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Displaced. What is the productive distance to situate oneself as an architect in transversal design?

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Middle Margins Matter, the Art of Creating Balance in Transversal Design Practice

Despite a tremendous amount of knowledge on urban disruptions, divides are proliferating. In situations involving complexity and uncertainty, where an urgency for intervention is felt and yet a clear response is not apparent, we know that “we cannot solve the problems with the same kind of thinking that created them” (Einstein). Some other levels of perception and understanding need to be mobilised for formulating sensible responses. Our professional capacities to design living together in difference maintaining free spaces are challenged.

The present contribution will investigate possible postures to situate oneself as an architect operating at the crossing between people, realms and scales of intervention. It is part of a practice based PhD project on “Middle Margins Matter, dynamic balance in transversal design”. Experience from professional practice will be put in perspective with examples from other critical designs and performance art.

Within the research project space is considered as a perpetual fluctuation putting in relation physical, imagined and lived space (Lefevre). This triadic spatiality can reveal both, a distance and a continuity between what is physically there, what is enunciated and what is being done. In the research project, what might appear as incoherence experienced amongst people, in organizations as well as in each one individually, is taken as a productive gap. From that productive gap containing action tendencies a situation can be put into motion. In this sense, just as any living organism, a city has emotions appearing in interaction with a milieu.

For making a gap productive tactics of displacement introducing play and game into the design process are explored. Such displacements can happen in form of transgression, immersion, situationists’ moves or Oulipian methods of constraint. All operate as catalysts for serendipitous encounter and imagination, making essence vacillate and accelerating a change in perspective, prerequisite for breaking habits and learning anew.

Case studies of play and game revealed that transversal design practice is relevant in gathering knowledge, stimulating imagination and raising collective awareness. The risks of a transversal design approach relies on the willingness of the actors to be displaced by outsiders, as issues of authorship power, legitimacy, value and money can be questioned.



Displaced. What is the productive distance to situate oneself as an architect in transversal design?

Despite a tremendous amount of knowledge on urban disruptions, divides are proliferating. The present contribution will investigate possible postures to situate oneself as an architect at the interstice of physical, imagined and lived space (Lefevre), where tactics of displacement introduce play into the design process and explore how to make these gaps productive. Three experiences from professional practice will be put in perspective with examples from critical design practices and performance art.

Image: Germaine, FPC Ens Nantes, F. 2016