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# Displaced. The challenge of disruptive gaps as space of investigation and projection in architecture and urban design.

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PETRA MARGUC

DISPLACED.

THE CHALLENGE OF DISRUPTIVE GAPS AS SPACE OF INVESTIGATION AND PROJECTION IN ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN DESIGN.

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 mobilized for formulating sensible responses.

The present contribution is investigating possible postures to situate oneself as an architect at the interstice of physical, imagined and lived space (Lefevre), where tactics of displacement introducing play into the design process generate gaps which in turn could become productive. The 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 in a territory, in organizations as well as in each one individually, is taken as a productive gap. From that productive gap containing action tendencies (N.Frijda) 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.

Two experiences from professional practice are investigated, wherein aspects related to displacement in its active form "to displace" and its passive form, „to be displaced“, are tested. The processes of production of space are redrawn after the realization of spatial prototypes in order to grasp the pattern how ideas, actions, material transformations and decisions emerge. In both research actions, the relevance of situation and of first-person experience can be observed. It became evident, how taking place physically amongst stakeholders in the place itself, with material anchors, is important to drive the process. These material anchors provoke the opening of productive gaps on individual, interrelation and territorial scale, they stimulate moments of creativity and simultaneously, they hold the process together, contain the dynamics in an object, explicating and driving the shifts.

**Keywords:** triadic space, displacement, play and game, open integrative design, productive gap, body-drawing

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Displaced. The challenge of disruptive gaps as space of investigation and projection in transversal design



### 1 ABSTRACT

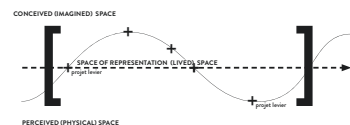
#### DISPLACED. THE CHALLENGE OF DISRUPTIVE GAPS AS SPACE OF INVESTIGATION AND PROJECTION IN TRANSVERSAL DESIGN PROCESSES<sup>1</sup>

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 mobilized for formulating sensible responses.

The present contribution will investigate possible postures to situate oneself as an architect at the interface of physical, imagined and lived space (Lefebvre), where tactics of displacement introducing play into the design process generate gaps which in turn could become productive. The 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 in a territory, in organizations as well as in each one individually, is taken as a productive gap. From that productive gap containing action tendencies (N.Fridja) 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.

Two experiences from professional practice are investigated, wherein aspects related to displacement in its active form "to displace" and its passive form, "to be displaced", are being tested.

#### Can the gaps being opened up by displacing some thing, or some one, or some action, be turned into a creative driver for the production of space? If so, how to get a grip on such instrument of change?



TRIADIC MODEL OF SPACE<sup>2</sup>  
Framework for the production of space - processual view  
<sup>1</sup>based on observations in Singapore, in Arcueil and Paris (1995) and in production of Espace (Lefebvre 1984)

#### PREVIOUS FINDINGS

As previous case studies revealed, play and game are relevant in open collective design processes for gathering knowledge, stimulating imagination and raising awareness. In two present case studies, these findings about play and game are introduced as tactics of displacement for making a gap productive. Such displacements can happen in form of transgression, immersion, situations/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.

**PLAY FOR BREAKING HABITS AND LEARNING A-NEW:** playful interaction settings allow to experience displacement as a joy, which in turn reinforces a pattern of breaking habits. In play mode we tend to do things differently than usual and accept uncertainty of the outcome.

**SHARED FIRST PERSON EXPERIENCE:** Creating shared experiences, doing something together first, facilitates exchange between people who are not used to meet, who neither speak the same language nor share the same interests.

**INSTRUMENTS OF CHANGE** are driving the creative process

**NAVIGATING BETWEEN MULTIPLE IDENTITIES:** When liberating participants from predefined roles, be it self-imposed or societally imposed, people keep changing the place from where they choose to speak. Nurturing an environment where a person can self-regulate on which part of their identity they thrive, which part of their competences they mobilize is a creative driver for it enhances confidence and trust building, engagement becomes easier.

