Collaborative Modes of Practice: Incomplete trajectories of thinking guiding a practice.

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Contents

Introduction; Mode, Nature and Tools

The importance of history in the design of place

The importance of climate in the design of place

The importance of cognition in the design of place

The importance of the collaborative practice

Conclusion; The offset of a trajectory

In short about myself;

Bibliography
Introduction; Mode, Nature and Tools

Through the course of this research I looked at the mode of my practice considering the collaborative as an important instrument in the way I work as well as the nature of the work produced through this practice driven by contextual concerns and negotiated by a variety of design tools informing both my practice and my teaching. In my practice, this collaborative mode concerns the notion of the embedded practice as part of a wider interactive network of practices. In my teaching, this concerns the notion of the social learner, investigating modes of interactive learning communities. In both practice and teaching the contextual is explored in terms of emplacement or place making referring to ideas described by Marc Auge. As I will address in the writing of this catalogue, the parameters used in the negotiation of contextual designs changed as the actual location of my practice changed resulting in the production of different tools by which the design is explored.
With this research, exploring the mode, nature and tools of my practice I aimed to develop an understanding of my practice in order to further develop the organizational principles governing this practice to accommodate possible overlaps between practice and teaching. As a conclusion to this research I will present InsideOpen, a webtool I developed, complementing my current practice and teaching to offset a trajectory where I can substantiate the idea of collaborative modes of practice in both practice and teaching.

What follows in this catalogue is a commentary on a selection of projects established and developed during the past eight years of my practice. This commentary follows a semi chronological course of action moving through the different places and cultures I worked and lived in with the aim to identify a number of shifts along the trajectory of my practice that led to the current state of my practice substantiating ‘the collaborative’.

Through the reading/observing of these shifts, three important strata in my practice are commented on;

**Mode of practice;** evolved from being an embedded practitioner, as part of an office in collaboration with other practitioners and builders in Malta - to starting an independent practice in Kuala Lumpur, after working for Dr. Ken Yeang - to being an embedded practitioner again as Partner of Architecture Project with a network of practices, combining this with teaching.

**Nature of practice;** with an emphasis on the negotiation of emplacement as a critical contextual design strategy starting with an interest in the historical context, complementing this later with the climatic to eventually combine these extensive/objective parameters with instrument to measure more sensual qualities of place (as described by Auge M. 1995).

**Tools** by which I design seem to meander between modes of authoritative representations following a professional (architectural) code and more perceptive representations using different media from different disciplines. Where authoritative representations are used to notate ‘extensive’ spatial qualities, the perceptive representations notate ‘intensive’ spatial qualities, drawing on Gilles Deleuze’s distinction between intensive and extensive space (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 1987).

With these strata, I seem to delineate performative areas in my work appropriating an implicit vocabulary to describe concepts. Even though the concepts seem to follow a chronological order, in now way do they replace or supersede previous concepts. Different modes and different tools are now simultaneously present in my practice. As such the strata and concepts described above are certainly not used to categorize projects, yet aim to identify ‘in-between’ zones of conceptual denotation where my projects seem to drift…
The importance of history in the design of place

Three year before the start of ‘the research’

Seemingly “Dwelling in the world” (Heidegger, 1952) as the ultimate existential experience.

Mode of practice; embedded practitioner as an employee in Architecture Project (AP) collaborating with AP Partners, peers and builders in Malta

Nature of practice; an emphasis on the negotiation of emplacement through the negotiation of a historical context

Tools; authoritative drawings exploring architectonic compositions of elements notating ‘extensive’ spatial qualities (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 1987)

The practical application of place and place perception started with the emotional investment of myself as an architect in the historical context of Malta. Surrounded by its legacy I aimed to work with the importance of memories in the manipulation of spaces (with their implicit memories) through the restoration and re-instigation of some essence of a significant past. With this conceptualization of place whereby place implies strong cognitive relationships between a person and a physical location with its embedded history, this early work with Architecture Project nurtured specific ‘distant’ connections between the designed object and its surrounding context.

