

Literature, Artists' Books & Authorship in the Education of an Illustration Student



Ros Simms¹

rosalind.simms@port.ac.uk

Abstract

In this paper I will look at the use of literature to support illustration students in the production of an artists book that seeks to question the position of the illustrator as a producer and author of work. I will discuss using literature as 'inspiration'/starting point for an artists book and show examples of works that incorporates ideas of adaptation/interpretation/new work, authorship, production/producer. Illustration practice and in turn what it means to be an Illustrator is in a period of questioning, seeking to redefine what this means. Having a curriculum that allows students to develop their own style and individual voice, along with having the choice to work across a range of media and processes be an illustrator that works in print, digital, animation, paint ink etc. places them in a pivotal position to explore the positioning of the Illustrator.

As the arts and humanities are shaped and negotiated, subject to revision, the education of the Illustrator should seek to embed this understanding and implications in it's curriculum design. I conclude that students introduced to ideas of authorship, production and responsibility of establishing their role as an Illustrator, will have the ambition to be engaged the debate about Illustration. By the practice and dissemination of their work, along with entering discussion and debate they can seek, not to limit their concept of Illustration, but develop an encompassing definition of what it can be.

1. Introduction

This paper seeks to consider the position of the Illustrator as an author of work, expanding the tradition role, somewhat narrow concept, of the illustrator working to commissions and external briefs, within an educational framework. Through the examples of work produced on the B.A.(Hons) Illustration Course at the University of Portsmouth by second year students and outlining a unit: Bookworks, it will consider how classic literature, with universal themes can inspire Illustrators to produce new works for a contemporary audience. The paper documents how students are introduced to the complexity of issues of authorship and production.

Keywords

Illustration, Authorship, Literature, Artist's Book, Learning & Teaching.

¹ University of Portsmouth, BA(Hons) Illustration, School of Art & Design, Portsmouth, Hants. PO1 2DJ, UK.

For the unit students are asked to produce an artists' book² that uses a selected piece of classic literature as their inspiration. Initially, students read and research a classic book, this includes reference to the author and contextual research. The term classic refers to books of acknowledged influence or excellence. They can cover the works of Shakespeare as well as tales of horror, imagination, romance, tragedy, historical works, fiction, science fiction, children's fiction, fantasy, Greek myths, fables, religious, satire, science-fiction, politics, crime, social conditions & humour. By selecting a 'classic' piece of literature students are able to draw on an abundance of research about the actual text and beyond, including information on the author and context. A large number of the works from the past have been written about, re-interpreted, perhaps set in a different context, been used as subject matter for film, television or have influenced other visual arts. The cross-fertilization of ideas, practice and media between these creative arts draws on creative heritage and provides an extensive source of endless inspiration.

2.1. 'Bookworks'

From their chosen book and related research, students produce an artist's book. The term 'Artist's book' is broad and describes a book made or conceived not just by artists, but can include photographers, illustrators, printers, bookbinders, writers and poets too. They can be produced in editions or as a one-off production and are usually self-published. Artist's book can be further defined in relation to their structure:

"Artists' books that maintain the traditional structure of a book are often known as book art or bookworks, while those that reference the shape of a book are known as book objects." [1]

Students are supported in their understanding and defining of what an artist book can be, by lectures and tutorials and had access to the Ministry of Books [2] - an archive of artists' books housed in the Illustration Department at the University of Portsmouth. The collection is archived online, with supporting resources, links and the site includes a wealth of bookbinding tutorials.

Although the students' artist's book will be derived from its literary roots it does not have to contain text. Students create their own individual book - not an abridged version of the text, highlighting areas they found interesting or responded to in their chosen text, developing initial ideas through discussion, visual experimentation and thinking how this could translate through imagination into their own artist's book.

In 2012 to mark the bicentenary of the birth of Charles Dickens we directed the students to choose one of Dickens' works or one of his contemporaries.

Maple White Land F.1 & 2 is an example of one of the students' artist's book and is inspired by the novel *The Lost World*.³ It is a purpose

² For a full definition of 'artist's book' see Castleman, & Castleman, R. (1997). *A Century of Artists Books*. United States: Harry N. Abrams.

