

THE IMPACT OF SOCIO-SENSORY KNOWLEDGE ON PLACE MAKING

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Abstract

The emergence of 'mega cities' is a growing phenomenon. It is seen as an undeniable manifestation of modernity. But who's idea of modernity? Many cities in emerging nations caught up in the global process of urban regeneration pursue a western model of modernity and urbanity without much consideration for its impact on social sustainability. This can result in entrenching already inequitable conditions where policies typically address the interests of elite minorities. This paper presents an alternative approach to analysing and engaging with place and its sociality to reveal nuanced place making practices of existing communities giving voice to marginalized groups and views.

Presented within the context of fieldwork studies in the Melbourne suburb of Footscray, this paper focuses on the multimodal mapping technique developed to identify and analyse sensory embodied practice. Ethnographic data supplemented by audio and visual recordings are synthesized and represented in a series of multimodal diagrams based the concept of vertical montage which explores the relationships between time, space and activity. This paper also briefly presents a design exploration of a Master of Architecture student at the University of Melbourne who adopted the mapping technique, developing a richly experiential and programmatically appropriate design for urban regeneration. Time-based methods reveal that every day practices create their own epistemic spaces where specific constructs of knowing and being are enacted by specific bodies of differing capacities and cultures. This knowledge could help inform the development of regional model of 'modernity' that is socially sustainable and specific to place. One that attempts to address inequity in the participation process and acknowledges the importance of existing spatial practices in creating complex and pluralistic urban spaces.

Keywords: social equity, urban regeneration, multimodal mapping, Footscray, sensory ethnography

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Introduction

Many cities, urban centres and inner city suburbs around the world are currently undergoing urban regeneration. Urban regeneration can be described as the revitalization of urban environments framed as being subject to social, economic and physical decay (Adams et al. 2007).¹

The resulting environments are often characterized by a lack plurality in not only spatio-aesthetics but also in demographic make-up and activity. A traditionally visuo-spatial approach to regeneration activity often overlooks nuanced and layered place making practices of the local communities. In addition to this, within consumer societies these places often become commoditized spaces available for consumption, compounding issues of social equity by its marginalization of certain groups. By means of an exploratory process which includes investigation through design, this study examines how this inequity can be addressed by designers through the consideration of the socially produced sensory realm generated by existing spatial practices.

The study is situated in Footscray; a suburb located 5km west of central Melbourne. With a population of around 13000 and land area of 5 square kilometers it is one of the oldest suburbs of Melbourne (Profile.id, 2015).² It is an immigrant receptor area and census data reveals that 40% of people in Footscray arrived in Australia within 5 years prior to 2011 (Profile.id, 2015).³ The diasporic populations brought with them specialty shops, market produce, ethnic cuisines and languages. Social clubs and societies were also set up by the respective ethnic groups giving an indication of a vibrant social culture. These diasporic communities generate distinct and varied sensorial landscapes within the places they inhabit. The sensory embodied activities involving sights, sounds, tastes and smells are used to recreate a culturally familiar 'place' within a larger mostly alien landscape. The resulting *socially produced sensorial regime* generated by cultural behaviours is not necessarily measured by economic productivity or generalisable for the market.

Anthropologist Maree Pardy argues that during urban regeneration, in such culturally diverse environments, this diversity is used as a marketable commodity through which to sell the image of cities or town centres. It has been further observed that the activities of certain groups are hidden or removed during revitalization if they are not perceived as adding value to this marketable 'image' of diversity (Pardy, 2009).⁴ This usually entails the suppression and control of the sensorial; inextricably entwined with day to day dwelling practices, often perceived as offensive, disorderly, subversive, and antagonistic, but potentially giving voice to the marginalized. This entrepreneurial approach to regeneration in which localities attempt to market for competition on a global stage, ultimately produces sensorially 'safe' environments that are non-confronting, de-politicised, and suited for mainstream consumption.

