Aalborg Universitet

The Walking Cure

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Making Sense of the City

Disposition

1. Sensing and Sense Making
    – "Urban Psychology"
2. Architecture & Perception
    – Atmospheres and Experiences
3. SEB-site

Distraction

"City spaces must never be meaningless. The urban landscape should rather provoke curiosity and present the citizen with challenges."

(Stig Lennart Andersson)

Making Sense of the City

- Sensing and Sense Making
  - How do people actually
    - Use ("move around", "go about")
    - Perceive and experience
    - Imagine and conceptualize
  - The city
  - Research questions
    - What is urbanity to them?
    - Where does the centre start and stop? (Boundaries)
    - Pulse, atmosphere
  - The users' perspectives
    - Not planners' etc. assumptions

  - The city
    - Aalborg
  - People
    - Residents
      - Inner city
      - Suburbs
    - Visitors
    - Demographics, lifestyle
  - Methods
    - "Walking": trajectories, itineraries while moving through space
    - Experiments (e.g. mental maps, disturbances)
    - Observations and interviews
    - Photos, films, drawings …

Making Sense of the City

- What people encounter when walking/moving through the city

- Micro-aspects of people-environment interaction
  - Studying how being and living in the city is experienced and performed from the point of view of those people who are actually *in* the city.
  - Exploring how life unfolds in the urban landscape: in the streets, along sidewalks, on benches, in and between buildings, in parks, etc.

Mind and body

- Exteriority: urban space as external to mind and body
  - "Physical surrounding"
- Embeddedness: urban space as internal to mind and body
  - "Ecology", which people live in, live with, live through

Exteriority and Embeddedness

"I confront the city with my body; my legs measure the length of the arcade; [...] my body weight meets the mass of the cathedral door, and my hand grasps the door pull as I enter the dark void behind. I experience the city through my body, and the city exists through my embodied experience. The city and my body supplement and define each other. I dwell in the city and the city dwells in me.

(Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, Chichester 2005: 40)

Sensing and Sense Making

- Objective features
  - The urban landscape
  - Agents acting in this landscape (Latour)
- Subjective features
  - Affective predispositions
  - Cognitive predispositions
  - Knowledge, Discourses
- Situational factors, circumstances

Making Sense of the City

1. The city as a multi-sensory landscape
   - Which sensorial impressions and feelings does the urban landscape generate (atmosphere, experiences)?
   - Which kind of bodily expressions does this landscape allow for (performativity)?
   - How do people's presence (movements) affect this landscape
2. Representations of the city
   - How is the city represented mentally?
     - Maps: Memory
   - How do people define the "centre of the city" (and periphery)?
     - Signs: Interpretation, Narration
   - How is everyday urbanity tackled in a quotidian way?
     - Bodily schemata: Habits, Navigation, Auto-piloting

Architecture & Urban Psychology

- Representations:
  - How does a coherent concept of the city emerge from the numerous impressions available in the urban landscape?
    - Mental maps, signs
- Feelings:
  - What excites, involves, scares, attracts, thrills or disgusts people about this landscape?
    - Emotions, atmosphere
- Habits:
  - How do city dwellers go about performing their daily routines in what to newcomers may seem an amalgam of chaotic sensory data?
    - Bodily schemata, navigation

Architecture & Perception

- Architecture of Seeing
  - Visuality
  - Ideal: Utopia (future) (Visionary)
  - Distance: Control (power)
  - Image, branding
  - Transparency & symmetry: Orientation

  - Showing (off)

Ocularcentrism: Seeing is believing?

Architecture & Perception

- Architecture of sensing
  - Multi-sensual: Complex
    - Haptics, olfaction, audition, gustation, vision
    - Balance, thermoception, kinesthetics (Proprioception)
    - Pain/pleasure (Nociception)
  - Bodily: Embeddedness, Immersion
  - Immediacy: Spontaneity, Now
  - Being (rather than Becoming)
  - Presence: Non-Symbolic, Non-Interpretive (Gumbrecht, Sontag)

Architecture of Sensing

- Atmospheres (Böhme)

