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**SPECULATIVE URBAN FUTURES:
FIVE DESIGN APPROACHES**

EDITORS

James Auger
Ivica Mitrović
Roger Paez

CONTRIBUTORS

James Auger
Céline Chip
Emile De Visscher
Lena Galanopoulou
Stavros Kousoulas
Ivica Mitrović
Roger Paez
Lorène Picard
Andrej Radman
Heidi Sohn
Jüri Soolep
Oleg Šuran
Manuela Valtchanova
Dora Vanette

MANAGING EDITOR

Dora Vanette

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Morgane Aubert

TYPESETTING

Oleg Šuran

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DURATION

The approach requires five sessions. It can be adapted for short workshops, integrated into a design studio, or used as a methodological approach for larger research projects such as a PhD.

STUDENT LEVEL

Master's and above.

TU Delft

SENSING - INTUITING - IMAGING (SII)

Stavros Kousoulas Andrej Radman
Heidi Sohn Lena Galanopoulou

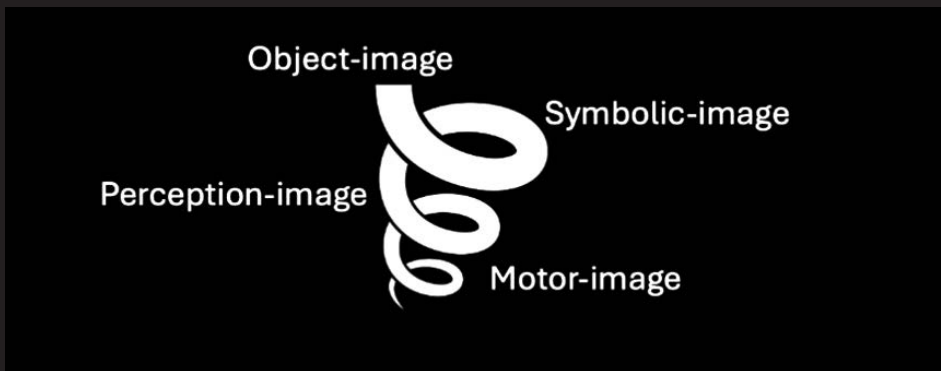


fig. 1.
The Image Phases, 2025.
Courtesy of Stavros Kousoulas and Andrej Radman.

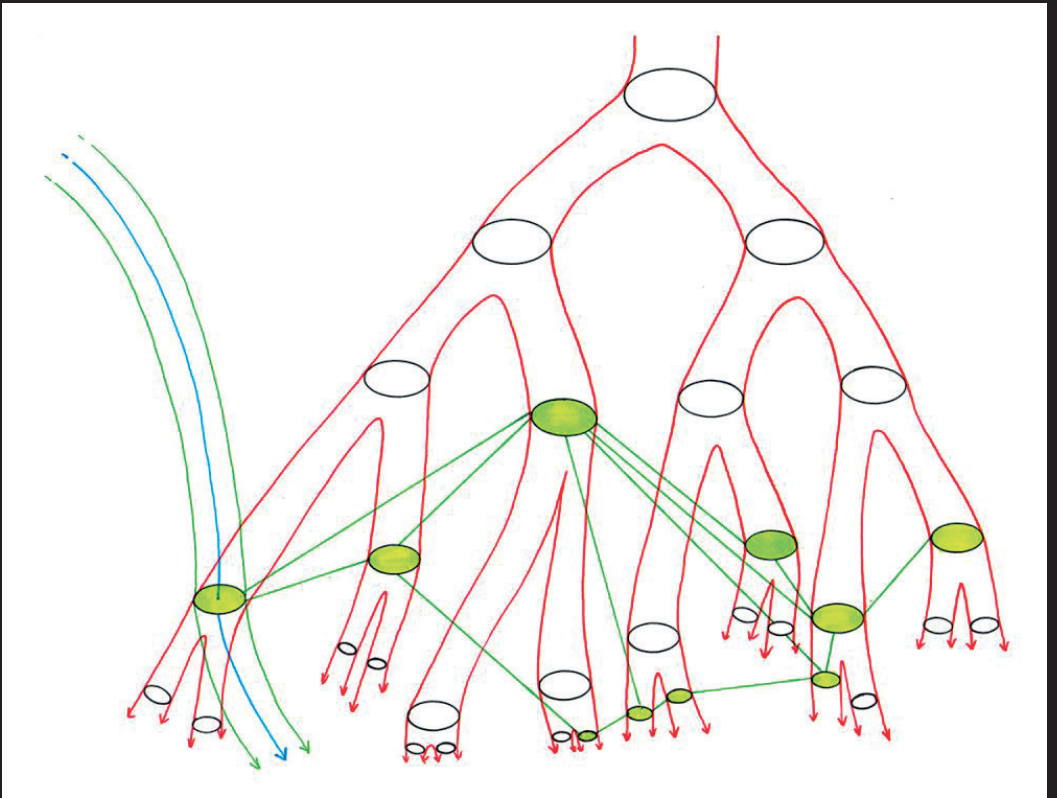


fig. 2.
Rhizome versus Tree, 2006.
Courtesy of Magda Wojtyra and Marc Ngui.
<https://happysleepy.com/art/drawing-thousand-plateaus/introduction/>.

