planning. This workshop established the basis of what we define as creative interdisciplinary pedagogical environments. The workshop focused on mapping different experiences developed in a public space. Students and researchers worked collaboratively in the development of urban narratives around some specific public spaces in Lavapies. There was research on the history, tales and legends of the area, and some elements of storytelling in order to produce cartographies of the space that encompass the different urban narratives. On the last day we held a public event as an outcome of the workshop.

Interdisciplinary Macbeth (Prague, Czech Republic) was a result of six-day intensive rehearsals as part of the Result Driven Workshop section of the festival with an international group of twelve architects and space designers. The outcome, a promenade site-specific installation, was presented at the Prague Industrial Palace in June 2019. The workshop was intended to help the participants to engage in devising processes using their own visual and multi-sensorial language and translating it into dramaturgical decisions in the interpretation of imagery in Shakespeare’s Macbeth. In this workshop, we devised using objects, images, sound and the human body. Starting from the images evoked by Macbeth, the participants created a series of performative and visual events or installations using objects, projection, sound and their bodies.

This interdisciplinary methodology was triggered by the consideration that learning and teaching in Higher Education have different layers. It is not only about knowledge transmission or knowledge exchange, but also about

experience and participation and educating students in a broader way, making them professionals working within their environmental conditions (social, cultural, economic, etc.) that are able to undertake different challenges and develop their problem-solving skills. This is supported by Prof. Craig Mahoney, who states, 'higher education should be a transformative process that supports the development of graduates who can make a meaningful contribution to wider society, local communities and to the economy'.¹ We need to support students in becoming independent and capable of finding solutions for the obstacles they will encounter, being able to find informational resources, as the different disciplines evolve and what we teach today could soon be obsolete.

From a pedagogical perspective, the workshop's objective was to set up interdisciplinary pedagogies between architecture and performance by connecting space to dramaturgy that would come out of narratives developed by the students. From a participant's testimonial, it is evident that this process transformed the way they perceived the creative practice as a singular discipline activity. One participant, a playwright, observed:

During this workshop we found a point of union between the architectural and dramaturgical perspective, between space and the body, between movement and the word, so the proposals were always directed towards those aspects of confluence.

Another of the participants, an architect, stated:

Our approach was directed towards the appropriation of urban space in a poetic way, making the participants embody the words. In this way we would be able to combine movement, word and space.

This evidences that the work developed in both workshops provided participants with a transformative experience and a deeper understanding of their disciplines and how their skills can be transferable to other fields.

The RSVP cycles as an architectural methodology

The starting point in the methodology of both case studies is the RSVP cycles (Resources - Scores - Valuation - Performance), a model that mixes performance, dance, landscape and space design. The cycles allowed us to create a common ground for the different disciplines involved, where everyone could bring their experience and ideas to the project.

The RSVP Cycles were developed in 1964 by Lawrence and Anna Halprin as a methodology for creative disciplines 'to trigger participation and integrate ideas and input from a group of people'.² It became a cross-disciplinary lab bringing together explorations with the body – physical expressivity and creativity, and relationship to space, involving innovators in cross-disciplinary collaboration – dancers, designers, performance and visual artists, musicians,

poets, and writers of her time. RSVP workshops and dance studios brought together cult artists of the day, such as Meredith Monk, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, John Cage, Terry Riley, Alan Kaprow, and Merce Cunningham. Anna Halprin was a dance pedagogue, and her approach was based on simple body movements with a focus on the self, that is the body within the external environment. Her husband and collaborator, Lawrence Halprin, was an environmental designer and modernist landscape architect who studied Bauhaus at Harvard and was interested in developing community participation in the design process, connecting art with nature in urban living. Together they created the RSVP Cycles, using communication ideas in French (the request for a response), arranged in a convenient order, RSVP as an invitation to the audience to respond and encourage participation. The initials indicating Resource, Score, Valuation and Performance – are an innovative methodology in creative – dance and design processes that could also be applied to different disciplines – from dance to landscape design. One of the key aspects of the RSVP Cycles is their ability to adapt to any human creative process in space and that they have the flexibility to transform and evolve. Lawrence Halprin's theory is based on the idea that the creative process is visible through scores in space as a recording of a process. He poses a question about the energy of group creation processes - how does it influence human action in life and all fields of art? Anna extended her approach to dance training as a healing practice working with people with AIDS and cancer, becoming an influential force in dance therapy throughout the following decades.