¹Adams, M., Moore, G., Cox, T., Croxford, B., Refaee, M. and Sharples, S. (2007) 'The 24-hour City: Residents' Sensorial Experiences,' *Senses and Society*, Vol 1, no. 2, pp. 201-216.

²Based on 2011 Census data, viewed August, 2014, <http://profile.id.com.au>.

³Profile.id, (2015) Footscray Birthplace, viewed 15 August, 2015, <http://profile.id.com.au/maribyrnong/birthplace?WebID=110>.

⁴Pardy, M. (2009) 'Multicultural Incarnations: Race, Class and Urban Renewal', in *The Future of Sociology: Proceedings of the 2009 Annual Conference of The Australian Sociological Association, Canberra, ACT, 2009*.

Sociologist Monica Degen stresses the importance of the senses and sensory embodied activity in informing the concept of 'place', writing that it ".....draws attention to the importance of the sensuous geography of place informing our experience of 'dwelling in public'. The sensory landscape creates embodied emotional ties and points of attachment between ourselves and the physical environment" (Degen, 2008).⁵ Within architectural discourse most existing works both theoretical and practical that explore the role of the senses – particularly through the influence of phenomenology - primarily construct an 'essentialist' viewpoint, where the body is stripped of all inherent contingencies such as gender, age and ethnicity. It is also a passive body where engagement with the environment is limited to experiencing the 'delight' of architecture through the senses.

This has not been the case in other disciplines. Notably, the humanities and social sciences have investigated the socio-sensory construction of the concept of space and the significance of the culturally specific sensory order in place making practices. These studies have brought to the fore the significance of local sensory categories in urban place making, how they operate in everyday life and how they interact with the wider political and power configurations; all of which can influence urban fabric. This body of work involving the sociality of the senses seems to exist outside the realm of practice with an apparent lack of structured studies exploring or demonstrating the practical application of such knowledge in the production of urban environments.

This paper presents an approach based on a sensory model, acknowledging the diversity of a socially produced urban sensorial realm: one that enables designers to grasp the existing sensorial realm, to represent it in a way that retains its complexity and to make use of this knowledge within the parameters of architectural design.

Methods Onsite

Knowledge of the socio-cultural context of place for design purposes is often gained through the implementation of various community consultation strategies commonly based on interviewing, workshops and survey techniques. During these processes sections of the community who lack the necessary language skills, access to multimedia and the confidence to engage in these approaches are often marginalized. By *directly observing lived space* and its day to day interactions a situation is created such that information about modes of occupation is not dependent on the ability of the occupants to articulate their views.

Anthropologist Sarah Pink provides a methodological approach in which an emplaced and collaborative ethnography is central (Pink, 2008 & 2009).⁶ This study therefore utilizes a variety of ethnographic methods to gather socio-sensory data. Pink asserts that in engaging in sensory ethnography a *multimodal* approach to collecting and representing the data is critical because of the understanding that sensory perception is itself multimodal with different sensory modes such as sight, sound, taste, touch, smell and kinesthesia interconnecting, overlapping and collaborating in forming sensory knowledge (Pink 2009).⁷ By approaching collection through a variety of methods was able to gain varying sources of information through different perceptual

⁵Degen, M. (2008) *Sensing Cities*, p. 157.

⁶Pink, S. (2008) 'An Urban Tour: The Sensory Sociality of Ethnographic Place-making', *Ethnography*, Vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 175-196. Pink, S. (2009) *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, London: Sage Publications Ltd.

⁷Pink, S. (2009) *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, London: Sage Publications Ltd.

modes. The phenomena were recorded through audio-visual multi-media in an attempt to capture and retain its multi-modality.

Sensory rhythms were identified in designated locations and how they fluctuate with time was recorded. The ethnographic methods used to gather experiential data that supplement the identified sensory rhythms can be categorized into two groups - 'non-participant observation' (Thwaites&Simkins, 2007)⁸ and 'participant observation' (Pink, 2009)⁹ methods. 'Non-participant' observation involved photographic and video documentation as well as sound recordings to support the evidence of the identified senses capes. These are visual methods as Pink writes, that "...do not *record* touch, taste, smell or emotion...However, an understanding of the senses as essentially interconnected suggests how (audio) visual images and recordings can evoke, or invite memories of the multisensoriality of the research encounter" (Pink, 2009).¹⁰ Behavior tracing or anthropological tracking was used to investigate traces of behavior patterns left behind as evidence in the built environment (Thwaites&Simkins, 2007).¹¹ In addition to this, written notes and sketches recorded impressions, insights, and events.