Introduction

Sensing-Intuiting-Imaging (SII) focuses on the production of speculative and intuitive problematisations. These speculations require both the formation of new sensibilities and the creation of new forms capable of expressing their potential. We shall call these forms images, but following a non-representational approach that does not reduce them to shapes, outlines, or the tracing thereof. On the contrary, we open images to an untapped affective potential that provides not only an account of “what has been” but can also invent “what is to come.”

To do so, SII follows Gilbert Simondon and his ontology of images. The philosopher of technology does not relate images to human consciousness alone but argues that images are external to the thinking subject and should be understood in connection with the broader action potentials of living bodies. Conceived as transducers (or, simply, as relays) between various individuals, images establish vital links that enable organisms and their environment to form a joint system. This way, Simondon develops a pluralistic account of images in what he calls the imagistic cyclecycle (fig. 1). The cycle of images consists of four complementary phases:

MOTOR-IMAGE For Simondon, images are not primarily conscious but motor, linked to the simplest behaviours through which organisms take possession of the milieu and proceed to the initial identification of the situations they encounter. In simple terms, primitive images have no content other than movement itself. It is this dimension of motricity that constitutes the first phase of images, what we can call a motor-image. An example of a motor-image would be the act of drinking water.

PERCEPTION-IMAGE Through movement, experience registers itself and leads to what Simondon identifies as the second phase of imagistic life: perception. The motor capacities exercised by an organism in its environment reveal potentials for action that create associations among activities, environmental variations, and the organism itself. An example of a perception-image would be the river that affords the act of drinking water.

SYMBOL-IMAGE As a result of perceiving, images become organised and systematised, developing the symbolising capacities we usually associate with consciousness. In other words, the (a praesenti) activity of movement, produces both the (a priori) symbolic potential of memory and of (a posteriori) expectation. An example of a symbol-image would be the recollection and the anticipation of a river that affords the act of drinking water.

These three phases constitute the life of the image that belongs to the relationship between the organism and the environment proper: movement, perception, and consciousness. It is at this precise point that conjoins feeling, acting, and learning that Simondon introduces a crucial fourth phase, one related to invention:

OBJECT-IMAGE If the tensions between movement, perception, and the conscious systematisation of both cannot be resolved through bodily actions alone, the need arises for a “mediator”—what Simondon calls that a transducer. This transducer is the invented, technologically produced object-image. Object-images resolve tensions between different orders of magnitude, effectively restoring the continuity of activity that has been interrupted. In doing so, they restore movement, and thus bootstrap the imagistic cycle once again. An object-image can therefore lead to novel perceptions, and, eventually, to new symbolic systems. An example of an object-image is the cup, invented to automate the activity of drinking water, no longer relying on the concavity of one’s bare hands.

OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTATIONS

There are three key factors pertinent to the SII approach:

FIRST to highlight that images and imagination should not be conflated with visual representations or, even worse, with the solitary acts of an individual and their presumed psychic or intellectual capacities. What makes the ontology of images so compelling is their transductive in-betweenness: at once objective and subjective, abstract and specific, of the world and of the self.

SECOND to underline that images do not belong to the individual, and imagination is not a solipsistic act. Nor do they belong to the environment conceived as an isolated container. Images, imaging and imagining arise in and of the relation between organism and environment. They solidify, modify, and transduce this relation in manners that propel the individuation of both organism and environment precisely because they belong to neither. The SII cycle is thus not circular and homeostatic but spiral and metastable.

FINALLY to regain knowledge and power over the production of images, especially at a time when this production is increasingly outsourced to automated processes that hinder the creative potentials of image-making and diminish the designerly capacities of those involved.

DELIVERABLES

- One diagram that expresses the movement of a flow.
- One map that captures the spatiotemporal specificities of flows.
- One encyclopaedic notational drawing that expresses what is singular in a flow, regardless of context.
- One image that results through the exchange of topics among participants.
- A 500-word text that articulates the research problem.
- One A1 sheet that compiles all the above in a single format.

REFERENCE PROJECT: MSC2 ARCHITECTURAL TECHNICITIES DESIGN STUDIO, TU DELFT

Example of Research:

SII was taught as a two-week intensive workshop comprising five meetings that took place at the beginning of the design phase of an MSc2 studio. The students had already selected a site in Split and had developed a specific problem of interest. The presence of both a location and a problem is crucial for SII, as its successful execution relies on the entanglement of the two.

Topic of Interest:

(Over)tourism and the Mediterranean South.

Design Hypothesis:

The city of Split in Croatia – and specifically its historical centre – will be examined through exploratory and speculative research into its past, current, and potential technicities: the ways in which inhabitants alter their environment through architecture, and how these alterations, in turn, transform them.