³ Doyle, A.C., (1912-original publication date) *The Lost World*



Fig. 1. Brain, R., Babbage, W., (2015). *Maple White Land*, (Hard back book, with collaged elements, beech box, bagged samples including: glass, minerals, tin, feathers).

built compartmentalized beech box, along with curiosities – including rock minerals and ephemera that evidence a trial of adventures but ‘communicates barely a whisper of the wonders witnessed’.⁴ Included is a documented history of previous owners, prior to being placed in the hands of the reader. Inside the hard-back book are geographical co-ordinates of locations that evidence the time, date and place of the findings of these objects, along with pictorial recordings, some photographic, drawn or printed representations. It is not just the content selected for the book, but the structure that has allowed the viewer to explore and navigate individual avenues – discovering and revealing a wealth of suggested narratives.

Students’ final artist’s books were underpinned with extensive developmental work – into the concept and materiality. From initial ideas and themes in response to reading the text, sketches, experimental speculative work into processes and materials were undertaken. Prototypes were made to test and refine possible book solution(s). In tandem, students participated in tutorials where they were encouraged to reflect on their practice and engage in discussion around content, production, format, authorship and ‘cultural relevance’ Heller. [3]



Fig. 2. Brain, R., Babbage, W., (2015). *Maple White Land*, (Showing hard back book detail, with collaged elements, beech box, bagged samples including: glass, minerals, tin, feathers).

⁴ Brain, R., Babbage, W., (2015). *Maple White Land*

2.2. Definitions

Drawing from another's work, in this instance a literary piece, there are nuances of different definitions, such as: adaptation, homage, interpretation, which allow illustrators/students to explore and define that which they may seek to produce. But sometimes it can be more helpful, indeed easier; to define what it is not. Questions as to whether the intention is to adapt, alter, amend, interpret, represent or translate are just form the basis for discussion at tutorial level. Hearing established artists' views on this is insightful. It is interesting to consider the quote from the novelist Angela Carter, made in an interview, regarding her book *The Bloody Chamber*⁵

“My intention was not to do ‘versions’ or, as the American edition of the book said, horribly, ‘adults’ fairy tales, but to extract the latent content from the traditional stories and to use it as the beginnings of new stories.” [4]

Validity, meaning and intention are important to all creative practitioners. The use of language to define or give an explanation to these creative processes can enhance, or as we see from the above quote, using the ‘wrong’ terminology can seemingly diminish the status of work.

2.3. Authorship

Ideas and theoretical debates of authorship are more established in the discipline of graphic design, but no so fully established in terms of Illustration. This is perhaps somewhat surprising as authorial illustration is strong within the discipline. The MA in Authorial Illustration at Falmouth, Atlantic Press and the Falmouth Illustration Forum is testament to this. Though there is more debate and acknowledgment of Illustration as a worthy practice, this quote from Zeegan (2005) still has resonance:

“Outside of education there appears to be a blanket refusal by artists to acknowledge the importance of the role that illustration plays. The crossover from art to illustration is occasionally deemed appropriate, but the reverse is rarely accepted.”

Zeegan (2005) [5]

With the growing opportunities for self-publishing, perhaps this is helping Illustrators to strengthen their positioner as producers of work, rather than confining outputs within the more traditional role of making work that has been commissioned.

It is interesting to see the collaboration between Auster and Thomas resulting in the book: *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* (2008) [6]. Taking Auster's text from *The Book of Illusions*, Thomas combines his own drawings, interweaving them with his own typographic design, resulting in a visual feast. Both Auster and Thomas are listed as joint authors⁶ on an

⁵ Carter, A., *The Bloody Chamber & Other Stories*, Vintage Classics (new ed.) London 1995

⁶ <http://www.amazon.co.uk>

online commercial platform. Perhaps this is in part due to the balance and weight given to both Auster and Thomas. In the book it states: Text Paul Auster, Drawings Glenn Thomas. Encouraging students to recognize individual input in collaborative work and any perceived hierarchy they may have about the image/type relationship can open up areas for discussion.



Fig. 3. Kettle, M., (2012). Unrequited Love, (*Mixed media including velvet, paper, brass lock & key*).

The artist's book *Unrequited Love* by Kettle, M. (Fig 3) was produced in response to reading *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. The author was interested in the protagonist - Pip's longing for Estella and how this consumed him throughout the novel. Rather than re-interpreting Pip's own story through her visual work, the author responded on a personal level, remembering the vivid emotional pain/pleasure of a past unrequited love. In wishing to capture a more universal 'bank' of narratives, the author put a call out via social media, asking individuals to share their story. The author was inundated with: 'words spilling from the heart... taken from previous untold stories and recollections of unrequited love. Hidden away but never forgotten...'⁷. Kettle has produced her own work - to amplify the chosen theme of unrequited passion, textually expressed by Dickens, but interpreted by her as reader and communicated by Kettle as the author/producer.