To record the intersectional relationship between time, space and the body, sketches were made that analyzed the built environment relative to the bodies engaged in it. Plans provided an understanding of the density of bodies in space, their orientation towards each other or a structure and their relative positions in space. Sections indicated the relationship between bodies and structures/built environment, how something is touched. It also provided and understanding of the volumetric space and scale relationship to bodies. Francesco Careri writes:

Walking, though it is not the physical construction of a space, implies a transformation of the place and its meanings...the variations of the perceptions he (the walker) receives crossing it constitutes a form of transformation of the landscape that, without leaving visible signs, culturally modifies the meaning of space and therefore the space itself.

Careri, 2002: 50

My own spatial trajectory within the context was significant. I noted and recorded them in a fieldwork journal. This re-enforcing of the spatial dimension in the methodology is seen as a necessary step if it is to be a fundamental part of a design process that can be adopted by architects and designers.

Multimodal Mapping Diagram

The data collected during fieldwork included sketches, diary, notes, photos and multimedia such as video and sound recordings. Each medium conveyed knowledge of the socio-sensory phenomena in a particular way. Sociologist Andrew Sparkes calls for exploration of new methods of representation for sensory ethnography stating that traditional narrative styles used in ethnographic work does not adequately capture the sensory experiences of both the

⁸Thwaites, K. &Simkins. I. (2007) *Experiential Landscape: An Approach to People, Place and Space*, Abingdon: Routledge, p. 83.

⁹Pink, S. (2009) *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, London: Sage Publications Ltd, p. 63.

¹⁰Pink, S. (2009) *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, London: Sage Publications Ltd, p. 101.

¹¹Thwaites, K. &Simkins. I. (2007) *Experiential Landscape: An Approach to People, Place and Space*, Abingdon: Routledge, p.87.

researcher and participants adequately (Sparkes, 2009).¹²To be a tool to be adopted by architects who work primarily through visual methods it needed to sit easily adjacent to current modes of engagement. It was also necessary for the data to be evocative of the phenomenon as encountered on site allowing others to engage with the data in a critical manner. Mainly, it needed to retain the interconnections between time, space and the social body, reflecting the mode of data collection.

The structural approach for the mapping diagram was adapted from the film composition process based on 'vertical montage' (Eisenstein, 1991)¹³utilized by Sergei Eisenstein in his film *Alexander Nevsky*. Goodwin writes, "The concept of vertical montage is drawn from the notation on an orchestral score, where vertical structure indicates the interrelationship of all the instrumental elements at a particular moment" (Goodwin, 1993).¹⁴Adoption of this method allowed me to retain the interrelationship between the different modes of sensory data collected on site by juxtaposing many (multimodal) parts to produce a coherent whole. It also allowed the element of time to be represented. Categories of the multimodal mapping diagram consists of:

INSIGHT- includes diary entries, reflective narratives, quotations from impromptu interviews and conversations as well as embedded sound and video feeds that directly correspond to the sensory rhythms depicted underneath.

BODY AND SPACE-AsDegen writes, "Activity rhythms are intricately linked to sensuous rhythms. As public life is punctuated and produced through activities, we experience these through the senses. The unfolding sensory landscape is created through past and present activities" (Degen, 2008).¹⁵ The embodied activity that is involved in creating these rhythms is represented by photographs and sketches in the body-space segment in map. They also depict corporeal engagement in space giving insight into kinaesthetic involvement with the built environment. The physicality of a place and how it may impact on its inhabitants is reflected in plan and sectional diagrams where relevant. THE PLAN VIEW- gives an understanding of the density of bodies in space, their orientation towards each other and/or adjacent structures and their relative positions in space. THE SECTION VIEW- elaborates the relationship between bodies and structures/built environment. How something is touched. The section also provides an understanding of the volumetric space and scale.