In the two present cases these findings are further challenged:

- the project brief becomes spatio-temporal scaffold, a playful interaction setting with rules of the game, but with no definition of purpose or of what to do
- the creation of shared experience is used as a process driver, action protocols and relational objects are redesigned more methodologically in order to get a better grip on them as instruments of change
- roles of participants are not defined in beforehand but can evolve from within

In both cases are observed, if and how proposals emerge, take shape and are being realized.



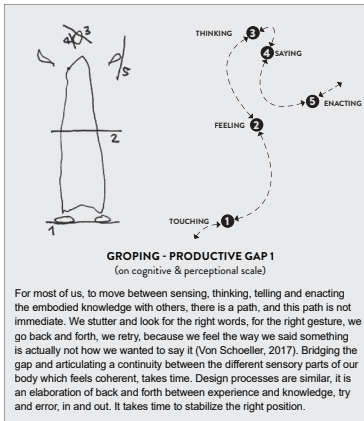
### 2 METHOD

#### TACTICS OF DISPLACEMENT - STEPPING BACK AND FORTH, STEPPING IN AND OUT, STEPPING SIDWAYS

As a reflexive practice research, this investigation examines two productions (La belle Excentrique, Le Germinator, 2018), using practice-based, practiced and action-research methods. Multidirectional tactics of displacement - stepping back and forth, stepping in and out, stepping sideways - are used for myself, in teaching, with commissioners, project partners and participants for changing distance and angle of perspective and as a knowledge generator. Previous research evidenced positive effects of displacement, such as enhancing creativity, opening new horizons which were unthought before. It also revealed negative effects, where displacement can increase vulnerability and lead to stand still or breakdown of the creative process. When displacement happens a gap occurs, it might feel unstable, and make us lose ground. Nevertheless, we can all deal with instable situations, we literally embody them.

#### LIMINAL CONDITION (example footstep):

When we lift one foot, doing a step forward, there is a moment of instability: our weight is not anymore on one leg only and not yet really stable on the other. We find ourselves in a "liminal condition" (Victor Turner, Chora). At yet, when we walk, most of us know how to move through this gap, where we are neither here nor there, literally instable.



**HYPOTHESIS:** What if the gap which appears in moments of transition is not necessarily a risk to avoid, but might have latent transformative power, and could be designed for enhancing moments of playful serendipity for individual and collective creativity.

#### How to recognize or even stimulate such liminal moments in the formation of space, and how to turn such gaps into instruments for creativity and positive urban and individual transformation?

#### RAW MATERIAL OF TWO CASES:

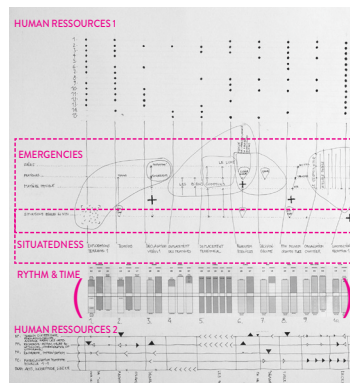
**„La belle Excentrique“**, a research-action commission by a citizen collective in Arcueil (France). The task was to develop within an open design process, with the citizen and other stakeholders, an idea for how to transform a public square into a vivid place for the community. A first development stage resulted in the proposal of an artefact in form of an art modeling of a real size figure combined with a support structure, a kiosk, to inform, host and accompany community events, called "La Belle Excentrique". The proposal developed with the citizen will be put up for public vote in the frame of the budget participative in November 2018.

**„Le Germinator“**, a studio project with 15 architecture students at the ENSA Nantes: the studio worked with a community organization, le mouvement grand place, in a neighbourhood called la Bottière-Pain Sec, currently undergoing urban regeneration. The proposal became a mobile atelier for the community, called "Le Germinator".

