

MANIPULATIONS: ARTEFACT-SITE-SPACE

MAHMOUD KESHAVARZ

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND COMUNICATION,
MALMÖ UNIVERISTY

MAHMOUD.KESHAVARZ@MAH.SE

ERIC SNODGRASS

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND COMUNICATION,
MALMÖ UNIVERISTY

ERIC.SNODGRASS@MAH.SE

OLA STÅHL

DEPARTMENT OF DESIGN, LINNÆUS
UNIVERISTY

OLA.STAHL@LNU.SE

ABSTRACT

This workshop gathers those who are interested in producing a set of responses to the concept of manipulation through a specific framework of design ecologies. The workshop will adapt a methodological approach linking artefact, site and space – an approach we hope will offer ample opportunity to explore manipulation both as a concept and a local and material practice that produces global effects.

Participants are invited to contribute with specific case studies of artefacts, sites and/or spaces, reading them up and against the notion of manipulation considered here not merely as an outcome of environments but also as a source of the production of environments.

The workshop is a part of MANIPULATIONS, an ongoing initiative in which scholars, researchers, artists and designers submit and discuss their investigations and explorations of the concept of manipulation.

INTRODUCTION

With its suggestive emphasis on dynamic relations, interacting environments and emergence, ecologies offers potentially helpful frames and methods for getting a hold of the many infrastructures, devices and material fabrics upon which things transpire. The ecologies approach has from the beginning been very encompassing in nature, with its embrace of more than just the human-centred qualities of those things that humans bring into being. As has been amply shown by fields such as feminist technoscience over the last few decades, such an embrace of a wider and more diverse spectrum of nonhuman entities and agents can prove highly fruitful for tracing out important and often glossed over configurations of things, materials, relations, concepts, technologies and indeed humans. Thus it has become hard to understand artefacts, sites and spaces without situating them in a network of practices and regulations regarding the movement of all moving things.

This understanding of ecologies can be linked to what Jane Bennett (2004) calls “political ecologies”. Political ecologies speak to the dynamic relations that are produced within multiple forms of assembled things. As Bennett (2004, p.367) writes: “its political potential resides in its ability to induce a greater sense of interconnectedness between humanity and nonhumanity.” This interconnectedness that Bennett describes does not however happen in a flat environment with equal forces. Every connection and movement of things brings with it a disconnection and immobilisation from other things in the same environment and within multiple ecologies of power relations.

Take the example of a chair. Once a chair is designed it may be considered as an artefact providing a particular service to its users and consumers. But it is always more

than that. The designed chair has already enacted some form of designation because it has manipulated the environment via the resources it has drawn from, the skills employed in its production, the labour that was invested upon it and so on. The forces embedded in the chair are not enacted merely in the office, living room or kitchen by its use and function. The chair is rather spatially and temporally embedded and oriented within ecologies of material power relations, both before, during and after design. This means that it is almost impossible to think of the space and time of design in a limited sense of the place and the time of use.

The capabilities of wood, skills, labour and workshop as a site of production can all be assembled in various ways. Furthermore, the possibilities of the designed chair to be oriented towards one direction and not another - giving certain shapes to space that some bodies can occupy and some cannot (Ahmed, 2006) - tell us about the complexities and difficulties that design and its internal relation to politics are involved in. Design is not merely an outcome of environments but also a source of production of environments. Sometimes one is stronger compared to the other but this mutual relation is always at place.

The case of the chair highlights the material articulations of manipulative forces and the ways in which various intersecting ecologies (economic, political, technical, etc.) coalesce and enact or enable further manipulative forces and practices. Simply put, we understand manipulation as material articulations and modes of action in the form of artefacts, sites and/or spaces that shape the dynamic relations of existing ecologies. Thus, any creation, intervention or disruption is always already a form of manipulation.

MANIPULATIONS.INFO

We have created a platform (www.manipulations.info) which provides a space to further develop the concept together with those who are interested in looking at the idea and practice of manipulation. The workshop at Nordes is one event generating inputs for this platform specifically in relation to ecologies and designed artefacts and actions, and mediated practices and environments.

WORKSHOP

The workshop invites participants – scholars, designers, artists and researchers – to explore the concept and practices of manipulation. To frame this engagement, the workshop will adapt a methodological approach linking artefact, site and space – an approach we hope will offer ample opportunity to explore manipulation both as a concept and a local and material practice that produces global effects.

BEFORE THE WORKSHOP (I.E. SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS)

Those interested in participating in the workshop should submit an outline by 24 May to

contact@manipulations.info that in one way or another explores a notion of manipulation as it can be seen within and across artefacts (e.g. chairs, barbed wire), sites (e.g. airports, mines) and/or spaces (e.g. smart cities, tax havens). It may be a textual draft, a photo- or video essay, computer program or material intervention. Accepted submissions will be shared amongst participants prior to the workshop and participants are encouraged to get familiar with the other's contribution prior to the event. Notification regarding involvement in the workshop will be confirmed no later than 1 June.

SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

The workshop is a half day event with the following schedule outline:

- Brief introduction to the workshop and the concept of manipulation by the organisers. [20 minutes]
- Presentations of works submitted to the workshop by contributors. [40 minutes]
- Coffee break. [15 minutes]
- A first round of discussions in groups formed by participants on the basis of themes established following the presentations and with a stated of focus on developing a set of questions around the themes explored. [45 minutes]
- A second round of group discussions responding to the questions developed in the initial round. [45 minutes]
- Coffee break. [15 minutes]
- Presentations by each group outlining their discussion, their understanding of the concept manipulation, the questions and responses developed, and any other potential outcomes. [40 minutes]
- Organisers summing up and concluding the workshop, opening up to further developments of the project MANIPULATION on the basis of the outcomes of the workshop. [20 minutes]

AFTER THE WORKSHOP

After the workshop participants are encouraged to develop their outlines further and send them to the organisers for potential publication on the platform. Furthermore, the material produced within the workshop will be assembled for publishing on manipulations.info. The web platform will thus act as a critical vehicle for working through and with the theme as it develops over time.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. 2006. *Queer phenomenology: orientations, objects, others*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bennett, J. 2010. *Vibrant matter: a political ecology of things*. Durham: Duke University Press.