In the form of the artist book the viewer approaches a seemingly familiar codex, but on closer inspection, the addition of a key and having to unlock the 'book', demands a new approach from the reader and this can create intrigue. On opening, the expectations of pages is usurped by the absence of pages, and space covered with vivid red velvet and the presence of a paper sculptural heart and text that reveals personal narratives that evokes emotions, including longing, nostalgia and passion. The material employed in the production of the artist's book - velvet, a dried rose, antique hard-back book, adds to the tactile, olfactory and visual experience. The form - with lock and key, seeks to reinforce the preciousness of memory and keepsakes.

⁷ Kettle, M., (2012) Taken from the exhibition label

Fig. 4. Hill-Gowing, J,(2012). Bottles and Maps, (*Mixed media including leather, ephemera, paper, glass*).



F.4 Inspired by the adventure novel *20,000 leagues Under The Sea* by Jules Verne⁸ Hill-Gowing's artist's book more closely aligns to the original story. With the author producing the rediscovered journal of book's protagonist, Professor Pierre Aronnax. The found journal is inside a leather case along with a collation of material – maps, vials and test-tubes containing a variety of 'samples'. Some as yet unidentified but seemingly of scientific importance, suggested by the meticulous labeling. The materiality of the piece – the fabulous copper covering, with a delicate fish scale pattern, interrupted by a port-hole that allows as a glimpse of crumpled maps below, echoes the splendor of the novel; but this artist's book entices the viewer to interact and experience not just the journalistic commentary and sketches, but sample discoveries too. The artists books that bare little resemblance to the established codex, as does 'Bottles & Maps' and without a contents page, ensures the reader/viewer navigates this book is highly individual way. Ellen Lupton, in *The Designer As Producer* cites Walter Benjamin (1934) when making reference to this 'empowerment' of the reader:

“...the goal is to turn “readers or spectators into collaborators.”⁹ His words resonate in current educational models, which encourages students to view the reader as participant in the construction of meaning.”

Lupton (1997)[7]

2.4 Exhibition

At the end of the unit an exhibition was organized: *Beyond Dickens*.¹⁰ The rationale for the exhibition was to highlight the impact of Dickens as an inspiration for new creative works by contemporary artists. This exhibition was an international response to produce artists' books inspired by the work of Charles Dickens or one of his contemporaries and would seek to disseminate the student body of work. All students were encouraged to submit, and selected works were exhibited along side the selected pieces

⁸ Verne, J., *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea* (1870 – original publication date).

⁹ Benjamin, W., & Demetz, P., (Ed.) *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (E. Jephcott, Trans.). New York: Random House, USA (1995).

¹⁰ *Beyond Dickens* (2012) The First Floor Gallery, Southsea Library, Southsea, Hants. UK

from practicing artists. The selected books drew on the universality of Dickens' themes, including: freedom love, social commentary, humour, industrialisation politics and morality, and they marked him as a relevant influence for contemporary creative practitioners.

Viewers were encouraged to 'read' the artists' books; touch pages, turn keys and open boxes... Artist's books are made to be interacted with, and in the process of viewing and manipulating the viewer can reveal multi-layers, determine sequence(s) and transform the sculptural elements of a book.

No distinction was made between the work of students and the work of practicing artists. By participating in this exhibition students had evidence and experience of how they could disseminate their work in an existing established context – the gallery and in consequence, expand their perceptions and ambitions of what they can produce and where their audience can view their work.

2.5. New works

In the Bookworks project that the students undertake, they are encouraged to identify subject(s) derived from the original text that have personal resonance. So they have a connection to the content, along with a desire to express and communicate their subject/theme. Though it stems from an established text and is inspired by another's notion, through distillation it becomes removed from its origins and begins to assume an identity of its own. A transmutation – shaped by the illustrator's unique voice – that of the authorial voice, into new work, in this case an artist's book.

These artists' books have a life, their own unique place in the visual world, but how are they pieces of new work, original works, when drawn from literary sources? Certainly they look different from the original, in format, they are relative to ideas and expressions that have existed in another time and place. Some of these new works will be less giving in terms of their heritage, so individual and contemporary – wanting independence, bearing little if any care or acknowledgement to past works that helped form and shaped them. The reader may see obvious connections, perhaps the trace of an individual character's voice, echoes of a setting that informed the poet, the writer, they may echo the busyness of a townscape or a lone voice seeking/demanding an audience, a new audience, but in others there is no seemingly obvious resemblance. Perhaps on closer inspection, the universality of themes is the commonality, such as adventure, love but in changing the format, the communication of the message – is altered, the new voice gives it its originality.

