MAKING ONE'S WAY OUT OF EIDETIC PARALYSIS

THE VALUE OF EMBODIED PRACTICES IN DESIGN

Jean Trottier

Assistant Professor
Department of Landscape Architecture
University of Manitoba, Canada

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Abstract

Anthropologist Tim Ingold describes making as the emergence of form through a continuous interplay, or itineration, between the flow of consciousness and the flow of active materials. This position runs counter to the hylomorphic perspective that poses the abstract formation of ideas as the a priory activity in the design process. It also clarifies why a pedagogical approach centered on ideation (whether in the framing of the initial brief or in the tools and methods employed) tends to maintain students in a state of “eidetic paralysis” where the formal, spatial, and material implications of ideas are never clearly expressed.

This paper will review how making reactivates the design process by promoting dialogical exchanges between the internal world of ideas and the external conditions within which design must necessarily operate. Referencing projects from recent graduate seminars and design studios it will articulate the discussion around the concept of embodied practice and consider the specific role or materials, tectonics, and technology in supporting reflective practices.

Keywords: Design pedagogy, design process.
One does not design landscapes as much as the conditions within which landscapes emerge.
Making as itineration

“The neat arrangement of the various prototypes belies the improvisational character of Stephanie’s design process and the extent to which the engagement with materials and particular technologies – through making – led her to appropriate structural solutions and a greater coherence between conceptual intention and formal strategies.”
Tectonics

“[The] quest for a structural problem-solving strategy resulted in an unforeseen analogical resonance: her curvilinear tensile structures became reminiscent of the economical geometry of plants and would not have been out of place in a taxonomic collection of seed pods.”
Dynamics

“[It] may well be that the ontological condition of landscape architecture is change itself, or, more precisely, the expression of how the 'constructional logic' of a landscape evolves over space and time. For Stephanie this idea spurred both conceptual and pragmatic questions. It is one thing to insert the seed carriers in the ongoing processes that regenerate a forest but how can these same processes be engaged in the design and functioning of the carriers themselves? Could it be, for example, that these processes become instrumental in the release of the seeds from their carrier?”
Technology

"[It] may be judicious to think of tools as mediators of the correspondence between makers and the material world. We can describe this mediation both in term of the operations the tools allow the maker to conduct and in term of the kind of information about the material world these tools bring to the design process."
“I began this paper lamenting the eidetic paralysis often observed in design education. Tim Ingold’s conceptualization of making as itineration through engagement helps explain why making-based pedagogy, such as design/build studios, seems to circumvent that paralysis. By establishing a correspondence between maker and materials, students are either challenged to switch from eidetic to evaluative tasks or find their design process co-opted by the agency of real-world conditions to which they must suddenly respond. In this context, technology serves as mediator of the reciprocal dance between maker/designer and the material world.”
REFERENCES