With the design of seven pre-fabricated apartment-units to be placed in a series of vaults in St Johns Fort for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta this ‘distance’ was triggered by considering the restoration of the historic vaults. An important part of the design was the reinstatement of the vaults by taking away all the interior clutter, accumulated over the years. To maintain the open space each apartment unit was conceived as a ‘super-furniture’ conceived by the stacking of furniture components and placed freestanding in juxtaposition with the 18th century vault.

The ‘super-furniture’ defined routes to ‘climb’ the inner space of the vault, sometimes in close proximity to the stone walls when going up the staircase, sometimes floating under the centre of the vault, looking out the high windows with views over the Grand Harbor of Valletta.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect</th>
<th>Architecture Project (AP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Malta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project dates</td>
<td>2001 - 2005</td>
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<td>Project value</td>
<td>€ n.a.</td>
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</tbody>
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Set within the historic centre of the southern town of Ġżira, "Casa Perellos", this country house built by the Grand Master Alonso de Alva (Vicente Ferrer y Nadalin) in the first half of the 16th Century, was redeveloped and only restored by its new owners. The more recent additions were completed and realised by two parallel designs on either side in this coastal location. The house, the courtyard and its garden became the central living room of this little "palazzo"; a tranquil and intimate space.
With the renovation/refurbishment of Casa Perellos, a similar strategy was used. Set within the historic centre of the southern town of Zejtun, “Citta Rohan”, this country retreat, built by the Grand Master of the Knights of St John, Ramon Perellos y Roccaful, in the first half of the 18th Century, was refurbished and fully restored. The more recent accretions were removed and replaced by twin glazed wings on either side of the courtyard to house the necessary service spaces (kitchen, bathrooms, guest bedroom). As such infrastructural works in the old palace could be prevented minimising the impact of the renovation. The new structures exist as ‘plug-ins’ to the old house with a dens composition of functional components inside.

The spatial investigations drift in modes of a ‘functionalist’ canon exploring architectonic composition in ‘respect’ of a historical context by taking on ephemeral qualities suggesting all new interventions could be taken away again and thus restore the historical context in its ‘original’ state. Architectural drawings and models play an important role in the exploration of these compositions. They adopt professional codes of notation in the representation of architectonic space.
PINTO COLD STORE BUILDINGS - Client: Pinto Coldstore - Location: Valletta, Malta - Project date: 2002 - Project value: n.a.
The importance of climate in the design of place

Start of the research – first GRC presentation 2004
Exploring “Place attachment” as the affective positive bond between a person and a place; or more specifically a strong tendency of that person to maintain closeness to such a place (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 1992)

Mode of practice; embedded practitioner working with Dr. Ken Yeang. At the same time developing speculative work independently. (Projects shown in the following paragraph are taken from a personal body of work, including a winning competition entry)

Nature of practice; an emphasis on the negotiation of emplacement through the negotiation of a climatic context, complementing the Historical

Tools; away from authoritative representations exploring architectonic compositions notating ‘extensive’ spatial qualities and towards the development of perceptive representations notating ‘intensive’ spatial qualities, drawing on Gilles Deleuze’s distinction between intensive and extensive space (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 1987).

With the following projects I considered the ecological variable of particular sites to have a significant impact on the autobiographical memories we have of places (Knez, 2003). Climate, as a nested structure in places, both constitutes place objectively and influences the way we experience and remember place.

Manuel DeLanda (2005) explains a fundamental distinction between extensive and intensive space made by Gilles Deleuze. Extensive space is ‘bounded by natural and artificial extensive boundaries’ whereas intensive space is characterized by ‘zones of intensity’. Examples of extensive quantities are; volume, area and length. Examples of intensive qualities are; density, pressure, temperature, recognized by Deleuze as ‘invisible’. Deleuze borrows this distinction from thermodynamics.

Guided by a research in bioclimatic design at Dr Ken Yeang’s office, my own work starts to negotiate qualities of ‘intensive space’ by including climatic parameters in the design of place.