  - Moods: relative stable state
  - Continuity: ambience
  - Generated by "inside"-agents
  - Sensed by "outsiders"
  - Liminal: "Containers"
    - Buildings, interiors
    - Plazas, squares
    - Streets, alleys …
    - Neighbourhoods, pre-modern towns
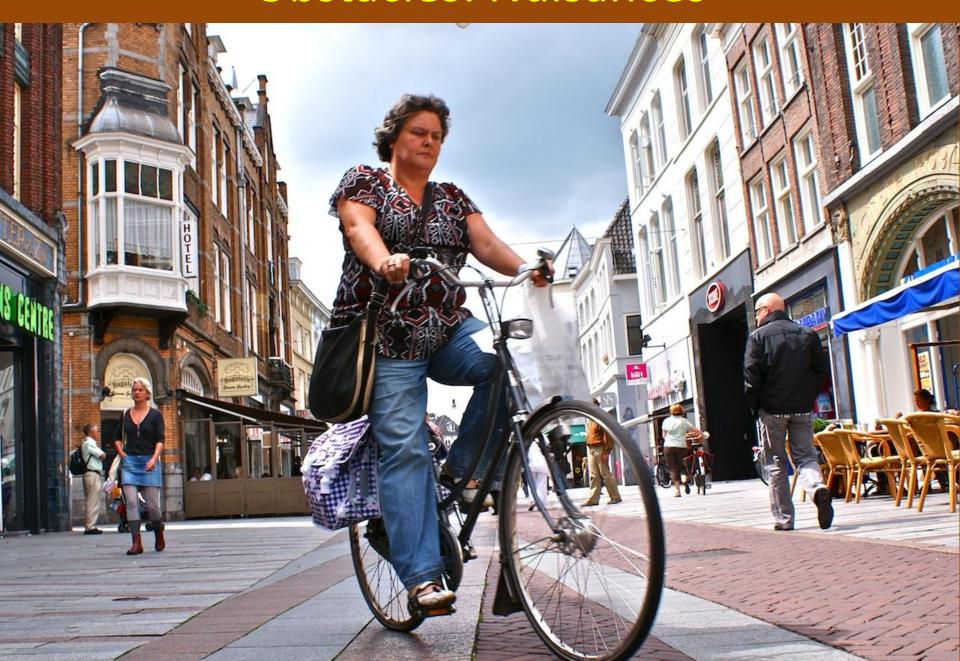   - "Scapes": soundscapes and other sensescapes

- Experiencing

  - Emotions: "activation readiness" (Frijda)
  - Discontinuous: rupture, disturbances
  - Performative: brought upon participants
  - Provoked: "Obstacles"
    - Artwork
    - Urban furniture: benches, trees …
    - Waste, billboards, noise, crowds
    - Stages, playscapes, festivals …

Container: Urban Interior
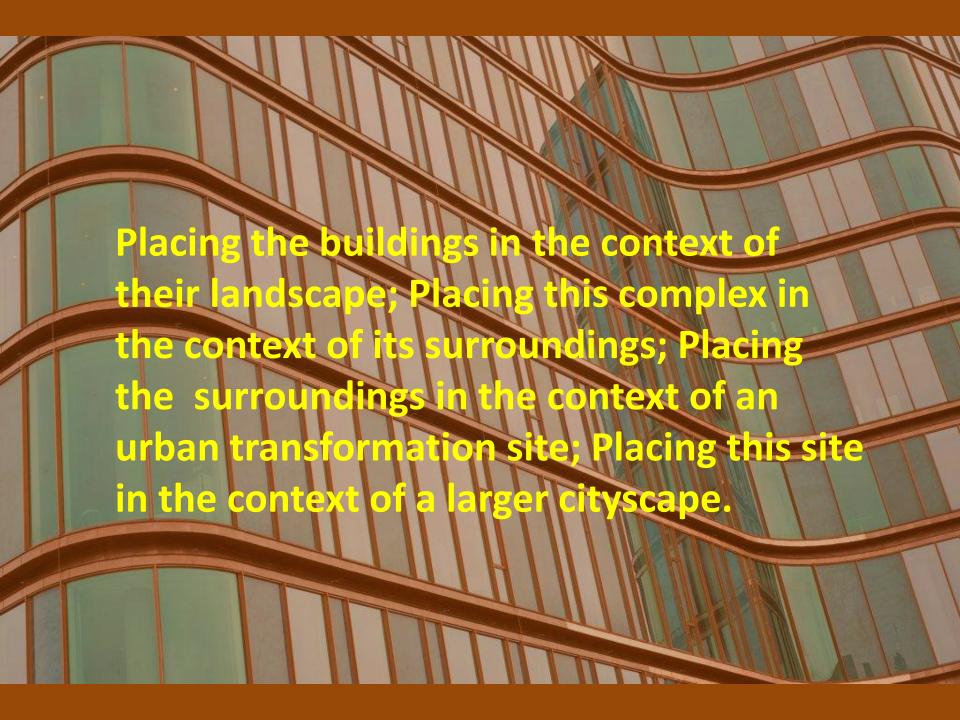
Making Sense of SEB

