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49 Methods

Appraising
Assembling Pasts
Atlasing Urban Experience
Bordering
Building Consensus on
Place Representation
Characterising Details
Charting People, Activities and Places
Co-creating
Collaging Community Narratives
Connecting the Nodes
Designing by Participation
with Giancarlo de Carlo
Double-exposing Place
Drawing Collectively
Eavesdropping
Engaging (with) images
Exhausting Urban Places
à la Georges Perec
Framing the City in Words and Images
Geotagging the Urban Landscape
Horizontal-viewing
Imagining Dialogues with
the Voiceless
Intervening Tactically
Making Material Sense
Mapping Graffiti and Street Art
Meaning-making
(multi)Styling Places... with Queneau

Performing (on) Architecture through
Theatre Protocols
Performing the City from Cyberspace
Planning and Walking Thematic
Routes
Playing City-making
Re-acting with Images
Re-activating Minor Matters
of Archival Documents
Reading the City
Recapturing the City
Revisiting Postcards
Scaling Stories
Site-writing
Stacking Narratives
Storying Stories
Streaming the Urban
Surveying with the PlaceMaker
Method
Tailoring Ethnography
Transcribing the City as Character
Transforming through Active Space
Uncanny the Ordinary...
with Cortázar
Walking and Scoring
Walking Backwards
Wandering Aimlessly
Weaving Stories
Writing at 1:50

REPOSITORY 49 Methods and Assignments for Writing Urban Places

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edited by

Carlos Machado e Moura, Dalia Milián Bernal,
Esteban Restrepo Restrepo, Klaske Havik, Lorin Niculae

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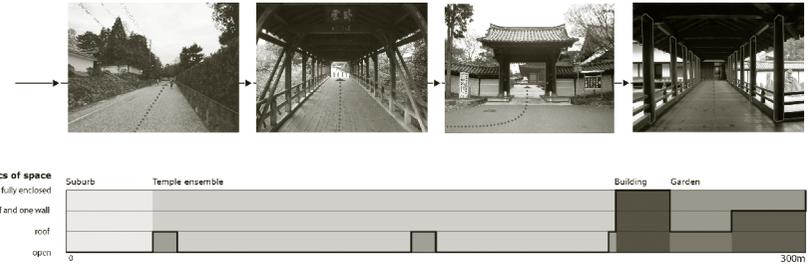
Walking and Scoring

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Some of the qualities of an urban landscape can only be understood through direct experience: sound, scent, materiality etc. And the most direct way to experience the (urban) landscape is by walking: a multisensory, active interaction with the urban landscape. When walking deliberately, the human body functions as a measuring device, exposing the city as a structure of spaces seen as well as felt, touched, and heard. To understand and make sense of these experiences, a researcher needs a second, interpretive component: a notation technique. Such a notation technique, that can translate and interpret the narrative and spatiotemporal quality of walking and allows for reading the urban landscape as a sequence of events or atmospheres, is the score: the symbolisation of a process, which extend over time (such as a musical score represents a musical composition). The most straightforward score looks like a linear graph, with a horizontal dimension that shows the progress over time, which in the case of a walk is the distance walked in metres, and a vertical dimension that visualises the relative amount of change in sensory quality/quantity.

In the 1960s and 1970s American landscape architect Lawrence Halprin started experimenting with alternative notation techniques for analysis and design. Inspired by the close relationship he had with dance and theatre, the choreography of movement became a key notion for his designs. He invented an ideographic system, using scores to document changes over time, in all fields of human endeavour. Halprin called the type of score that represents human movement in space, 'motation' (Halprin, 1969). However, the scores he invented took the actor as the subject. When we make the urban landscape the subject, we can reverse this technique, and use the actor and his or her actions (walking) as the tool (de Wit, 2018, p. 412).

To explore these experiential qualities of the urban landscape that change as we move through them, a researcher should walk with determination and focus, using each of the different faculties of their own body as a measuring device to record one specific aspect, each of which can be expressed in a score. For example, a first walk could be guided by the eye, with focused attention to the visual scenogra-



Visual-spatial score of the Tofuku-ji temple ensemble (Tokyo, Japan). The score shows how each transition from one area to another is marked by an enclosure, and how the sizes of the spaces become smaller towards the garden. (Images by the author, 2018).