As a tool by which I ‘explore and understand’ (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1998, Kaplan and Ryan, 1998) qualities of ‘intensive space’ I begin to use drawings not only as spatial representations but as tools for simulating process and instruments of discourse. I call these drawings; Deviation Diagrams.

As an instrument of discourse, the diagram has the fantastic quality of the ‘slow’ by revealing micro shifts in a design process and thus providing opportunities to sustain in the transitional construct of a design; questioning it to learn more about its impending potential. As much as the diagram was aimed at the ‘organization’ of the design process, it became a tool to derail thoughts, make mistakes and provide moments of intuition. As such the diagram is negated as a scientific tool and looked at as a personal thinking tool, hence the title Deviation Diagram.

The diagram is used to notate spatial boundaries on the basis of both extensive and intensive spatial qualities particular to the site. The design of a spatial envelope is defined by various types of implicit boundaries (such as zones of temperature, light intensity, wind velocity) and explicit boundaries (such walls, streets, etc). With this survey of various types of boundaries my drawings take into account studies by E. J. Maray and Frank Gilbreth (however not explicit yet; the survey of bodies-in-space takes place at a later point in the research) and Alexander Klein as early attempts of diagramming boundaries and enclosures based on movement, views, paths etc.
Wind diagram indicating a prevailing NW wind, tunneled by the Bastion walls.

In order to naturally ventilate the building, a double curtain wall system is used with the outer skin shaped as air streamers to direct this prevailing NW wind into a ventilated cavity.

Glass air streamers as louver segments direct the prevailing NW wind into a ventilated cavity, providing the interior space with fresh air.
With the Valletta Coldstores project I adopt a strategy of sculpting an initial architectural envelope as the maximum extrusion of available building space sandwiched between the Valletta Bastion Walls and the Harbor Stores of the Valletta Grand harbor. With the Deviation Diagram, environmental aides (as structural solutions as opposed to power-operated solutions, Reyner Banham, 1969) are developed using intensive parameters such as pressure (wind) and temperature (sun) and view lines.

The drawings for this project show a step by step consideration of these parameters in the forming of an architectural envelope.

With only 4 meters between the east facade of the Coldstore Building and the Valletta Bastion Wall, the building envelope was skewed creating a conical void between the Coldstore Building and the Valletta Bastion Wall to make it possible for people in the building to see the sky.

As a consequence the west façade is now leaning forward in such an angle that the afternoon sun can not penetrate the building.

Being so close to the sea, sitting in an east-west facing corridor, the site provided for an opportunity to work with prevailing winds to organize natural ventilation throughout the building. The envelope was chiseled to provide ventilation scoops to guide air through a double membrane façade system.
With the design competition entry for Putrajaya Holdings I continued to look at design as a sequence of self generated operations yet with the integration of bioclimatic design principles. With the design of these offices the concept of the solar wall was developed slicing the entire building mass to organize internal courtyards. An urban landscape on ground floor level was repeated on rooftop level with a canyon like landscape of office volumes guiding air, wind and rain, in-between.
The importance of cognition in the design of place

During ‘the research’ – second GRC presentation 2005 demonstrating a major shift in my practice

With this work I relate to the fundamental assumption that my design is about the design of a sense of place conceived as multidimensional constructs with a focus on the relationships between the self and place (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

Mode of practice: as an independent practitioner in Kuala Lumpur collaborating with artists, directors, choreographers, etc. At the time my practice was named V.O.I.T. (Variations On Interiorized Transgressions)

Nature of practice: a focus on measuring more sensual qualities of space/place looking through the lens of ‘other’ disciplines and/or the transposition of disciplines (Stan Allen, 1998)

Tools: a clear focus on perceptive representations notating ‘intensive’ spatial qualities, drawing on Gilles Deleuze’s distinction between intensive and extensive space (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 1987).

After my first presentation at the Graduate Research Conference at RMIT I became more and more interested in questioning the notion of ‘professionalism’ particular to my practice. At that time my research was more or less focused on the tools by which I designed. In order to explore this further I needed to be able to ‘avoid’ professional codes of representation and invest in other languages of representation, in languages of other disciplines. I wanted to explore the subject of space beyond conventional representation and thus beyond conventional form. With V.O.I.T, I set up a ‘personal playground’ outside my ‘profession’ working with people from different backgrounds using different media.