3. Conclusion

Just as in the humanities, the arts themselves are subject to re-interpretation and revision, subsequently those who practice in this field have a role to play in refining, moving boundaries, establish new practices and responsibilities.

“..the arts and humanities change continuously by virtue of their be-

ing elements of a culture always in a condition of transition. Thus they transform through internal dispute, contestation, revision of tastes and methods, discovery or recuperative research, politics and philosophies. These subjects are continuously in debate and discussion: as new writers or artists emerge (or are discovered) to challenge existing norms, a field of discursive activity is simulated; as new historical theories, evidence or discoveries are made, different and challenging historical narratives follow which will then be tested in debate.” [8]
(Fry, Ketteridge & Marshall 2014)

How a student recognizes and negotiates this can be challenging, perhaps problematic. But if education is to truly acknowledge and reflect this, it has a responsibility to embed these ideas in the education of the illustrator and in turn support their understanding of it. But in what ways can the curriculum seek to support students? Allowing students to question, engage in activities that challenge their own notions of what it is to be an Illustrator. Theories can be explored in visual culture sessions and tutorials within the subject discipline of Illustration. Allowing students to consider, question and acknowledge their vital input in this debate – the awareness, responsibility of the part that they have in redefining their professional practice.

Designing projects that allow students to source, define and refine their own content for their practice and providing supportive opportunities to put into ‘practice’ these ideas of authorship - producing and disseminating work, in this example the production of the artist’s book and an external exhibition. It can open up necessary dialogues, with the balance firmly in the terms of the practical. Education provides the introduction to these issues. Students, as they graduate and practice in the professional arena will give shape to how these ultimately inform what Illustration can be.

How successful as authors they are or indeed will be, may be up for debate – but the value is found in the dialogue and expansive ambitions of students, in turn Illustrators – working in ways defined, newly defined, but not limited by existing boundaries. Placing students at the centre makes them better placed to engage with the theoretical debate, empowering and extending, not a dilution but enrichment of Illustration practice.

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Mobile architectures, a shifting space of perception: from cartoon to 3d



Concha García González¹

mariaconcepcion.garcia@universidadeuropea.es

Abstract

“Mobile architectures” is an experimental project that uses as main resource the dialectic relationship between 3d animation that depicts rotating views of presumed celestial spheres, and sound. Using as starting points two “instructional drawings” created by the architect Yona Friedman and taking its name from the his Manifesto “Mobile Architectures”, published in 1958, we combine 3d animation and soundscapes to suggest alternative spaces far away from current economy based on immovable properties, based also on the ownership of the land, land and property speculation. Our animations are, thus a metaphor of self-carried roofs: structures modified by situations and circumstances instead by the constructions of settlements.

Keywords

3d Animation, Drawing, Sound, Mobile Architectures, perception, space, composition.

1. Introduction

This article explores the concept of the project “Mobile architectures”: an immersive audiovisual installation and it’s contextualization. “Mobile architectures” is an experimental project that uses as main resource the dialectic relationship between 3d animation that depicts rotating animations of presumed celestial spheres, and sound. This Project also could be considered part of a large tradition of art works who seeks for correspondences and tensions between sound and image. In this case, the main narrative element that changes over time is the sound. It suggests the transition between different spaces and strange situations that we can’t imagine together, depicting an impossible geography and topology.

2. Project Background

The project takes its name from the Manifesto “Mobile Architectures”², published in 1958 by the architect Yona Friedman. He describes there a new habitat based on an unending and periodic renewal of social, political and economic relationships. He speaks about structures or architectures that don’t affect landscapes or cityscapes, as they are situational. In this case, situational means that each built volume is a point and its connections. He developed there the concept of architecture without build-

¹ UEM (Universidad Europea de Madrid), Department of Art, Design and Digital Contents. Tajo st. , Villaviciosa de Odón, Madrid, Spain.

² “Mobile Architecture” can be seen here http://www.yonafriedman.nl/?page_id=225

ings³, where the need for flexibility is paramount .This approach seeks to construct and also guarantees the possibility to easily deconstruct at any given time.