phy of the routing while singling out those elements at eye level that inform the line of movement: views, landmarks, and expansions and contractions of space. These can be represented in a visual score: a sequence of abstracted, perspectival images as informed interpretations of the visual elements as they enter your retina, without interference of your mind and before they become connected by underlying meanings and knowledge (fig. 1). Another walk might focus on the dynamic properties of the ground plane, which can be perceived through ascent and descent, moving left or right, straight ahead, or turning back, factors of the site which influence bodily position, as interpreted by the muscles and the vestibular organ. The locomotion score identifies these properties of the ground that influence the physical act of moving (fig. 2). Closely related is the surface underfoot: the material properties of texture, roughness or smoothness, and details of surface variation. Firm surfaces require little attention to negotiate; the more muscular and vestibular effort they require, the more awareness of one's surroundings they provide. These properties can be related to one another in a surface-underfoot score, with on one end of the scale being smooth and slippery surfaces, and on the other, soft, bumpy, loose, or rocky surfaces. Another walk might be dedicated to the interaction between different sound sources: traffic, human voices, wind, birds etc. which can be registered in an auditory score.

By repeating the same walk, and creating comparable scores for multiple sensory components, you will find that the rhythm, volume, and quality of the different scores interact with each other. And just as a musical composition contains threads of different instruments; scores for the different sensory components can collaborate to communicate the perceivable form of the urban landscape.

References

Halprin, L. (1969). *The RSVP Cycles; Creative processes in the human environment*. New York: George Braziller.

Wit, S.I. de (2018). *Hidden Landscapes. The Metropolitan Garden as a Multi-sensory Expression of Place*. Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura.

Assignment

1 Determine two points of interest at c. 500 metres distance on a map and print the map on A3 paper in black and white. Because you can't zoom in and out on a print, this will allow you to keep a sense of the relative distances. Draw a line that connects the points, using existing paths.

2 Select one sensorial aspect: visual-spatial, locomotive, auditory, etc. (To capture all its detail and finesse it is necessary to focus on one sensorial aspect at a time).

3 Start walking. Walk with a colleague or friend. This will allow you to discuss each moment of change in the quality of visual cues, sounds, and body equilibrium.

4 Use your body as a measuring device: your eyes for noticing view lines, landmarks and panoramas, and widening and compressing of spaces; your ears for differentiating sounds; the muscles in your legs and your vestibular organ for registering level changes and curves and bends in the road, and your feet for the material underfoot. (You could try to walk barefoot, but also when wearing shoes, you'd be surprised how much the

surface changes determine your balance once you start paying attention).

5 Mark each observed moment of change on the map. Annotate as much as possible about the quality and the quantity of each change. It might be helpful to use your phone to locate the exact locations. If necessary, adjust your anticipated line.

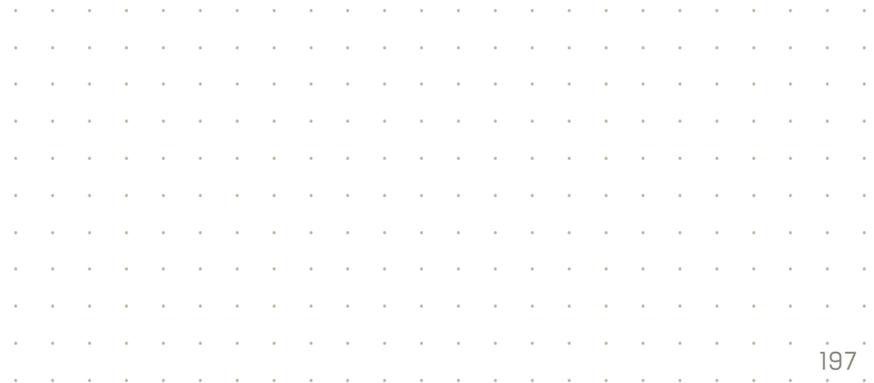
6 Take photographs to document the moments of change.

7 Once back behind your desk, if necessary, collect (cartographic) information in order to, for example, objectively document locomotive aspects and verify your findings.

8 Draw a linear graph (similar to a musical score). The horizontal dimension shows the distance walked in metres. The vertical dimension describes the perceived changes in the sensory

aspect you are researching (e.g. volume of sound, amount of light, height differences, amount of enclosure, roughness of surface underfoot, etc.). Take your time to invent your own set of values for the vertical bar, relevant to the content of the walk. Divide the vertical dimension in equal bars that visualise the relative amount of change in sensory quality/quantity. Use words to describe the range, such as from loud to absent, or from rough to smooth.

9 Use your notes to complete the score by drawing the line that represents your walk, indicating the relation between the horizontal (time) and the vertical (sensory quality) dimension of the graph. The line moves up or down, abrupt or gradually, according to the moments of change you registered. The line can be drawn in different ways, to add information to the score. For example, multiple intertwining lines of different colours for different types of sound, or different line textures to indicate different underfoot textures, etc.



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