NAFISEH MOUSAVIAN

POROSITY AND PLAYFULNESS

My thesis titled: «The tiered city: reflections on urban intensity based on analysis of mountainous villages of Kurdistan, Iran» seeks to find spatial configuration ideas that allow integrating natural and social phenomenon (coexistence with nature and human interactions) into multi-level dense human settlements. Coexistence goes with proximity. And proximity, although often appreciated, is sometimes promiscuous. So the desire to integrate urban (and nature) in an intense and steep environment requires innovative architectural proposals to incorporate both public and the intimate, nature and artefact.
Thesis hypothesis suggests : To reach this congenial multi-level intensity, more POROSITY is needed in the built space. Through this porosity, new spatial arrangements, new functions, stronger social relations, and the symbiosis of man and nature can emerge.
In this regard, « In-between Spaces » - which share, connect, separate, or superpose simultaneously public and private realms - are studied in two ancient villages of Kurdistan.

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After a week of living in these villages, I began to analyze them in two parallel but yet distinct directions which provided me with a vocabulary of the tiered city which is evolving consistently.
First I started with a phenomenological analysis to reach, discover, understand, and excavate the particular spatial arrangement and the underlying ideas concerning human – nature coexistence in these villages.
Besides, a typological analysis is taking place to de-complexify the spatial arrangements which seem more complicated. So the repartition of functions in different levels and the transition between public and private, interior and exteriorise could be studied more efficiently.
This led me to prepare a 3 dimension catalogue of architectural elements that contribute to the idea of porosity. They could be either spaces of PAUSE or spaces of PASSAGE.

– Terraces – balconies – roofs – courtyards – squares – a tree – thresholds – places to come to – places to stay – to make connections between people – to make relationships

– Ramps – urban stairs – stepped streets – inclined lanes – bridges – pavements – ladders – covered walkway – impasses – places to comme and go, to stroll, to pass air, rain, wind, clouds and birds, places of movement, of mutation, to make connections between places, to make the links

The proposal for CA2RE Berlin conscerns part of research that let playing with a series of magnetic 3d prints of these In-between spaces (of PAUSE and PASSAGE) to examine the limits and possibilities for creating Porosity. And I would like to discuss this playful méthode and how playfulness can contribute to my research.

Nafiseh MOUSAVIAN
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POROSITY AND PLAYFULNESS

POROSITY

My thesis titled:
«THE TIERED CITY:
reflections on the urban intensity of the inhabited milieux based on analysis of mountainous villages of Kurdistan, Iran»
seeks to find spatial configuration ideas that allow integrating natural and social phenomenon (coexistence with nature, and human interactions) into multi-level dense human settlements.

Coexistence goes with proximity. And proximity, although often appreciated, is sometimes promiscuous. So, the desire to integrate urban and nature in an intense and steep environment requires innovative architectural proposals to incorporate both public and the intimate; nature and artifact.
In actual modern-inherited multi-level buildings, we live in separate individual worlds which are merely superposed one upon another and are linked by just escalators, elevators, and corridors.
While in this research, the thesis-hypothesis suggests:

To reach this congenial multi-level intensity, **more POROSITY is needed** in the built space. Through this porosity, new spatial arrangements, new functions, stronger social relations, and the symbiosis of man and nature can emerge.

In this regard, **« In-between Spaces »** - which share, connect, separate, or superpose simultaneously public and private realms - are studied in two ancient villages of Kurdistan: villages of Palangan and Awihang.

Because of their mountainous sites, the villages are built in multi-level forms following geographical curves and steeps. In general, each roof serves as the courtyard of the upper house. But if we look closely, we'll discover numbers of not-so-known micro-arrangements of the usually-known architectural elements -like steps, ladders, balconies etc.
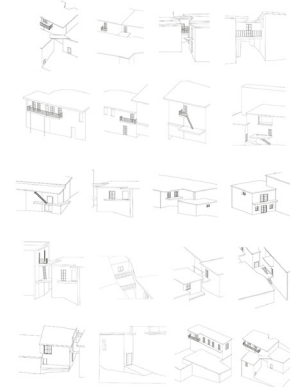
After a week of living in these villages, I began to analyze them in two parallel but yet distinct directions which provided me with a vocabulary of the tiered city which is evolving consisteantly.

First, I started with a phenomenological analysis to reach, discover, understand, and excavate the particular spatial arrangement. This primary analysis resulted in a series of photo-narrations which revealed some underlying ideas concerning human-nature coexistence in these villages. (This part can be consulted online: https://cargocollective.com/thetieredcity)

Besides, a typological analysis is taking place (work is in progress) to de-complexify the spatial arrangements which are more complicated. This, to achieve a better understanding of spatial incarnation of the human-nature and social relations in the villages of study. So, the repartition of functions in different levels and the transition between public and private, interior and exterior could be studied more efficiently.

In this regard, I prepare a 3-dimension catalog of architectural elements that contribute to the idea of **porosity**. A catalog of all « In-between Spaces » that I've found.
They could be either spaces of **PAUSE** or spaces of **PASSAGE**.

• **PAUSE**s are
places to come to,
places to stay,
to gather and chatter,
to make connections between people,
to create relationships.

They consist of different types of :
TERRACES - BALCONIES - ROOFS - COURTYARDS - SQUARES - UNDER A TREE – THRESHOLDS – BENCHES AND SO ON.

• **PASSAGE**s are
places to come and go,
to stroll,
to pass the air, the rain, the wind, the clouds and birds,
places of movement, of mutation,
they are to make connections between places,
to create the links.

