

Pro-Seminar 2

For my second professional seminar series I watched Violet Whitney's City Complex presentation. This presentation revolves around cities and how technology has affected them. She is an Adjunct Assistant Professor at Columbia Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation. She is also a product manager at Sidewalk Labs where she leads computational design and research (part of Google).

Her assertion is that cities are programmed in some way. Life has been computerized and created a platformed society. Social and economic relations occur on these platforms. For example, Tinder is shaping how people reproduce and the genetic makeup of future populations. What people see, eat or experience can be entirely determined by technology.

She describes how interfaces are so much more than a singular experience. They are affected by everyone around them, both in terms of the technological and social environment. She describes this as the spatial interface. Originally people's behavior was influenced by the social groups they were surrounded with. Now people who are accessing the same information on the same app, can be triggered to do the same thing, disregarding space and surrounding culture. Technology is not just a user experience but a social experience. An interaction can affect a group of people together. Information is being distributed on massive scales of hundreds of thousands of people. This means that architects and city planner have to think about the affects technology has on spaces, not just the pure three-dimensional world. These are affected by: behavior, time, movement, growth, policy, and interaction.

Physic spaces are engineered by humans, even at a subconscious level. How people sit, how train tracks are laid, how people traverse street spaces, are all examples of how humans can manipulate and change the meaning a physical spaces. Spaces like factories or offices have been historically optimized to fit humans and make the most efficient spaces for them. One issue is that when technology is built it doesn't usually take into account how it will affect spaces.

One thing she wants to explore is how to give people agency over their spaces and what this agency should include. Especially now the smart home/IoT devices are becoming main stream, this is a great area to study. Its much easier to see how these devices change the use of a space compared to architecture. However, these devices can be difficult to build. They want to try into building dynamic systems that don't need to have complex code, just premade blocks. They are currently trying to build these system with the if/then this/that syntax. They want to see how measurements relate to how the system reacts: including human body and the human bodies organic sensors.

In her speech she uses some of the techniques we talked about in IxD and UCRE about pitching. She starts off with a short story and tries to draw the audience in and have them relate and imagine what she is describing. She then uses this to lead into her main points. She also involves the audience in her speech by having them participate in an interactive poll that would relate to all audience members.