

Designing Space through Narratives: The Role of the Tour Description in the Architectural Design Process

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Abstract : When people are asked to provide an oral description of a space they usually provide a Tour description, which is a dynamic type of spatial narrative centered on the narrator's body, rather than a Map description, which is a static type of spatial narrative focused on the organization of the space as seen from above. Also, subjects with training in the architecture discipline tend to adopt a Tour perspective of space when the narrative refers to a space they have actually experienced but tend to adopt a Map perspective when the narrative refers to a space they have merely imagined. This pilot study aims to investigate whether the Tour description, which is the most common mode in the oral descriptions of experienced space, is a cognitive perspective taken in the process of designing a space. The study investigates whether a spatial description provided by a subject with architecture training in the type of a Tour description would be accurately translated into a spatial layout by other subjects with architecture training. The subjects were given the Tour description in written form and were asked to make a plan drawing of the described space. The results demonstrate that when we conceive and design space we do not adopt the same rules and cognitive patterns that we adopt when we reconstruct space from our memory. As shown by the results of this pilot study, the rules that underlie the Tour description were not detected in the translation from narratives to drawings. In a different phase, the study also investigates how would subjects with architecture training describe space when forced to take a Tour perspective in their oral description of a space. The results of this second phase demonstrate that if intentionally taken, the Tour perspective leads to descriptions of space that are more detailed and focused on experiential aspects.

Keywords : architecture, design process, embodied cognition, map description, oral narratives, tour description

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