They could be:
RAMPS - URBAN STAIRS - STEPPED STREETS - INCLINED LANES - BRIDGES - PAVEMENTS - LADDERS - COVERED WALKWAY - IMPASSES, ETC.

THIS COLLECTION IS COMPARABLE TO A SPECIALIZED DICTIONARY PROVIDING THE VOCABULARY TO SPEAK ABOUT THE TOPIC OF THE TIERED CITY.
But a question emerges:
How do we make sentences with these words?
How do we put them together?
How do we articulate these words so they could make sense?

What do we do when we reach something new, attractive and unknown?
As a mother of a young child, I may answer:

WE PLAY!

The proposal for CA2RE Berlin concerns part of research that let playing with a series of magnetic 3d prints of these In-between spaces (of PAUSE and PASSAGE) to examine the limits and possibilities for creating Porosity. Here I would like to discuss this playful méthode and how playfulness can contribute to creativity in my research. This is an experimental part and is in progress.
YOU ARE SO WELCOME TO PLAY!

PLAYFULNESS

WHY DO WE SUGGEST TO PLAY?
This part is based on researches of developmental psychologist Peter Gray on the theory of play.His research shows that
THE INHERENT PLAYFULNESS, CURIOSITY, AND WILLFULNESS OF CHILDREN HAS BEEN HONED BY NATURAL SELECTION TO PERMIT EACH INDIVIDUAL TO EDUCATE THEMSELVES.

He argues that not only children but all humans (architects and Ph.D. students included) are biologically designed to educate themselves through play and exploration.

Below is mostly extracted from his book:
Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life

Peter Gray introduces three human educative instincts, which are:
CURIOSITY
the drive to explore & understand
PLAYFULNESS
the drive to practice & create
SOCIABILITY
the natural drive to share Information and ideas

Long before Gray, German philosopher and naturalist Karl Groos presented evidence for the educative power of play from a biological, evolutionary perspective in two books:
The Play of Animals (1898), and The play of Man (1901).
He suggests that:

• Young animals play more because they have more to learn.
• Those animals whose way of life depends mostly on learning (and least on rigid instincts) are the most playful

• And, human beings, having much more to learn than do other animals, play much more than do other animals.

I may add here, that nowadays, we as adults (and architects) need much more to learn each and every day. So, it is necessary to preserve our powerful instinct of playfulness.
THE HABIT OF PLAY MUST BE CARRIED INTO ADULTHOOD.
The more serious we are about learning, innovating or creating something, the more playful should be our state of mind.

Peter Gray expands upon Groos's theory and proposes a list of universal types of children's play and the relation of each type to basic human survival skills:

PHYSICAL PLAY (to develop strong bodies)
LANGUAGE PLAY (to learn to talk): When language play is carried into adulthood, we call it poetry
EXPLORATORY PLAY (which combines exploration and play, to promote understanding, and to make sense of the world): Whenever children or adults bring imagination and creativity into their efforts toward discovery, they are combining play and exploration. In adults, we call that science.
CONSTRUCTIVE PLAY (which teaches us to build): It can be with words and sounds as well as with substances. Construction can be intellectual as well as manual.
FANTASY PLAY (to build our capacity for imagination and to provide a foundation for the development of logical thought): That allow us to consider things that are not immediately present, which is what we all do when we plan for the future and what scientists do when they develop theories to explain or predict events in the real world.
SOCIAL PLAY (to cooperate and to restrain our impulses in ways that make us socially acceptable.)

These types of play are not mutually exclusive categories. Amongst these,
I suppose POROSITY would be an exploratory, constructive and fantasy play, all at once.

THE EDUCATIVE POWER OF PLAY IS THAT IT AWAKENS OUR PLAYFUL STATE OF MIND, ALSO KNOWN AS ENTERING A STATE OF FLOW IN CREATIVE FIELDS.

Later in the book, by discussing four general conclusions from psychological research, Peter Gray shows that:
NEW LEARNING, CREATIVITY, AND PROBLEM-SOLVING ARE IMPROVED BY INTERVENTIONS THAT PROMOTE PLAYFULNESS, AND ARE INHIBITED BY EVALUATION, EXPECTATION OF REWARDS, OR ANYTHING THAT INTERFERES WITH A PLAYFUL STATE OF MIND :
1- Pressure to perform well interferes with new learning
2- Pressure to be creative interferes with creativity
3- Inducing a playful mood improves creativity and insightful reasoning.
4- A playful state of mind enables young children to solve logic problems.

We finish by trying to clarify **"WHAT IS PLAY?"**
It is a contradictory concept;
It is serious, yet not serious;
trivial, yet profound;
imaginative and spontaneous,
yet bound by rules and anchored in the real world.
It is childish,
yet underlies many of the most significant accomplishments of the adults.

To define Play, we should keep in mind these general points:
• Two people might do the same thing, and one might be playing while the other is not. So, the characteristics of Play all have to do with motivation and mental attitude, not with the apparent form of the behavior itself.
• Play can blend with other motives and attitudes, in proportions ranging from zero up to 100 percent. Hence, the adjective Playful is often more useful than the noun play.
• We can define play as a confluence of characteristics. The more fully an activity entails all of them, the more we can refer to that activity as play:
1- Play is self-chosen and self-directed.
2- Means are more valued than ends.
3- Has structures and rules that emanate from the minds of players.
4- Is imaginative, non-literal, mentally removed from "real" or "serious" life.
5- Is conducted in an alert, active, but non-stressed form of mind.

I suggest that We don't go further in defining how the POROSITY play should enroll and let the play be free. As here is the most delicious of play's paradoxes:
THE ENORMOUS EDUCATIVE POWER OF PLAY LIES IN ITS TRIVIALITY.