Both cases were set up as an open collaborative design process, with the test, if and how proposals emerge, take shape and are being realized within a spatio-temporal scaffold. Both ended with prototypes at 1:1 scale, one became a built prototype, and the other one became a prototype of alternative practice of space, where ideas for transforming the square where tested in situ by testing uses, collaborations and positioning.



top view: building prototype of Le Germinator  
left: the Arcueil prototype culminated at the first stage in a public event to produce and share with the citizen a new organization of the square in form of a spatial practice. Publicly were tested the embedding of the square within a future creative path (1), the pedestrianization of a side street (2), the positioning of a stage of a cultural center (3), the collaboration with several local partners and residents (4), the project idea and the name of "La Belle Excentrique", a kiosk to welcome, inform and accompany residents in making this square more alive (5), the implementation of real size figures by the local arts craftsmanship (6).



### RE-DRAWING THE PROCESS OF PRODUCTION OF SPACE - case „Germinator“

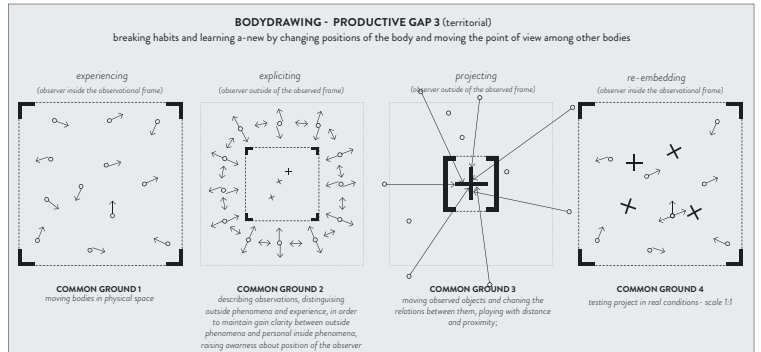
The three types of resources, situatedness in a real territory, the human resources of all participants combined, and the resource time gave as a spatio-temporal framework to perform. For both case-studies re-drawings of the process of the production of space were produced afterwards as a means to grasp the dynamics at play, how did things happen?

- **Rhythm & Time resource:** given temporal framework of a total duration of 27 days, in a rhythm of 10 sessions over a period of a little less than 4 months.
- **Human resources 1 & 2 (different players in music analogy):** There are 15 students and 5 teachers. The 5 teachers had partially similar and partially complementary roles. All shared an attitude that everybody is a latent resource person to each other, and that everything and every situation can be considered as a latent resource and potential project driver. The art would be how to activate and fertilize those resources (François Julien, 2016).
- **Situatedness in a real territory:** The contact with a real situation, with a real on-going project, with real actors, real urgencies, where we keep reconnecting to, is a third resource.
- **Emergencies:** Mapping of emergencies during the process of production of space in terms of ideas (representations), in terms of emergent practices (actions, behaviors), and the emergence of physical form<sup>3</sup>. The extended spatiality going beyond material manifestations allows us to grasp spatiality in terms of spatial dynamics where its material aspects are understood in relation to the practice of space and in relation to the ideas we have of a spatial situation. Observations on these three levels are mirrored in relation to the contact we had with the real site. At what moment there was direct contact? How did this direct contact impact on the evolution of the project?

### 3 OBSERVATIONS

- **Dilemma accelerator:** First person experience, for instance direct contact with a real situation and real people, intensifies the desire for commitment which in turn reinforces expression of motivation (why). Direct contact with a situation of alterity, (the site, the people, the different practices and attitudes) causes displacements, which accelerate a process of learning, the elaboration a just posture, a right gesture.
- **Why - How - What:** Occurrence of project definition stages in the order of (1) why, (2) how, (3) what
- **Triple reality check of motivation, resources, situatedness:** Personal motivation, confronted to limited resources in terms of time, capacities, material resources and situatedness structure and specify the open design process.
- **Uncertainty as a creative driver can be nurtured and trained, but it requires a minimum of a safe environment.**
- **Strong group cohesion:** students recall a "life experience" (video-cued recall)
- **How were ideas, decisions, validations formed?** Ideas, decisions and validations emerged through the process of production. Situatedness was operational, as well as regular expressions of the state of things in readable, sharable, interpretable representations (scetches, namings, mind maps, meetings with actors). A continuous formalization was summing up and re-actualizing a state of affairs. It generated an implicit decision-making and validation process. We called these regular expressions of the state of things relational or transversal objects, they operated as material anchors. They structured the open design process. In fact, it would not be possible to tell who had what idea, for example. It emerged.