Example of SII result:

Title: Stocking Intensities, Negotiating Bifurcations,
Weaving Beliefs
Participants: Chloe Bodin, Enrica Agus Klumper, Max de Groot

Stocking Intensities, Negotiating Bifurcations, Weaving Beliefs emerged from an exploration of individual convictions – underlying beliefs shaped by past experiences – which were initially abstract but gradually coalesced into shared problematics of power, control, and manipulation. Through the development of a collective glossary and a sustained process of theorisation, the project engaged concepts from Deleuze and Guattari's

flow–code–stock triad to frame urban experience as a dynamic field of negotiation rather than a fixed representation.

Drawing on the affective intensity of Split's green market, the project recognises vernacular practices of spatial claiming amid the tensions between locals and tourists. The project mapped 69 singular experiences, each subjected to personal grading systems that revealed how intensities defy objective legibility. This speculative cartography enabled participants to understand experience not as fixed but as continually modulated through negotiation, conflict, and movement – what they referred to as bifurcation points. These moments of qualitative change served as conceptual hinges, challenging fixed codes of ownership in favour of a performative and evolving notion of “owning.”

The resultant design intervention proposes a suspended net structure above Split's old town—a literal and conceptual field of negotiation. Supported by a scaffold of columns (signifying enduring beliefs), the net performs as a dynamic surface of shared owning, shaped and reshaped by the flows of people, objects, shadows, produce, water, and weather. Tables suspended from the net become temporary sites of mediation—market stalls, playgrounds, platforms of encounter—destabilising vertical hierarchies by requiring constant adjustment and co-participation.

Inspired by Simondon's imagistic cycle, the project unfolded from mapping motor-images of market flows (money, sound, decay) to perception and symbolic reconfiguration, culminating in an object-image: a speculative device for generating new social relations and architectural subjectivities. (fig. 3) The net thus becomes an infrastructural diagram for negotiating intensities, capable of reconfiguring without breaking, and proposing a resilient, open-ended technicity of collective becoming.

SCHEDULE: KEY STAGES

PHASE 1 (20% project duration)

- Project launch: introduction to Simondon's imagistic cycle.
- Optional: formation of participant groups (if not already established).
- Outline of the four upcoming project phases and their deliverables.

PHASE 2 (20% project duration)

- Development of the motor-image diagram.
- Review.

PHASE 3 (20% project duration)

- Development of the perception-image map.
- Review.

PHASE 4 (20% project duration)

- Development of the symbol-image annotation.
- Review.

PHASE 5 (20% project duration)

- The participants exchange their projects and incorporate one another into their work.
- Development of the object-image.
- Final review.

PHASE 1 Project launch

- Presentation of Simondon’s imagistic cycle.
- The four phases of images will be laid out along with their philosophical and theoretical background, their broader implications, their potential, and their radical differences from traditional approaches, as well as their relation to architecture thinking and doing.
- Presentation of the workshop brief and objectives.
- Presentation of the schedule and project steps.
- Definition of the research subject (a list of examples is provided).
- Examination of the related issues (and the relationship to design), including questions of image-making, visual arts, design, artificial intelligence, ethical issues, political implications, etc.

Optional

- Formulate participant groups if they are not already established.
- Formulate groups, ideally of three to five participants per group.

Outline the Four Project Phases

- Explain how diagrams relate to flows; define flow as literally anything in flux — bodies, money, water, light — anything that relates to each group’s design problem.
- Explain how mapping relates to perception, as flows crystalised in space and specified locally and temporally.
- Explain how annotation operates as a process of encyclopaedic ambition: transforming a specific flow and its specific spatiotemporal expression into an abstract notion; think, for example, of an IKEA manual.

PHASE 2 Development of the motor-image diagram

- Examine motor-images as the primary movement of flows.
- Speculate on the kinds of flows involved in both the theoretical problem as well as in the urban conditions of the selected location.
- Produce a diagram that attempts to express the movement of the group-specific relevant flow(s). The diagram can be hand drawn, digital, or a combination of both, but must remain non-representational.

Review

- Each group presents their diagram at the end of the day: ten minutes for presentation and ten minutes for discussion.

PHASE 3 Development of the perception-image map

- Examine perception-images as the registering of flows and their assignment to a specific place and time.
- Speculate on where and when these flows are registered within the selected location.
- Produce a map that identifies and captures the spatiotemporal specificities of flows. The map has no scale constraints and does not need to follow traditional cartographic formats; a façade or section of a building can function just as effectively as a map.

Review

- Each group presents their map at the end of the day; ten minutes for presentation and ten minutes for discussion.

PHASE 4 Development of the symbol-image annotation

- Examine symbol-images as the resingularisation of flows.
- Speculate on how flows are taken away from their specific context, expressed in terms of their most singular aspects, and eventually opened to a potential anywhere and a potential anyone.
- Produce an encyclopaedic notational drawing that expresses what is singular or generic in a flow, regardless of context.

Review

- Each group presents their encyclopaedic annotation at the end of the day; ten minutes for presentation and ten minutes for discussion.

PHASE 5 Development of the object-image

- Examine object-images as inventors of flow.
- Speculate on how novel flows are invented when the captured, contextualised, and eventually resingularised flows relay from one domain to another.
- Produce an output that remains fundamentally open and cannot be predetermined.

Review

- Each group presents the compiled A1 of all image-phases, including the object-image, at the end of the day; twenty minutes for presentation and twenty minutes for discussion.

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