My personal spatial journey was responsive to the sensory rhythms that evolved in the site. From the designated spot for rhythm analysis I moved towards identified sources of the rhythms for closer interrogation, observation and at times, personal corporeal involvement. These spatial trajectories consisting of pauses and movements are depicted in the mapping diagram using the Lund approach to time-geography (Parke & Thrift, 1980).¹⁶ This process allows complex traces of movement in space to be depicted in relation to time (Parkes & Thrift, 1980).¹⁷ In the mapping

¹²Sparkes, A. (2009) 'Ethnography and the Senses: Challenges and Possibilities', *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*, Vol. 1, no.1, pp. 21-35.

¹³Eisenstein S. (1991) *Towards a Theory of Montage: Sergei Eisenstein Selected Work Volume 2*, Glenny, M. & Taylor, R. (Eds.), London: British Film Institute Publishing.

¹⁴Goodwin, J. (1993) *Eisenstein, Cinema and History*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, p. 175.

¹⁵Degen, M. (2008) *Sensing Cities*, p. 173.

¹⁶Parkes, D. & Thrift, N. (1980) *Times, Spaces and Places: A Chronogeographic Perspective*, New York: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, p. 243.

¹⁷Parkes, D. & Thrift, N. (1980) *Times, Spaces and Places: A Chronogeographic Perspective*, New York: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, p. 243.

diagram, the timeline remains a universal axis while the spatial context is shown underneath in map format. These two aspects of time and space are then linked by a 'category space' (Parkes & Thrift, 1980)¹⁸ dynamic map which gives insight into my spatial trajectory against the timeline. Reflecting on the overall reading of the mapping diagrams as in Eisenstein's vertical montage, space, time and the corresponding multimodal information are encouraged to be read together as a vertical episode.