The RSVP Cycles are annotations (using examples of musical scores) of creative process development; they are not fixed results but transitions from which to create an action that can be artistic or indeed can relate to any human action. Resources (R) are an essential starting point referring to the material used for improvisation, the emotional and physical resources that performers use to work with, individually or in a group. The scores (S) are at the centre of The RSVP Cycles. Describing the process, Halprin defines scores as 'symbolization of processes which extend overtime' and 'instructions for the work'.³ The term 'Valuation' (V) is action-focused; it joins two words to suggest looking for a value in the scores (actions), 'a process of dynamically responding to work based on values'.⁴ 'Performance' (P) refers to results through the improvisation process 'setting the work in motion'. Cycles were a perfect synergy of body and space, an essential element of group performativity and the origin of devised theatre pedagogy, providing performers/students with multi-vision and a strategic outline from which they can develop their work.⁵

The RSVP cycles provided a creative method to work with students focusing on experiential learning, 'where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience in a creative process. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience'.⁶ Experiential learning emerges in opposition to:

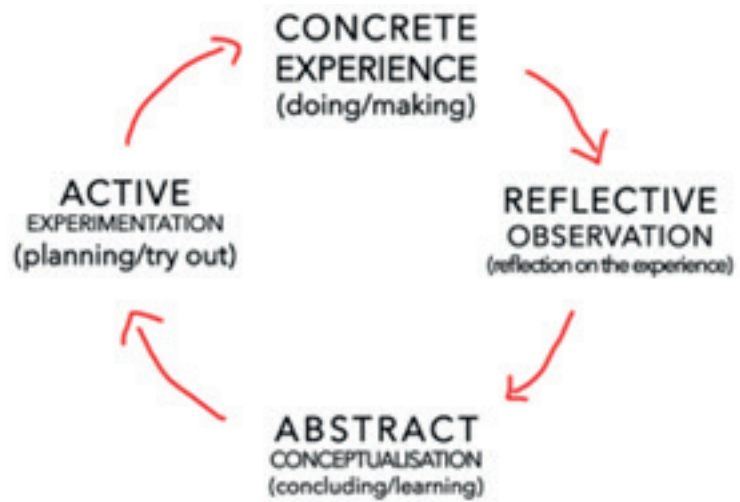


Figure 1:
Kolb Cycle of Experiential Learning
(Maria J.M. Sanchez 2019).

Learning from texts and teachers, learning through experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill is opposed to acquisition of them as means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal.⁷

Kolb developed a cycle of experiential learning that has four stages: Concrete experience, Reflecting Observation, Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experimentation (Fig.1).

The following demonstrates how Kolb's cycle can be related to Halprin's RSVP method, allowing further interrogation of the connection between creativity and experiential learning.

Kolb's cycle also can be adjusted to the RSVP Cycles as applicable to human creativity. For Kolb, education is achieved through experience, which includes creativity. A process of translation of Kolb's phases to RSVP cycles identifies the following:

1. Halprin's Resources = Kolb's Concrete experience; the initial stage of RSVP cycles – Resources looks into what we have around us, relating to the learner encountering concrete experiences.
2. Halprin's Scores = Kolb's Reflective observation; the Score as a way of putting together what we know (resources) and using our experiences in action. It also involves the mapping and representation of the resources, which relies on a process of observation and reflection of the experience.
3. Halprin's Valuation = Kolb's Abstract conceptualisation; in this phase the RSVP cycles propose a reflection on the initial outcomes to evaluate and identify the elements that can be taken forward in the creative process. In Kolb's cycle, this phase also corresponds to the articulation of the conclusions and learning from the experience, identifying the most valuable elements of the process.
4. Halprin's Performance = Kolb's Active experimentation. This is the last phase in both cycles, which would lead us again to the first phase. In the



Figure 2 & 3:
Urban Dramaturgies. Experiential
Cartography/ Event
(Rolando Duran Cavieres 2018).

