

THEME

The desire for infinite compression and the compression of infinite desire —
The interior is the exterior; The exterior is the interior.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do we express the complex relations between the individuals and the built environment as an assemblage of “territories” within the disappearing old Hong Kong neighborhood?

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Desire itself as a territory of intensity

Desire has been discussed by many philosophers and psychologists and has been theorized as an interiority-exteriority relation with regards to the interrelation between the environment and the individuals’ emotion and behavior. In the chapter ‘*Capitalism and schizophrenia*’ of *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1972) suggested that desire serves as a productive force, which possess its capacity to influence individuals’ behavior and remains as a desire machine that reproduce itself. Desire is impersonal and intensive, which serves as an impersonal drive that causes us to be affected with a certain intensity. We act accordingly with the intensity, which results in a material change of the external (i.e. the environment). Reciprocally, the external (the environment) will affect us likewise, which our desire is then maintained. It exists as a constant reciprocal relations between [1] the territorialisation of individual’s desire and [2] the deterritorialisation of desire-subject:

[1] The territorialisation of individuals’ desire — it relates to the action of the individual. It can be understood as the process that an individual act on a subject in the environment, and hence, the subject express the notions of desire. (i.e. the way of how we construct the built environment with desire as the driving force, which the environment express the notion our desire.)

Reciprocally, [2] the deterritorialisation of desire-subject — it relates to the perception of the individual. It refers to the process of how an individual perceives the notion of desire through diverse experiences and engagements with the subject in the environment, which in turns, individual’s desire is being shaped and maintained. (i.e. ‘what’ the individuals see; touch; hear; smell and taste in an environment, hence, it shapes and maintains individual’s desire accordingly.)

In this sense, every individual’s desire remains as an unique territory that reproduce itself, which remains as an immanent bond between the body and the ‘common’ environment. Each territory involves a series of actions and perceptions between the individual and the environment; it is distinctive with its own ***intensity and limit***. With regards to the ‘*Difference and Repetition*’ written by Deleuze, he defines the characteristics of *intensity* in relations to *difference*. That is, *intensity is difference in itself*. What does it mean?

The interior is the exterior; the exterior is the interior

To give an example, different individuals have their own standard of ‘comfort’ and each of us have the ‘same’ desire for comfort in a ‘common’ place. When we feel hot or cold in a room, we act accordingly to adjust the temperature of the heater or air-conditioner. Hence, we then feel comfortable after the adjustment of temperature. Here, [a] *intensity* — refers to the degree of adjustment, i.e, how much we raise or lower the temperature. It involves [b] a *threshold* — when the individuals feel the changes from cold to warm. It also involves [c] the *limits* — the hot and the cold.

However, every individuals have their own intensity and limit but they all share a ‘common’ environment. One’s standard of ‘comfortable’ can be the other person’s standard of ‘uncomfortable’ — The interior is the exterior; the exterior is the interior. The question that follows is, how do these territories of desire negotiate with their intensities and limits, and hence, they constitute as a territory of *collective* desire?

To bring this question into the context of the project, the question becomes: What happens when these territories of desire are situated in an extremely dense and compressed landscape? Whereby, the compressed landscape in fact is constituted by a collective desire — the desire for an infinite optimization of our capacity and potentials within a limited space.

The infinite desire for spaces in Hong Kong

According to the UN World Population Prospects 2019, Hong Kong ranked as the 4th with a population density of over 5,000 people per square kilometer, while the population density of the Netherlands is 412 people per square kilometer. Due to the increasing population and the rigorous urban development with various ongoing infrastructural projects, the city collectively has a huge demand for spaces in order to accommodate the infinite desire of the people and the city. In a sense, the infinite desire for spaces drives the urban development of the city, which is expressed through the transformation of the urban expression. Since 1880, various scales of land reclamations were carried out. The expanded territory increase the supply of useable lands, continuously pushing the coastline. In a sense, the 'pushed' coastline defines a new 'limit' for the production of new lands. Yet, this 'limit' does not constrict people's desire for spaces. Conversely, it remains as a 'threshold' that opens up another means for people to create 'new' spaces— through the rigorous spatial compression within the expanded territory.

The 'desire for infinite compression'

Based on the Leibnizian's concept of expression, **[a]** *expression* can be understood as — *the multiplicity of individual's notion which express collectively as the notion of the entirety*. Leibniz suggests that the subject which express the entirety is constituted by the '*point of views*'. **[b]** *Point of view* — refers to 'the portion or the region of the world expressed clearly by an individual in relation to the entirety of the world, which it expresses obscurely in the form of minute perceptions (infinite small perceptions).' (Smith, 2012)

To understand this at a spatial level, here are some examples: the numerous of skyscrapers being erected next to each others; the extremely compacted interior configurations within buildings; the numerous storage capacity within a small room etc, all these individual spatial *expressions* (the urban expression; the architectural expression; the interior expression) of the city deliver the strong notion of extreme compression. In a sense, spatial compression remains as the 'entire notion' of the city, which suggests the intensified capacity and potential of the city.

It also remains as an *expression* that delivers the notion of desire — our collective desire for infinite compression; the desire for infinite spaces. It can be understood as an infinite optimization of functional capacity within a limited space, in order to **[1]** maximize the functional contents with the least spaces required, and **[2]** to maximize the capacity of the functions (i.e. to accommodate more individuals and allow more events happen in a limited space). It exists as a spatial reality but the same time it suggests its potentials, for examples it becomes an adaptive strategy — subdivision in existing buildings; it also becomes an emerging design strategy — the compacted configurations as the new typology.

Here comes to a crucial question: Do these expressions inform us about the notion of the individuals? Or, the way round, the notion of the individuals explain these expressions?

The 'compression of infinite desire'

Beyond the spatial level, we should ask further and shift the focus to the individual level. Whereby, individuals' desire and the *point of view* become the subject of the discussion. In a sense, our behaviors and engagements with the environment express the capacities and potentials of ourselves. Hence, the focus should be shifted from the 'desire for compression' to the 'compression of infinite desire'. We should ask: Why do these expressions appear? Who construct these expressions? The notion of infinite compression should be read as — the infinite events and heterogeneous habits that situated within a limited space — the 'intensity of heterogeneity' within a finite space. In a sense, ***we are not desiring for infinite 'spaces', but we are desiring for an infinite optimization of our capacity and potentials within a limited space. In another word, how much more we can do within a limited space.***

With regards to the question towards intensity at the beginning, the question should be transform into: How does each '*territory of desire*' suggests the capacity and potential of the individuals? Hence, how do these 'territories of desire' with their intensities and limits negotiate within the compressed environment? To put it simple, how and what an individuals do with desire as their driving force? Hence, how do these territories negotiate and constitute a 'common' environment?