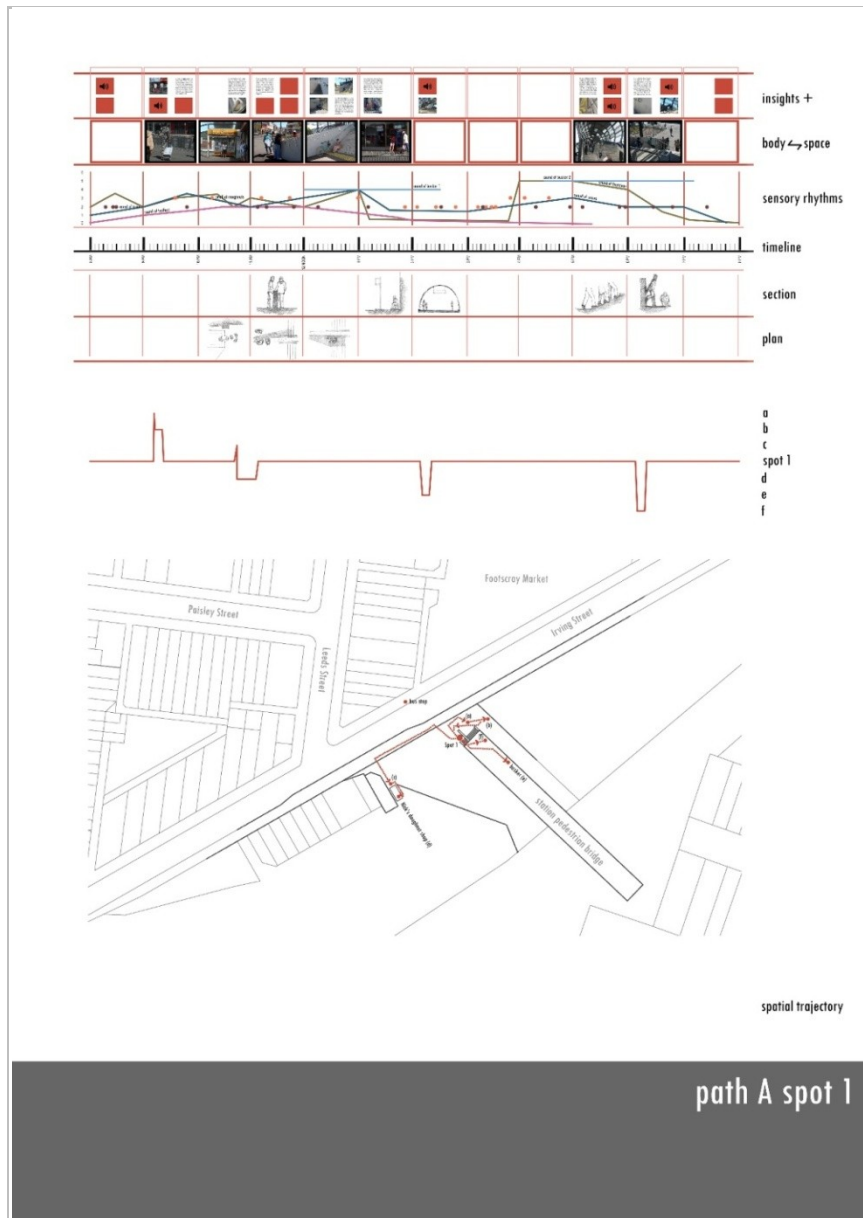


Fig. 1: Example of multimodal mapping diagram - Path A Spot 1, Oct 2010. Source: Author

¹⁸Parkes, D. & Thrift, N. (1980) *Times, Spaces and Places: A Chronogeographic Perspective*, New York: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, p. 243.

Design Exploration

One of main aims of this research was to explore how the specific type of knowledge generated by the multimodal mappings can impact architectural thinking. With the aim of expanding scholarship and multiplying outcomes, application in a studio setting was thought to be ideal as it is a space as Donald Schon writes, where practice and reflection can intersect (Schon, 1985).¹⁹

Within the studio there was an emergence of multiplicity; in design concepts, programmes and representation techniques varying quite distinctly from student to student. It became evident that this multiplicity took place within a framework of broader themes that were common threads running throughout the body of work. I will illustrate this by analyzing selected episode derived from the mappings of Footscray. The episode is unpacked to reveal socio-spatial markers which form a framework through which the design work is reviewed. These markers are literally 'traced' through the discussions as they emerge, through bold lettering. While the socio-spatial markers that emerged in the themes are traced in the designs, how they impact architectural thinking is evaluated through the parameters of spatiality, programme, scale, materiality and detail:



self negotiation occupying threshold use of props proximate scale

¹⁹Schon, D. (1985) *The Design Studio: An Exploration of Its Traditions and Potentials*, London: RIBA Publications for RIBA Building Industry Trust.

The elderly women and (at times) men sell fresh produce, operating on the fringes of the main commercial blocks in Footscray. It is possible to speculate that these women and men did not possess a permit for street trading in Footscray, yet they engaged in this marginal economic activity to their obvious advantage with minimal disruption and absence of disputes with the wider urban community. The women chose to be visible at a pedestrian scale without compromising their stealth by positioning themselves at the intersection of a main and secondary road. This allowed them to be seen by the more dense pedestrian traffic of the main road while not hindering it, as the displaying and selling took place along the less vibrant secondary road. They contribute minimally to the soundscape; they do not call out their wares. There is an absence of signage with prices or names of produce that bring attention to them and their activity. The bodies are elderly, so although engaged in tactical action it is quite a slow, static occupation of time, spanning over hours with little movement.

I observed that they appropriated the immediate surrounding environment, occupying the wide pavement, sharing the space with the adjacent bakery seating. The bakery signage was used for wind protection by some while their seating positions moved in relation to the bakery wall for sun protection (see plan). Uprturned milk crates were used to sit on (see section) and to display produce; other produce was sold directly from trolleys. At the conclusion of their day's work, they leave no trace of their occupation of the space. The milk crates disappear and the trolleys are pulled away with them.