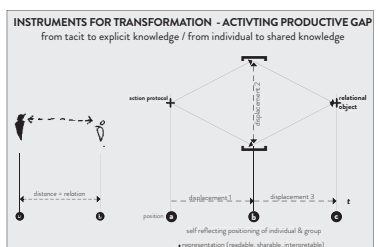
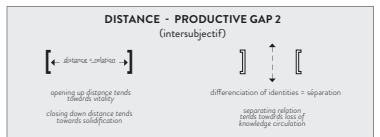
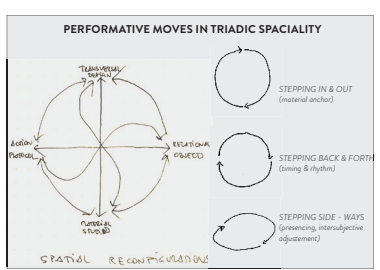
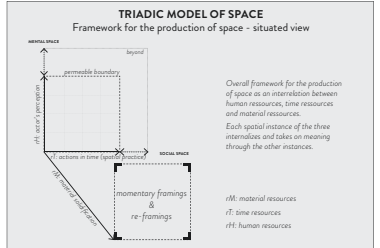
In both research actions, the relevance of situatedness and of first person experience can be observed as well as the pattern how ideas and decisions emerge. Particularly in the case of Arcueil, which was not done with students, it became evident, how taking place physically amongst stakeholders in the place itself, with material anchors, is important to drive the process. These material anchors provoke the opening of productive gaps on individual, interrelational and territorial scale. They stimulate moments of creativity and simultaneously hold the process together, explicating the shifts.



<sup>3</sup>It is a part of the practice based PhD project "Middle Margins Matter: dynamic balance in transversal design", grounded in my architecture practice called Palimpsest and in my teaching. "Le Germinator" was produced within the studio "Class les instances de la grande ville de du jour", the students' PFC promotion 2017/2021, and teachers Bruno Pissani, Petra Marguc, François Chénier, Pauline Courraud, Suzanne Kishi, Anne Hys, La Belle Excentrique was produced with the collectif citizen Logique, the city of Arcueil and palimpsest.

### 4 FINDINGS

**SPACING, AN EXTENDED NOTION FOR THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE:** Triadic spatiality is not only useful as a model to observe, describe and grasp patterns of existing spatial phenomena in terms of their formation. It can also serve as an overall framework for spatial formation for the future reconciling three relevant vectors in one single system: actions in time, human perceptions, and situatedness. For its latent performative qualities, the three spatialities for the production of space by Lefebvre evolve into an interrelation between human resources, time resources and material resources. Each spatial instance of the three internalizes and takes on meaning through the other instances.



**MATERIAL ANCHORS AS INSTRUMENTS FOR TRANSFORMATION ACTIVATING PRODUCTIVE GAP ON INTERPERSONAL SCALE AND TERRITORIAL SCALE:** To propel open creative design processes instruments of change work on generating productive gaps. A first displacement from position a to position b opens up a new view, a self-reflecting repositioning of individuals and groups. In a second displacement from position b to position c this new view is articulated in readable, sharable and interpretable forms. Hence opening and activating a productive gap between tacit and explicit knowledge, redefining a position between different individuals draws upon representational methods. In order to make those instruments of change operate, they are conceived as material anchors, which can refresh positions through explicating and re-embedding. Just as any material anchors, human bodies can be used to create representations of space.

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