

The Dialectics of Design:

**Rhythm-analyses:
Santa Monica, California and Oberhausen, Ruhrgebiet**

Ileana Apostol
Universite Pierre et Marie Curie Paris 6
apostol@usc.edu

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In search for building an understanding of spatial quality I consider essential the relational nature of space that is conceived according to temporal dimensions. In this paper I aim to contribute to the translation of this spatial knowledge into design practice, by means of rhythm-analyses of places. I illustrate this method with my experience with interactive temporalities of places while undertaking research on public spaces across the Atlantic, in Santa Monica, California in the US and in Oberhausen, Ruhrgebiet in Germany.

The example shows that a key in adapting to the pace of change within the contemporary spatial production is the practitioners' capability to develop the habit of reflective action. Hence I argue for design as a reflective practice (Schön 1983), and propose to look at designers as spatial explorers that approach spatial analyses from a phenomenological viewpoint. In the space that contains and represents within itself relationships such explorations become an inter-subjective practice. From this perspective practitioners assume different roles alternatively, by performing sensorial, conceptual, institutional, and rhythm-analyses of places. To explain the various manners in which reflective practitioners interact with places I structure a conceptual triad based on Henri Lefebvre's dialectics of spatial production. I define the design dialectics as a dynamic understanding of a place's biography across the following moments: a) a sense that contours an external image, b) the conception that leads to a professional image, and c) the life that creates lived experiences and an enduring civic presence of a place. In order to incorporate change within the conception process, the planning and design practitioners need a dynamic take across the dialectical moments of this spatial triad, which helps the mediation among the three modes of representation. The dialectical alternative to the design practice that I propose draws wisdom from the senses and the inner being, values the particularities of places and individuals, and is attentive to movements and presentation scales of phenomena.

Within this framework, the rhythm-analyses translate spatial theory into design practice twofold. On one hand, in the spatial production they can restore the role of the human body by reinstating the sensible in consciousness. On the other hand they represent a method to formally integrate social sciences theory into design pedagogy, and to familiarize future practitioners with a critical approach to design reasoning and practice. The example illustrated here is a first step in proposing this reflective method of planning and design practice.

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