With the affordance provided to them by *time*, they are able to exercise creative autonomous action in the urban landscape to their advantage. Such incidents of tactical occupation of space often involved **self-negotiation of territory** between groups and within groups. In this instance, it is implicit negotiations between the bakery, the market and the informal sellers. **The men and women negotiated space, inhabited niches, occupying a luminal position on the threshold of public and private.** They gained tactical advantage by **using unfixed, movable 'props'** in this case the milk crates, collapsible stools and shopping trolleys positioned within the strategically designed urban landscape – taken away after use leaving no palpable trace of their occupation in the built environment. To preserve the tactical strength it was seen that **engagement with the environment and other bodies were at a proximate, bodily scale** making them a low key presence in the urban landscape.

[Path A Spot 3]9am

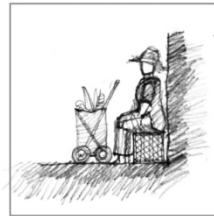
I see around the street corner near the bakery, a group of elderly Asian women sitting on milk crates. I walk towards them and observe them for a while and realise it's a market. I speak to one of the women and she says that she has five children and so she grows a lot of her vegetables and herbs in her backyard. The excess she brings out once a year and sells on this street corner. They are mostly women, with a few men, and they sell the produce straight out of their trolleys 'marketing' it as "...no chemicals". The space where they sit is normally occupied by the tables and chairs of the bakery. For a few hours in the morning, two, three times a week the transgression of its boundaries by the little market is benignly accepted.



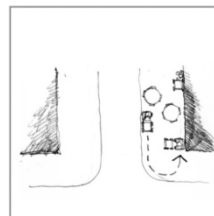
insights +



bodies ↔ space



section



plan

self negotiation PR

threshold SP

visual coverage SP

proximate scale SC

convoluted boundaries SP

rhythmic variation PR

multiple social realities PR

use of props SP SC DT

This scheme was developed in a Master of Architecture studio at the University of Melbourne (2014). The project, a hotel for refugees in Melbourne, begins with the framing of the plight of asylum seekers in Australia on bridging visas. Close parallels can be drawn between the socio-economic conditions of the group the student highlights and the migrant groups focused on in this study. Both are marginalized groups whose agency is not encouraged, and whose visual (and sensorial) display of difference is disconcerting to the larger public. The student writes: How might our cities of tomorrow extend hospitality to those truly seeking refuge (namely asylum seekers), without repatriation or a loss of cultural identity? (Ng, 2014)²⁰

Economic empowerment and agency in space for the refugees had to be balanced against the need to placate a larger community who feel threatened by the visual presence of refugees especially in large numbers within the community, feeding into commonly held myths (Ng, 2014).²¹ The hotel and its programme therefore take on a wholly tactical nature.

In order to gain access to the economic opportunities the city centre has to offer, the hotel is situated at the heart of Melbourne's Central Business District. The hotel is a habitable façade which appears nondescript. Within the façade there is accommodation and various other amenities for the refugees.

Programmatic requirements draw from tactical engagement with the surrounding urban environment, in particular a public car park. To gain insight into what is offered in terms of 'opportunity' here, the student reconceptualised the multimodal mapping methodology around the tactical typologies theorized by Ramirez-Lovering in *Opportunistic Urbanism* (Ramirez-Lovering, 2008).²² Mapping a 12 hour period of the car park she noted tactical actions that fell within the categories of 'appropriation' 'piggybacking' 'itinerant relationships' and 'open systems'. Mapping of site movements and patterns was also conducted.

Informal street vending, hairdressing, delivery services were identified as possible activities the inhabitants could engage in. Opportunities were also identified in underutilized infrastructure and the by-products of urban services. For example, hot air from the mechanical vents of neighboring buildings was used to dry clothes and warm spaces.

