

Environmental Aesthetics and Nature Immersion Art Practices.

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Abstract

In this paper I describe 3 different immersive field trips in nature resulting artworks and environmental appreciation. The first, it is an art residence I undergone in Norway, Sweden and Lithuania. The main subject of the call for this residency was “Cartographies of everyday life on the sea.” The second, it is an art residency I organized on a sailing boat with the theme “Experience the Sea.” The third, it is an artwork derived from different trips on nature. On the first, I focus on the process and intentions of being on that location. On the second, the focus is on the experience. And on the third, I talk about the outcome of different immersions in nature performed on recent years. They all have in common the urge— as an artist – to be in nature and produce something out of it. It can be a report, a note, a video, or a photograph, anything that connects me to nature, which can extend the feeling even when I’m not there anymore.

Keywords

Nature, Art Residency, Immersion, Environmental Aesthetics, Experience.

Introduction

Having environmental aesthetics as a methodology for nature immersions, I have been promoting and undergone different kinds of art residencies and field trips. This paper intends to present and discuss the practices and processes resulting from these nature awareness experiences. Everyday we see an increase detachment from nature and an engagement on a speedy and busy way of living. As an artist and educator I feel the urge to go back to nature from time to time. This contemporary way of living demands slowing the pace and creating some detachment from the concrete/digital world. In order to do that, I have accomplished some nature immersive field trips, most of it done by the movement (Cresswell, 2006) of my body – that is: walking (Thoreau, 2004; Jokela, 2008), cycling, sailing, and rowing... I also promoted a “day on the sea”

as an art residency on a sailing boat. The goal of this residency was to perceive the sea that surrounds our city. Afterwards, every artist created an artwork based on his/her experience. Here in this paper I intend to present a reflection on these artistic processes based on nature immersions.

Art, Experience and Nature

Allen Carlson (2000), in his book “Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, art and Architecture,” talks about ways of getting involved with nature. He (Carlson, 2000, p.194) states that

...aesthetic appreciation involves more than simply either passive contemplation of pleasing form or spontaneous delight in sensuous surface. Essential to aesthetic appreciation is active engagement, involving cognitive and emotional interaction between the appreciator and the object of appreciation.

At the same time, Carlson considers the scientific knowledge to be mandatory for nature appreciation. For the author, an art critic is capable of appreciating art while an ecologist is better equipped to appreciate nature. Science is a better tool for environmental aesthetics than art (Carlson, 2000, p.50).

Nevertheless, in Ecoarte¹ group we use art to appreciate nature. At the same time, in each project we engage on cognitive knowledge of the environment in order to better appreciate it. We mix art & science to create a deeper engagement.

Our projects are based on experiences, and these experiences lead to an environmental aesthetics. For Jorge Larrosa Bondia (2002), nowadays experience is rare. Firstly, it is because there is a great amount of information. And being experience “what happens to us,” information is not experience. Secondly, there is excess of opinion. In our society driven by social

¹URL: www.ecoarte.info

media, opinions matter more than experiences. Thirdly, experience is rare because we lack on time. Our lives got so busy, everything has to be fast and we are missing silence and memory. Fourthly, we have an excess of work, we are always active trying to finish a work and have no time to really feel “what happens to us”. Experience is based on being passive, being open, being available (Bondia, 2002, p. 19).

The three practices described below have experience as the main objective. Different from knowledge that is common to all, experience is unique, everyone has his/her own, it is impracticable to be repeated (Bondia, 2002, p. 27).

Marine Time: Perceiving Sea Changes

Traveling on the sea can distort someone’s awareness of time. Going from one place to another, a trip journey or simply enjoying the water can be a way of rethinking one’s experiences, one’s life and one’s way of dealing with time and changes. “Marine Time: Perceiving Sea Changes” is a project on time perception, environmental awareness, on location and landscape affinity.

Marine Time was created do the M.A.R.I.N. (Media Art Research Interdisciplinary Network) art and science residency organized by Tapio Mäkelä² in the North and Baltic Sea. My proposal in this residency was to create a mapping of how people perceive the sea and the temporal changes in three different places (Flørli/Stavanger, in Norway, Öland island, in Sweden and Nida, in Lithuania). By collecting stories of people who live out of the sea, such as fishers, sailors, tourism related workers, NGOs, researchers, etc, I created narratives and maps that present time chances, how it is sensed and created on a personal and spatial level.

The goal of this project was to research the spatial patterns, time changes and interactions of environmental problems, combining different sources of information to develop a mapping narratives allowing to different users to explore the details and complexities of this territory and its human and environmental problems. The main product of this was an online logbook presenting notes, maps, audio interviews, photos and videos collected on the field trips. It’s a hybrid of my subjective cartography and local people points of view, where fishers, managers, scientists, artists, tourists presented their sense of the place, time and panorama. This online travelogue can be conceived as a tool for debate, decision-making and

awareness on the sustainability on the sea.

During the weeks on the North and Baltic Sea, I went to many walks on nature, sauntering and enjoying the environment. Sometimes I took longer trips on a bicycle, or a sailing boat or a rowing boat, all in a slow pace, no motor involved. My choices of where to go were based on talks to local people or, sometimes, random. As Thoreau (2004, e-book) wrote:

What is it that makes it so hard sometimes to determine whither we will walk? I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright. It is not indifferent to us which way we walk. There is aright way; but we are very liable from heedlessness and stupidity to take the wrong one. We would fain take that walk, never yet taken by us through this actual world, which is perfectly symbolical of the path which we love to travel in the interior and ideal world; and sometimes, no doubt, we find it difficult to choose our direction, because it does not yet exist distinctly in our idea.