Yona Friedman was the principal activist in the Communication Centre of Scientific Knowledge for Self- Reliance, created under the auspices of the U.N. University⁴. The purpose of that Centre was, among others, to transfer and disseminate knowledge of a whole range of techniques in numerous manuals illustrated using cartoon language, dealing with techniques by which people can improve their living conditions and well-being themselves, The goal was the creation of a popular encyclopedia for survival available for millions of people, enabling the most disfavored population to assume their subsistence and improve their lives, along with the demonstration of how basic information about building techniques can be communicated with simple drawings. From water purification to the construction of smokeless stoves, these manuals were drawn by Friedman himself as simply presented documents that were often shown as wall posters. These manuals were adapted to be presented as animated films, to be used by local televisions or to be projected during the training courses. Those techniques received in 1962 the Golden Lion of Sant Marc, the highest distinction of the Venice Film Festival.

3. Project Development

a.- Concept

Our “Mobile architectures” project takes its meaning from the concept developed by Friedman. This concept finds its expression in systems of construction that allow the people living there to outline the design of their dwellings, based on structures with little impact on the ground: skeletons to be filled in as desired, dependent on the initiative of every inhabitant⁵. He tried to devise a system created with space-frame grids shaped with circles instead of polygons. He called it *space-chain structure*, and because of its arrangement -all the joints of this space-chains are situated at points where the rings are tangential to one another-, admits interesting cases of transitions between contiguous polyhedrons. In addition, using spheres of various diameters, arranged in an irregular pattern, random structures could be created with no rules of composition. He called those irregular arrangements *protein-space-chains* ⁶, because their resemblance with the structure of the proteins illustrated by scientist . By combining the space grids as regular structures and proteins structures as irregular ones, depending on the choices of the individual, usable spaces were created, flexible and not regular, adapted to the needs of the individual: a space were the choices of one individual do not impede those of the others.

³ The video of “Architecture without a building” can be seen here <https://vimeo.com/25050690>

⁴ The web page of the U.N. University is <http://unu.edu/research>

⁵ In Lebesque, S., Fenterer van Vlissingen, H. Yona Friedman. Structures serving the Unpredictable, pp. 22–23, Nai Publishers, Rotterdam (1999).

⁶ Lebesque, S., Fenterer van Vlissingen, H, Ibid. pp. 96-97.

Those structures and the concept behind it deal with change and movement of man in the environment depending on his changing needs, sound space cartographies as means of exploration and source of knowledge of a place, instead of permanent occupation, to fence in a plot, to defend or to devastate: all of them, different aspects of an economy based on immovable properties, based on the ownership of the land, along as land and property speculation. Those are ideas related with the concept of inhabit of a culture that doesn't encourage experimentation because is focused on investments in overrated soil.

Nevertheless, we consider that situations along with mobile and temporary artifacts could be as important as permanent built structures and can contribute to the generation of our own self-image as individuals such as, for instance, the garments do.

This project is about temporary settlements, passing through those spaces which are outside purchasing and sales transactions: free places like empty plots, public pavements, waste grounds, ditches, roofs, industrial wastelands....: that is, formless or irregular spaces open to change and also to new joints. It refers to a man who replaces possessions by new relationships with the surrounding environment and the others. It also

deals with structures that do not affect the landscape: a temporary installation, a walk, an encounter....

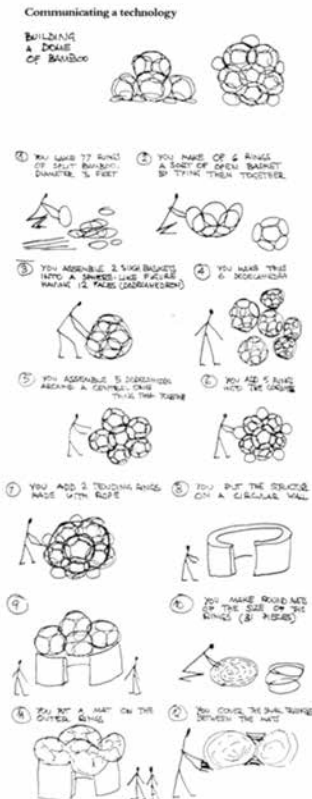


Fig. 1. One of the drawings explaining how to build a dome of bamboo. Communication for Self-Reliance. In Mimar 20: Architecture in Development, edited by Hasan-Uddin Khan. Singapore: Concept Media Ltd., 1986.