The hotel furniture as elements of the hotel façade is designed to be "detachable, operable or retrofitted opportunistically for trade" (Ng, 2014)²³ - the use of movable props strengthening their tactical advantage. 1:1 prototypes were developed to interrogate embodied engagement with these elements.

The scheme presented here reflects many of the characteristics that were inherent to tactical action in the mappings. The convolution of boundaries between private hotel functions and public car park occurs as the occupants engage and occupy thresholds on either side. A self-negotiation of territories is promoted as the occupants infiltrate the urban surroundings, shifting agency into their own hands. Their informal trade activity creates a negotiated space of cultural identity. Engagement with environment and other bodies is at a proximate scale, and visually low-key, enhancing its tactical strength. Rhythmic variation – in this instance,

²⁰ Ng, A. (2014) Research proposal, Design Research, unpublished.

²¹ Ng, A. (2014) Revised Research Question and Essay Outline, unpublished.

²² Ramirez-Lovering, D. (Ed.) (2008) *Opportunistic Urbanism*, Melbourne: RMIT Publishing.

²³ Ng, A. (2014) Revised Research Question and Essay Outline, unpublished.

counterpoint- to the existing rhythms allows very different social realities to exist in the same space.

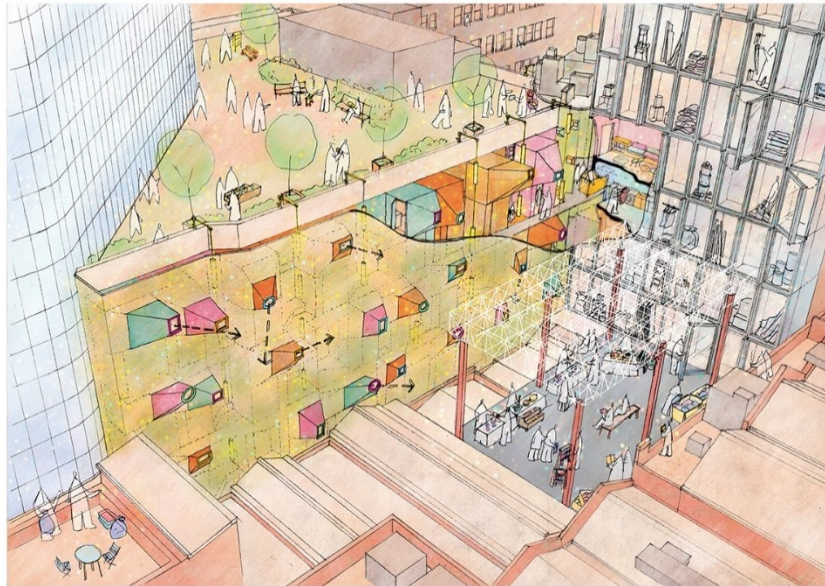
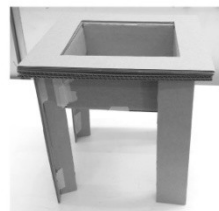
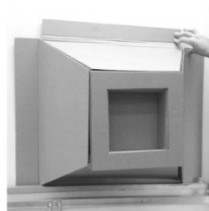


Fig. 3:Hotel for refugees consists of habitable facade where there is accommodation and other amenities.
Source: Amelyn Ng

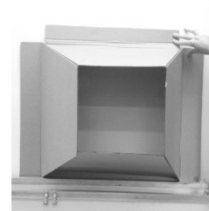
FURNITURE PROTOTYPE



cardboard iteration of mobile seat / trade receptacle



fitting seat into hotel room window projection



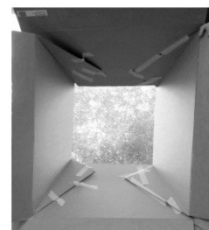
window projection opening



operability: hotel guest's discovery of seat



upon removal the guest has a clear view out



guest's 'picture view' out of hotel room

Fig. 4:Prototype research. 1:1 testing to assess relative heights, sizes and mobility.
Source: Amelyn Ng