- Sensing and Sense Making
  - How do people actually
    - Use ("move around", "go about")
    - Perceive and experience
    - Imagine and conceptualize
  - The SEB-Site
  - Research questions
    - Abstract vs. concrete (geometry)
    - Nature vs. culture (landscape, spatiality)
    - Universal vs. relative (code)
    - Atmospheric permanence vs. emotional moment
    - Where does the site start and stop? (Boundaries)

  - People
    - Employees
    - "En passant", circumstantially
    - City dwellers, purposefully
    - Skaters
    - Neighbours to the site
    - Tourists (incl. architects)
  - Methods
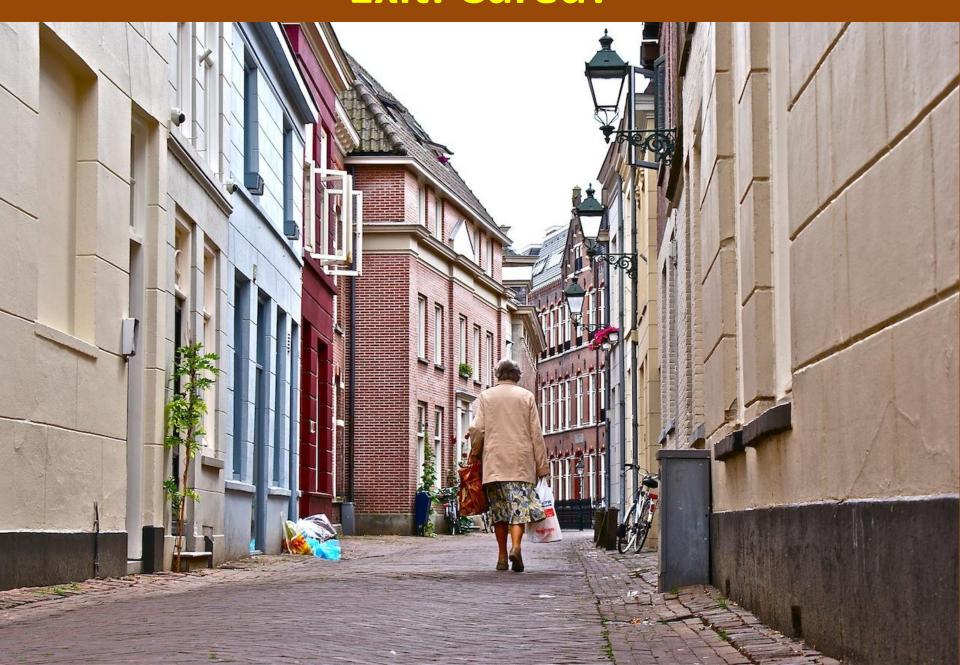   - "Walking": trajectories, itineraries while moving through space
    - Experiments (e.g. mental maps, disturbances)
    - Observations and interviews
    - Photos, films, drawings …

Placing the buildings in the context of their landscape; Placing this complex in the context of its surroundings; Placing the surroundings in the context of an urban transformation site; Placing this site in the context of a larger cityscape.

"Sensing SEB"

1. **Movement: "Walking"**
   - **Rhythms**
   - **Pace**
   - **"Styles"**
2. **Containers**
   - **Buildings**
   - **Urban interior?**
3. **Obstacles**

- **Boundaries ("Walls")**
  - **Materiality**
  - **Transparency**
  - **Permeability**
    - **Private/public**
  - **Temporality**
    - **Permanent**
  - **Legitimacy**
    - **Skaters accepted; entrance contested**
- **Slopes**
  - **Movement**
  - **Obstacles**
- **Skaters**
  - **Obstacles**
  - **Obstructed by non-skaters**

Urban Psychology

Architecture

- Architecture of sensing
  - Atmosphere (Böhme)
  - Experiences

- Architecture of sense making
  - Psychogeography (Debord)
  - Mapping (Lynch)

Psychology

- Perception
  - Moods (Thayer)
  - Emotions (Frijda)

- "Socio-cultural" cognition
  - Microgenesis (Valsiner)
  - Mapping (Milgram)