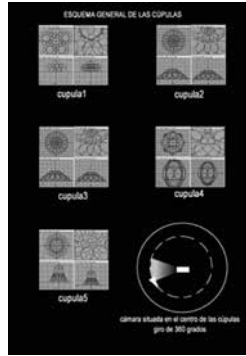
b.- Hands on

The concepts of *space-chains* made with circles instead of polygons as structural unity for mobile architectures, along with two of these Friedman instructional drawings mentioned above, depicting the construction of domes made with bamboo rings, were used by us as manuals to “build” our domes inside the computer. So formally speaking, we have used Friedman’s cartoon drawings as the starting point or the trigger of our animation, and conceptually speaking we have used and worked based on his already mentioned concepts.

Following their instructions, we created five different celestial domes inside 3d software.

The image below shows the different structures inside the computer.

Fig. 2. An image made by composition of different screenshots of the domes, taken inside the 3d space. Down, on the right side, we can see the camera, placed in the middle of the spherical space.



We have placed virtual cameras on the center of each dome. The cameras were animated with a rotational movement. From there, the renders were calculated.

The visual appearance doesn't want to reproduce in a realistic way different constellations as we know them. A special treatment is applied to the structures to simulate glowing points of different sizes, similar to the lamps of different sizes and intensity.

In this regard, is important to consider that we have not to try to simulate in a realistic way the properties that we perceive in objects or ambient of real life. Lev Manovich considered this as one of the main aspects of the New Media⁷. Instead of that, we have created an abstraction of a constellation: something that is in-between a natural construction and a human-made structure, but remind us about the structure and color of the starry sky. Symmetry confers a hypnotic effect similar to the mandalas that remain always the same with no changes.

Fig. 3. One frame of one of the animations, obtained from the central camera.



Each animation is 10 minutes long. It depicts, using accelerated speed, the daily movement of the earth around the sun: the scenery under which our live develops.

The final result is a strange sky where we can look for constellations and star trails.

⁷ Manovich, Lev. El Lenguaje de Los Nuevos Medios de Comunicación. Paidós Comunicación, Barcelona (2005)

Our animations are, thus a metaphor of self-carried roofs: structures modified by situations and circumstances instead by the constructions of settlements.

Change is suggested here by the sound. All the experiences we treasure, all the places we experience are suggested by the soundscapes. We use here the term coined by R. Murray Schaffer⁸. Soundscape refers to events heard but not seen. By listening, we re-create a space, depicting the constitutive audible features that define and characterize a place. We could say that is a concept related with the aural identity of a place.

The soundtrack is, thus, made using field recordings. We use the idea of composition as a new approach to the old codes already established: we take the soundscapes of different places and we create (or re-create) a new one with the juxtaposition of remote locations: unrealistic places that we experience with our body, as sound is always felt with the body and not only with hears. This project includes five different soundscapes lasting ten minutes each one.



Fig. 4. The animation should be experienced lying on the floor, in a cushion.

As we are depicting celestial domes, the animated videos must be experienced lying on a cushion. The lying down position contributes to a restful attitude and concentration which along with the hypnotic images focus our attention in sound and the spaces recalled with it. It could be seen as an *acousmatic* experience. This term was derived from the Pythagorean word *akousmatikoi*, and refers to listening without seeing the source of the sounds in order to focus on it and also to heighten the sense of hearing.

4. State of the project.

“Mobile architectures” is an on-going project. It received a grant from the Regional Government of Madrid, but is far from finished. The different components of the installation have been tested: the capacity of the soundscapes to recall different spaces and the hypnotic movement of the animation. It also has been tested on big screen, with different audience, in Madrid and also in the Marion Center for Photographic Arts placed in Santa Fe, New Mexico, but it hasn’t been tested yet with the entire configuration needed. Further steps will include tests with the desired settings: the spectator lying on a cushion, experiencing the immersive installation alone.

8 Schafer, R. Murray. *The Tuning of the World*. Destiny Books, Rochester, Vermont (1977)

5. Conclusions

This projects talks about tension. Taking as the starting point the language of animation, we create an abstract space that recalls us to already known entities of our real world, in this case heavenly entities. On the contrary, the sound speaks about earthly matters.

In this case, the sound plays an outstanding role to re-create for ourselves spaces and to recall subjective circumstances, events and places, always different depending our previous experience. Tension between sound material, always changing and the animations, always the same, accentuates the symbolic aspect of the representation. The symbolic meaning associated to the sounds is always changing as the sound changes, but the images, that remain always the same, negate this.

Mobile architectures can be considered as an art project that encourages a more conscious attitude towards our environment and landscapes.

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