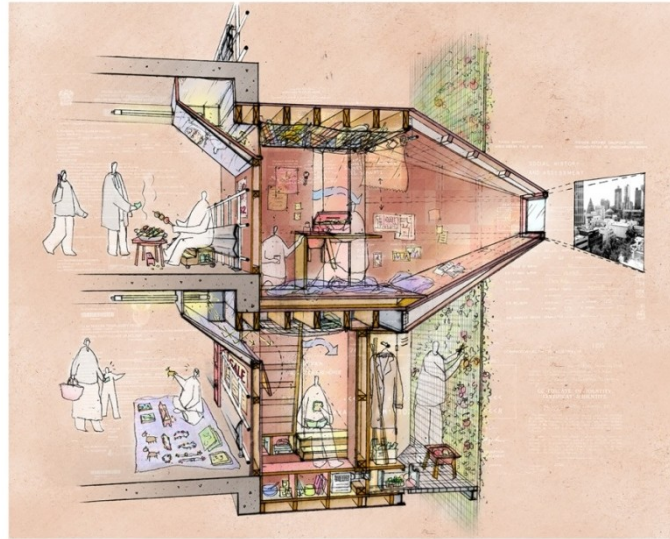


Fig. 5: Section of habitable facade.
Source: Amelyn Ng

Conclusion

The research presented in this paper attempts to highlight the *sociality* of the senses and looks specifically at the interplay between the physical, temporal, and social of everyday interactions to inform design. The socio-cultural implications of behavior in urban settings and design outcomes based on that have been explored, for example by Amos Rapoport and Jan Gehl (Rapoport, 1976, 1977 & Gehl, 1987, 1996, 2013),²⁴ however, in this research the design tasks were approached through the impetus of how architects could contribute to issues of *social equity* in public spaces while still inhabiting a strategic position within the urban regeneration process.

The multimodal mappings of Footscray revealed the significance of tactical occupation of space, allowing bodies that do not possess legitimate power to engage in the production of place or participate in culture (De Certeau, 1984).²⁵ Those occupying a marginal position in both regeneration discourse and urban space because of disadvantaged backgrounds were afforded the opportunity to exercise creative autonomous action in the urban landscape, to their advantage.

²⁴Rapoport, A. (1976) *The Mutual Interaction of People and their Built Environment: A Cross-cultural Perspective*, The Hague: Mouton, and Rapoport, A. (1977) *Human Aspects of Urban Form: Towards a Man-Environment Approach to Urban Form and Design*, Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Jan Gehl has specifically developed quantitative tools that privilege pedestrians in the urban landscape. His body of work has been widely adopted in urban planning processes throughout the world since the 1980s.

Gehl, J. & Birgitta Svarre, B. (2013) *How to Study Public Life*, Steenhard, K. (Trans.), Washington DC: Island Press. Gehl & Gemzøe, L. (1996) *Public Spaces, Public Life*, Copenhagen: Danish Architectural Press and Gehl, J. (1987) *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*, (Trans.), Koch, J. (1987) New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

²⁵De Certeau, M. (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Design investigation by students reflected many of the socio-sensory markers that emerged in the mappings. The schemes demonstrated a collective leaning towards designs that were tactical in nature but also emphasized embodied engagement with the built environment impacting specific architectural parameters.

This research presents a particular way of reading urban conditions, specifically addressing the socio-sensory occupation of space and the body-space-time issues that result from this. It is therefore not presented as an all-encompassing method or approach that addresses all the issues designers may face. The methods presented here give insight into place making mechanisms and complexities unique to contexts that are contingent on specific epistemologies. It has the potential to inform professionals engaged in place making of alternative approaches that can help produce regionally and culturally specific outcomes. Further research could investigate how, for example, would societies with kin-based social relationships and urban populations originally from rural village typologies with a specific concept of 'space', create place and impact on urbanity? How could this knowledge impact design and planning decisions?

This knowledge could inform the development of regional models of 'modernity' that are socially sustainable and specific to place. Ones that address inequity in the participation process acknowledge the importance of existing spatial practices to inform design/planning decisions and provide a sense of continuity within the regeneration process.

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