**Urban Acupuncture Applied to a Research Lab and Studio: ArtSciVillage an exemplar of Smart Village Acupuncture**

Jan 20 2024

The UTDallas ArtSciLab is a university research lab and studio. We seek to apply trans-disciplinary, trans-cultural and trans-generational methodologies on problems that are desirable to solve.

Tomas Londono, and subsequently Tommy Ayala, initiated the application of Smart Village methods to our research lab. The hope is that we will uncover new ways of doing, discovering, and applying to societal contexts outside the ArtSciLab.

On of the ideas that Tomas Londono initiated was a quick application of the Methods of Urban Acupuncture. We propose to convert this to Smart Acupuncture, in a Smart Village Research Lab.

The simple version of the idea is that we tend to over think and over-analyze and plan. Sometimes a quick jab can create desirable change and ideas, drawing on the ideas of Maturana and Varela: auto-poetic smart acupuncture. Pin prick both the social system and the technologies used, separately to together.

One of the seminal initiators of these methods is Jaime Lerner. His 2014 book Urban Acupuncture is translated from Portuguese but addresses applications of the methods in many cultural contexts. Urban Acupuncture is fundamentally transX ( Disciplinary, cultural and trans-generational.

The book ends with a poem that should be read before the rest of the book, in my opinion. One observation, that I like to repeat, is that when you write carefully, academically, you always have to lie and plagiarise a bit; this has been accelerated by the use of A.I. However when you write a poem, you inevitably only tell the truth and stretch the imagination. A.I. has little or no imagination.

One thing that is provocative about this book is that it doesn’t propose anything new, rather it knits together many well-known ideas into a different fabric that may be more applicable and warm than other methods in the future.

Much of the thinking structure reflects the concept of ‘pattern language”. ***A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*** is a 1977 book on [architecture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Architecture), [urban design](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban_design), and community [livability](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livability). It was authored by [Christopher Alexander](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Alexander), [Sara Ishikawa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sara_Ishikawa) and [Murray Silverstein](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murray_Silverstein) of the Center for Environmental Structure of [Berkeley, California](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berkeley,_California), By coincidence Chris Alexander and I went to the same boarding school in England. Pattern language is a key method in combining good methods in art, design and science.

This approach is championed by Felipe Londono, <https://tempsarts.cat/arts-visuals/felipe-cesar-londono-art-and-artists-are-vectors-of-communication/>, who by synchronicity, is the father of Tomas Londono and runs the Science Design and Art Program in Bogota Colombia where I serve as an advisor.

Coming back to the Urban Acupuncture book, the medical concept of acupuncture is applied seamlessly to the social context in cities. Some of the Chapter titles are illustrative: Rescuing a river, Acupuncture of Silence, Markets and Street Fairs, Creative Leisure versus Industrious Mediocrity.

As I said earlier, there is almost nothing new in this concept of Urban Acupuncture, but it restructures the fabric of thinking and action.

Designer Cassini Nazir was the co-founder of the ArtSciVillage; he currently works on how to design ones curiosity. One of the key ideas was to encourage all lab members to ‘leave a trace’ of their temporary presence in the lab. This could be publications such as white papers, artworks on the walls or musical traces.

An exemplar is Evan Acuna’s ArtSciLab bandstand which collects the favorite songs of any lab member or person who walks in the door: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLgwud9qExrSvpUoxP7pqbhRXZjIxvAwj7> .

The contributions are anonymous, but the result is a sonic portrait that captures the spirit and ideation of the lab. Psychologists have methods for studying sonic portraits to understand the strong and weak points of a personality.

Another example is MFA alumna Taylor Green, who overnight did a social acupuncture. She couldn’t get permission to show art on the walls of our art school, our elevators or even our toilets. One morning I walked in the lab. She was precariously on a ladder pinning artwork to the ceiling of the lab, she named it the Sky Gallery. And some lab members pinned their art under the desks. Most of us never bother to look at the ceiling, now we do. No one needs bureaucratic permission.

More recently lab alumna Alejandro Garcia got a good job in industry. When he moved homes, he asked if we could host his aquarium. We said yes quickly, social acupuncture. Inevitably the object becomes a subject of discussion connecting to PhD student Lee’s project “wanderer’, which explores non humanoid interactions using local fish in Dallas as interactors.

One of Cassini Nazir’s prompts was the question: when you are in the lab how do you know you are in Dallas and not in Hong Kong? Well, the skeleton of a local fish, a Gar, and the cowboy hat on Evan Acuna’s head are quick social acupuncture objects.

As I said earlier, I didn’t learn anything new in the Social Acupuncture book and concepts. But the weaving of old ideas can make a new cloth better adapted to our futures (ingenuity rather than innovation). Anu Gowda and George Morgan are pioneering new/ingenous approaches to innovation studies.

Lab co-director Katryn Evans introduced the concepts of the 5 Rs (search it on line). In our case the 5Rs are Recruitment (of new lab members), Retention (providing value in exchange for presence) , R for Recognition, Resilience (during pandemics) and so on. Somehow the 5th R has been labelled “rocket launch’ to celebrate lab members who leave the lab as soon as possible for a more desirable job. (Yes, I have been a rocket scientist, but I never had understood this social application/metaphor). And no, one of my own success criteria is not finding a better job.

Nikhil Chaturvedi, a business/marketing student became the social acupuncture rocket engineer: <https://artscilab.utdallas.edu/rocket-launch/>

Another example of the method of social acupuncture is the I3 idea of Misal Shah. When he started working in the lab people kept referring to projects that had left no trace of any kind except the memory of current lab members. He titled his project “Interesting Incomplete Ideas” and interviewed alumnae about the projects they had started but never finished or documented. I asked him if we should force lab members to write up/document/leave a trace of the ideas. He said; NO, 90% of the projects in the lab are done on the spur by students. We jokingly refer to creative chaos which we document in our Creative Disturbance podcast platform. So yes, leave a trace, or don’t. Learn to practice smart acupuncture.

Over the years we will surely continue the practice of smart acupuncture thank you Tomas Londono, Tommy Ayala and Ricardo Dal Farra and and and. Our next social acupuncture will be a gamified workshop in Manizales and Bogota Columbia IMAGEN festival. <https://festivaldelaimagen.com/es/> from May 6-12. Please come practice your smart acupuncture.