Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Performance, Space and the Embodied Mind

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• Abstract (300 words):
The paper offers a historical overview of the dynamics observed between design and science through the lenses of second-order cybernetic theories (SOC) and proposes a transdisciplinary and historical inquiry on the human – machine – environment recursive relationships. The essay articulates these nuanced interactions while revealing conceptual biases that respond to contemporary understandings of space interactivity, building performance and human experience.

The relationship between design and science has shifted continuously postwar onwards. The design methods movement which stemmed from the scientific and technological optimism of the postwar era looked at the design disciplines through rational scientific foundations. From the 1970s onwards though, counter arguments would see science as a specific form of design inquiry; rather than apply science to design, science could be understood as a form of design activity, reversing the more usual hierarchy between the two.
Deriving from both Ross Ashby’s ideas on the nature of embodied minds and Andrew Pickering’s general reading of cybernetics from a performance perspective, the paper demonstrates these historical shifts by reflecting on the dynamic involvement of observers within their observations, in contrast to the separation of observer and observed in conventional science. As Pickering emphasizes in his analysis of R. D. Laing’s psychiatry “we are all adaptive systems, psychiatrists and schizophrenics alike” or while referencing Gordon Pask’s participant observers who maximize interaction with what they observe in order to explore it.

In conclusion, the paper reflects a willingness to transcend disciplinary boundaries that is characteristic of cybernetics’ origins cutting across distinctions between design and research fields as well as those between objectivity and subjectivity, human and machine, and mind and body. It suggests operations, tactics, and methods as ways of researching and generating awareness, thus allowing our collective expertise as designers to contribute with more potency.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Severino Alfonso and Loukia Tsafouilia are registered architects, educators and researchers. They hold a Post-Professional MS in Advanced Architectural Design from the Graduate School of Planning and Preservation, Columbia University. They are founders of PLB studio architecture practice and Assistant Professors at the College of Architecture and the Built Environment, Philadelphia + Thomas Jefferson University in Pennsylvania where they have founded the Synesthetic research and design lab in collaboration with mental health institutions within the Jefferson + Philadelphia University.

They have developed, taught and coordinated courses at Barnard + Columbia Architecture, Pratt Institute, Parsons School of Design, New York Institute of Technology, the Spitzer School of Architecture at The City College of New York and at the New York City College of Technology. Their design work has been exhibited in international design venues, such as the London 3d print show and ICFF in New York and they have lectured in academic institutions in New York, Madrid, Athens, and various cities in China. Their research is positioned at the intersection of responsive environments, digital technologies and the computational theory of design in the 1950s-1970s in Europe and North America.

Severino also holds two MS in Urban Design and Advanced Architecture from the school of architecture in Madrid (ETSAM) where he is currently a Ph.D. candidate. He has worked with international architectural studios such as Carme Pinos, Angel Fernandez Alba and Federico Soriano in Spain, Lomar Arkitekter in Sweden and Per-forma Studio, KDF Architecture and Natalie Jeremijenko in the United States.

Loukia received her professional degree in Architecture Engineering from the National Polytechnic School of Athens where she is a Ph.D. candidate. She is the editor of the book publication titled Transient Spaces, exploring the impact of mass migration on cities around the world and examining transience as a force of potential and resilience. She has worked with Studio Dror, LEESER Architecture, Solid Objectives and Jorge Otero Pailos in New York and with K+T Architecture as well as the NTUUrban Environment Lab in Athens.