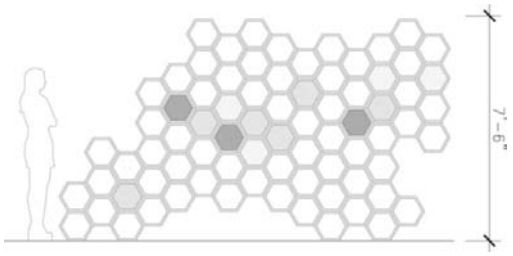
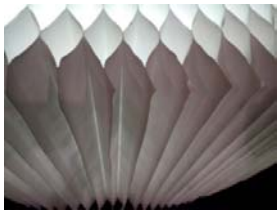
Requiem Apis a time-based sculpture

A collaborative, research-based project that will culminate in a large-scale multimedia installation weaving together architecture and sound, as well as text, video projections and lighting into an integrated, immersive, narrative environment. Using the recent decline in honeybee populations worldwide as the starting point, the purpose is to explore bee intelligence as related to the formation of the honeycomb structure, as well as bee spatial perception, navigation and communication through the five senses. The research will be used towards creating a tangible experience for the audience, framed within a human-scale, "abandoned" beehive honeycomb structure. By moving through and engaging with the installation on a multisensory level at human scale, the intent is to create *a space of empathy* that allows us to experience alternate perceptions of space, while raising questions concerning animal commodification and the impact of our exploitation of nature on the environment. Perhaps only through physical empathy with the world of the Other can we better understand, respect, and learn from the animal kingdom. Finally, the project hopes to help raise awareness in support of the ban of neonicotinoid pesticide use in Canada.

Architectural Installation

A giant, abandoned beehive. A three-dimensional, lightweight, collapsible structure of modular hexagonal units that can be assembled and disassembled. In terms of materiality, the installation will be fabricated from a light, paper-like material, experimenting with origami / cutting and folding, to achieve a three-dimensional, curtain-like screen. In addition to studying actual honeycomb structures, research will also revisit 1960s organic and mesh structures inspired by nature (i.e. the architecture of Buckminster Fuller). Translucency of the material is optimal for projections and back-lighting. A series of these screen-like partitions will be arranged in space, creating passageways and enclosures for the audience to move through. A configuration will be found that supports the desired movement pattern throughout the installation. The installation as a whole will be designed to be tourable and flexible, while fulfilling its function as a navigable landscape, and possibly incorporating technological devices such as tablets or audio equipment. It should be easily folded and made compact for transportation, to be shown in different spaces. The idea is that the configuration will adapt to different spaces with a slightly different set up each time, just as beehives in nature work with the existing architecture. The partitions will be designed in such as way so that they can possibly be extended in height and length. The architectural installation component will serve as a framework / empty screen for the time-based narrative itself.





Rigid installation element of interlocking modular units vs. hanging foldable approach (photos: Tyvek partition by MOLO)

Man-made rectilinear honeycomb vs. organic combs found in nature

A narrative ordered around the idea of presence and absence, moving from buzzing activity to nostalgic ghostly echoes. It speaks to the idea of hypothetical extinction, loss, and memory. The result is an ever-changing space that seems to breathe and have a life of its own. The piece will have a score for the visuals and sound to follow.

Visuals

Visuals will include video projections, lighting, and possibly tablets integrated into the installation. For the video content, documentation from live bee hives gathered in the research will be used as the starting point. The generated visuals will appear as projected onto the overall installation, and/or possibly fitted within individual hexagonal apertures (serving as mini projection screens or using integrated screen tablets) . Text will also be incorporated in a dynamic way, using gathered data and statistics pertaining not only to the global decline of bee populations but also related topics. Pre-programmed lighting creates opportunities for playful colour washes and effects, as well as shifts between light and dark (in tandem with sound). The visuals will explore the bee's colour spectrum (i.e. colour perception from the point of view of the bee) with imagery of flowers and pollen. Finally, the project also wants to use the momentum of the current media spotlight on the honeybee, a domesticated insect close to humans, to bring attention to other insect pollinators and their importance for biodiversity. Finally, the honeycomb structure will also serve as a framework for the larger environmental narrative, posing more questions as lighting shifts transform the space into various endangered natural environments (underwater scene of damaged coral reefs, overexploited mine, post-apocalyptic scenario of empty condo units, etc.).

Soundscape

The soundscape for the project will emerge from the study of bee communication, exploring the relationship between sound, movement and touch as the starting point. This may involve working with vibrations, frequencies and transmission, which lend themselves well to insect communication. It may also incorporate text (facts and figures, news clippings, interviews, etc.). The function of the soundscape within the piece as a whole is to create changing intensities and vary the overall mood, alternating the dark and elegiac with light and hopeful. The sound set up may investigate localizing mini speakers, which supports the idea of discovery of narrative through movement through the installation, as well as overarching sound, or may require the use of special equipment. The soundscape will use primarily electronic sound, but will also include a separate instrumental musical composition to be mixed in.

Olfactory

The sense of smell and taste, crucial in bee communication, will also be incorporated.

Synthesis

All of the elements will come together in an integrated whole, the architectural installation providing a framework for the unfolding of the narrative composed of scored and synchronized sound and visuals, in a sort of audiovisual symphony to be experienced through movement of the body and sensory interaction. Project explorations may result in sensory overlap and interconnectedness. Interactive, sensor-driven technology is also something that can be explored if the concept calls for it.
After testing the piece, a future step may involve a live performance element. This could combine choreography and audience participation which further explores bee navigation, the waggle dance and spatial cognitive map. Alternatively, a dance artist is invited to create a movement piece that responds to the constructed space, possibly with live musical accompaniment.

Research

Research into CCD and bee biology so far has included contacts with European bee scientists through COLOSS and EurBee conferences in Murcia, Spain (Sept 2014). This spring, the plan is to participate in beekeeping workshops and work with local beekeepers (through UTBA / U of T B.E.E.S. / OBA) to conduct interviews and shoot video / sound recordings of live hives.

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