For me, it was a foreign land, a foreign continent; therefore, all the walks were new. It was my first time in every single field trip. On those I collected data as: photos, video, audio interview, maps, data of the fishing habits, stories of the changes and some subjective and emotional statements.

As Katharine Harmon (2004) said, “I sense that humans have an urge for maps”, maps aren’t only a tool to get from one place to another, they can be an instrument to motivate our imagination, our fantasy, a way to travel in time and space. I proposed maps that were hybrid: scientific, storytelling and subjective. It could be an instrument for community management and, at the same time, an instrument for dreaming.

The travelogue³ was a report on experiences of the way people perceive their territory and environment, reflection on the past, present, and future. It was collaboratively created using efforts from art, science and communication.

Despite of science, cartography has been extended used by artists and activists, “An Atlas of Radical Cartography” (2008) presents some examples of that: maps of places, routs, protests, actions, feelings, intentions. The map here pretends to use many of these themes, but different from the ones in a book, they are not static, not printed versions. Accordingly, I created a collaborative narrative mapping produced

² <http://tapio.translocal.net/cv/>

³ Marine Time URL: <http://marine.ecoarte.info/>

Panels

by a combination of my field trips; Open Street Maps, scientific data, community stories, subjective places and emotional perception.

Velejar Art Residency

On the end of October 2016, a group of artists and art students went on a sailing trip with the aim to sense the sea of the bay around their town. This project was called "Sailing: Art and Experience of the sea." The city was Salvador, in Bahia, the first capital city of Brazil. The boat was a 17-ton 44-foot sailboat, a Bruce Roberts 434 model, with a ketch (two masts) and a pilothouse. And the group was interdisciplinary, students and artists from different backgrounds and age range. Together with Roberto Fabiano, the captain of the boat, I led this art residency on the sea. Our main goal was to sense the sea – to feel it, to observe it, to notice it in a different way, to recognize it, to be aware of it, to comprehend it, to appreciate it, and to realize it. And after that, to create art pieces based on this experience.

Place for me is the locus of desire. Places have influenced my life as much as, perhaps more than, people. I fall for (or into) places faster and less conditionally than I do for people. (Lippard, 1997, p4)

Having this citation from Lippard as mote to the day on the sea, our objective was to fall for the Baía de Todos os Santos (bay where we have sailed). I have a great passion for the seas and the bay that surrounds my city.

We were a group of 12 artists and the great majority had never been on a sailing boat. The experience started before boarding, when we planned the trip. Beto Fabiano showed us the possible routes, the wind forecast, currents, weather forecast, nautical chart and topography of the bay. The two days planning were a form of start to understand the environment we were going to face. This scientific data helped us to better appreciate nature (Carlson, 2000).

During the experience on the sea, we could feel the wind on the sail, how the boat moves and how to anchor. We stopped in different island and went for a swim on the sea. On board, I realized that four of the artists didn't know how to swim. I took each of them with me to the water. Their experience of the sea was original. They said it was a strange sensation not to have anything beneath their feet. It was an incredible statement. For a diver as myself, it was amazing to hear that someone that lives in a coastal city had never been floating on the sea. It was a perfect example of an experience described

by Bondia (2002).

The result was an online exhibition⁴ of 12 pieces resulting from this practice. There was video, photography, text, drawing, performance, glitch, dance, land art, audiovisual performance and animated code. Everyone had a different experience on that day, and those are translated on their resulting pieces.

Wanderscapes

WanderingScapes is an audiovisual performance about journeys on nature. It is wandering on different -scapes such as landscape, cityscape, townscape, roofscape; riverscape, seascape, waterscape, snowscape... It is going into field trips as nature immersions and bringing back a miscellaneous of videos and sounds. This audiovisual performance is the outcome of the lived experience in different environments. It is glitched, rusted, noised as the experience cannot be (re)lived. It is just performed with simple body movements, instruments, sensors and objects created by us.

As an artist, I went to a variety of immersions in nature in order to record videos for this performance. The way to experience nature had no selected weather, some days were sunny and colorful, and others were rainy and gray. The mud, the wind, the sand, the extreme heat, the freezing cold was felt on my skin.

WanderingScapes was created together with Enrique Franco Lizarazo, I work with the visual and Enrique works with the sound. In the performance, we mix the movements of the body on going into immersion in nature with the movements of the actual audiovisual performance. The videos and sounds collected during immersive field trips walking, cycling and sailing in different landscapes – deserted beaches, open ocean, forests, parks – bring us back to natures. In this AV Performance, we use simple movements of the arms and upper body as an allusion to the movements of the body, which took us to the contact with nature. It forms a simple dance of the arms on air, using sensors and mixing images and sounds to recreate a revised version of the nature experience.

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⁴ URL: <http://velejar.ecoarte.info/>

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Karla Brunet is an artist and researcher, has a PhD in Audiovisual Communication and a master's degree in Fine Arts. She has participated on many art exhibitions in Brazil, Europe and the USA. Karla is a professor at IHAC and Pós-Cultura at UFBA, where she researches projects that present intersection of art, science and technology. From 2009-2012, Karla was the coordinator of Lab-debug.net, a media lab focus on women and free technology, and in 2012, she was the curator of FACMIL/LabMAM, a medialab at the Museum of Modern Art of Bahia. In 2014/2015, she got a year art/research grant at UDK, Berlin. Nowadays, back in Brazil, Karla coordinates the Ecoarte, an interdisciplinary research and art group. <http://karlabru.net/site/>