RSVP cycles, this corresponds to the final output that emerges from the three previous phases. In Kolb's cycle, this phase corresponds to the last stage of the learning process, where we try out and experiment with what we have learnt involving a process of planning.

In both case studies, we have applied RSVP cycles as a methodology of creative practice and Kolb's experiential learning as a pedagogical methodology.

Urban dramaturgies

The first case study, Urban Dramaturgies explored an urban environment through methods and tools from performing arts that are usually not implemented in architecture and urban planning. The outcome of urban dramaturgies was a performative event which aimed to reveal the laws of movement and tensions between the different urban spaces, where the people carrying out their everyday actions introduced through performance events, a new meaning and a spatial and playful dimension. This attempt to define the urban space through actions in performance study discourse has been previously proposed by Paul Makeham: 'performance studies, provide an interpretive frame for analysing the urban drama, encompassing not only formally designated artworks but an almost infinitive range of other phenomena as well'.⁸

The workshop was developed into three performance cycles. The first one was working with students through an understanding of the RSVP Cycles. Students were split into groups and started working with their own texts – poems, narratives, etc – which related to them and brought into the process. They worked inside the School of Architecture of Madrid using various spaces for their scores (Fig.2 & 3). The second cycle was to develop the key

performative material that came from the first cycle in the public space, using locations such as the marketplace, car park, or the façade of the library, formerly a monastery. The third cycle was the creation of an installation event and a public performance in the urban environment resulting in a mixing of real every day) and performative activities.

Urban spaces are defined by the actions that take place in them, what Mumford names: the Urban Drama.⁹ Public spaces are adapted to the uses that different communities develop in them, and their character can change several times a day depending on how they are used. They are spaces for relationships, playgrounds or simply areas for socialising. Mumford understands the city as a theatre:

It is in the city, the city as a theatre where man's mere purposive activities are focused and work out, through conflicting and cooperating personalities, events, groups, into more significant culminations.¹⁰

Paul Makeham already spoke of everyday actions as part of the urban drama, pointing out that 'performance studies provide an interpretive frame for analysing the urban drama, encompassing not only formally designated artworks but an almost infinitive range of other phenomena as well'.¹¹ Jane Jacobs further develops this concept by proposing the concept of urban ballets: 'the ballet of the good city sidewalk never repeats itself from place to place, and in any other place is always replete with new improvisations'.¹² However, the performative nature of these concepts that have broadly yet to be explored empirically. Further underpinning the suitability of the performing arts in developing an interdisciplinary architectural pedagogical environment.

In reference to Lavapiés, the identity of this urban framework bases a creative process of self-management for the intervention of the space from the dramatic fact capable of informing the experience at different pragmatic levels of knowledge. The process generated a technology of representation that expresses the historical, social and cultural idiosyncrasies of Lavapiés, now seen as a location for the event. A performative event open to the public is, in this sense, at the service of the community.

I n t e r d i s c i p l i n a r y M a c b e t h

The objective of the second case study, Interdisciplinary Macbeth, was to explore the use of space as the primary tool in working with a text through a collaborative creative process. Performance devising - also called collective creation - is a method of making theatre performances through collective improvisation. It, therefore, was a useful method to engage participants from different disciplines. Using space as dramaturgy, space designers are not generally actively involved in the dramatic devising process, although it is one of the most popular strategies in performance creation. Directors and performers mostly use devising, but how can a designer devise a space through a group process and be actively engaged in the creation of new

performance work? Interdisciplinary Macbeth was part of the Emergence Performance Festival at PQ19. This unique version of Macbeth approached the transformation and adaptation of Shakespeare's Macbeth through an installation space. The transformation was achieved through mixed media techniques, which involved projection, soundscapes and performance scores in a site-specific installation designed to trigger audience participation.

The starting point was the creative process based on the Repère methodologies appropriated by Robert Lepage. Founded on Anna and Lawrence Halprin's RSVP Cycles, this process has group creativity based on a cyclical reworking of starting references at its core. The methodology based on actors' creator improvisation and collective dynamics was applied to performance designers as creators, devising through visual and installation arts. In addition, we applied the Viewpoints performance method by exploring architectural objects, shape, time, lighting, and understanding of the configuration of space in order to respond to it as performers through movement, emotions and creation of a story. This was an innovative approach to working with designers as devisers, placing space at the centre of creativity. In Interdisciplinary Macbeth, the participants walked amongst the audience at the Prague Industrial Palace, inviting the audience to come into a section of the space which had been transformed into a mix-media experience environment based on the prophecies from the text of Macbeth. Through immersion, the audience explored spaces where fragments from Shakespeare's Macbeth were presented using the performance language of installation, combining visual and performing arts. This work, following collaborative methods, provided new ways of exploring different dramaturgical techniques, creative workshops and strategies, and mixing visual and performing arts. It also offered a new understanding of cross-cultural collaboration that helped to engage in the adaptation of classics through multimedia and plural linguistic performances at a global level.

This cycle staged themes from Shakespeare using the aesthetic of mixed media, visual and performing arts (Fig.4 & 5). The outcome was a series of performative events based on stimuli such as words, themes and images found in the text. The outcome of this cycle was the creation of a number of visual images that served to develop a future performance narrative, translating the language of the dramatic text into the performance design of the space using audio-visual elements. This led us to the question of how to make these images more accessible to broader audiences when staging Macbeth. We found the answer through the use of technologies such as virtual and augmented reality.

I n t e r d i s c i p l i n a r y e x p e r i e n t i a l a r c h i t e c t u r e p e d a g o g i e s

The appropriation of the RSVP cycles for the analysis and development of an exploration of urban and architectural space allowed us to define an interdisciplinary teaching environment. As Barthes observes, interdisciplinarity



Figure 4 & 5:
Interdisciplinary Macbeth.
Installation/ Site-specific
Performance. Cycle 2. Central Arts
Centre. Birmingham, UK
(Maria J.M. Sanchez 2019).

begins 'when the solidarity of the old discipline breaks down...in the interests of a new object'.¹³ Interdisciplinarity can also be defined as 'two or more disciplines ...contributing their particular disciplinary knowledge on a common subject'.¹⁴ We need to cultivate students' curiosity, which is achievable by highlighting the overlaps between different areas of expertise, collaboratively exploring new fields and pushing the boundaries. In addition to this, we can affirm that Higher Education isn't always linear, it needs to be transversal, bringing different

disciplines to the creation of knowledge. Interdisciplinary education is directly linked to enhanced learning and the application of constructivist methodologies. As Keeton and Tate state, in learning by experience:

The learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied... It involves direct encounter with the phenomenon being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter or only considering the possibility of doing something with it.¹⁵

The creation of environments – situations where the students engage with a live project – has emerged as an essential condition for our interdisciplinary teaching method. The creation of an interdisciplinary environment establishes pedagogies that dismantle the hierarchies amongst disciplines. They facilitate the democratisation of the creative processes and give equal voices to all disciplines and participants.

The article presents two case studies of projects where students from different disciplines have been working in a devised pedagogical environment based on live projects; Urban Dramaturgies and Interdisciplinary Macbeth. This paper argues that creative pedagogical environments are an effective way of enhancing interdisciplinary teaching strategies within the field of architecture and performance design. Both projects apply the RSVP Cycles, a creative, collaborative model, as a pedagogical framework where all the disciplines can coexist without hierarchies encouraging creative dialogues. These environments can be created across disciplines, enriching the student's experience and enhancing the transferable skills between different knowledge areas.

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