To look beyond conventional representations and focus more on the relationship between myself as a designer and the tools by which I design, I stepped into a transactional perspective of designer-environment relations complementing a certain ‘objectivism’ in my work (exploring environmental stimuli) with a certain ‘subjectivism’ focusing more on psychological intra-phenomena in the use/performance of space. Interested in working more through aspects of absence, the unreal and the imaginative my drawings, prints and sound-constructs aimed to explore mediations between place and its occupant’s performance.

With these projects I invest in tactics of forgetting in order to rearrange the production of material/projects. John Cage believes in the importance of ‘forgetting the past in order to be more in the present’. This makes it possible to practice in a state in which everything is a discovery instead of moving or designing towards a preconceived outcome.
Later in the research (explained further in the catalogue) I will explore and reflect on the importance of deploying tactics of forgetting in education. Mentioned here is a selection of projects briefly explained.

**Stage design: Magneto.**
Magneto describes the space of performance; the occupancy of space by the dancers is extrapolated through sound. Large speaker-pairs with opposite poles hang in grid formation above the stage floor. Connected to amplifiers the magnetic field of each speaker-pair produces a humming sound. Dancers transfer kinetic energy through their movement to each speaker-pair causing fluctuations in the magnetic fields resulting in oscillating sounds. Here sound performs as a diagram, taking note of the dancers’ performance.

**Sound: The sound of place and performance with other musicians**
Our hearing is limited to frequencies (more or less) between 20 Hz and 20,000 Hz. Using amplified sounds ranging between 1Hz and 20Hz, the previously unheard is suddenly revealed. Sounds of absence are now made present exploring the concept that-what-is coexists with that-what-is-not (Ref. Silence by John Cage 1961). The sound of places has been used in personal work and the work with students at Canterbury School of Architecture. Attached to the digital version of this catalogue 3 track are available for listening.

**Prints: Sections of a wedding album.**
We don’t have pictures taken on that day. Instead we did 5 body prints on photo paper registering meticulous skin detail, void of any narrative, registering just flesh.
In 2006 I co-founded Architecture Project London with Riet Eeckhout, Tom van Malderen and the four founding partners of Architecture Project Malta. With this practice we bring together 8 years of practice with shared histories of collaboration and diverse interests in design research.

Architecture Project is defined as a network of practices with offices in London, Malta and Croatia. Within this network we appropriate a matrix of both local and global relations to enable mutual influences of different areas of research and expertise.

One of the important aspects of Architecture Project is that it is defined as an open studio where we look at design as a process of editing and team collaborations. In our London office we employ architects, engineers, interior architects, spatial designers and industrial designers all equipped with very particular views and tools to design. Knowing that certain people will at some point leave our office to pursue their own careers we are interested in accommodating a supporting structure for the development of diverse (and sometimes individual) modes of practice. As such the notion of multiple embedded practices coexists on different community strata. Different practices exist within the larger network and different embedded practices exist within each office.
In 2006, as an academic member of the University for Creative Arts in Canterbury, I started to work on the writing of a new course in Interior Architecture & Design for Canterbury School of Architecture.

With the Interior Architecture & Design course at Canterbury School of Architecture I aimed to position its curriculum within the perimeter of socio-critical research and education describing the subject of the interior through three main domains. First, the experience of space through intuition, emotions, and direct corporeal knowledge, second, the integration of the interior into a socio-cultural context, defining the interior as a place of intersecting social situations and third, the substantiation of these aspects into real possibilities, real as both propositional as well as actual.

With the development of the new curriculum I was able to include research on the tools of my practice accommodating students to meander between modes of authoritative representations following a professional code and more perceptive representations using different media from different disciplines. The interdisciplinary is important to appropriate an exploration (by students on the topic of the interior) of intersecting strands, including the physiological, the cultural, the technological and the professional to enable a critical dialogue between that which might be categorized as the thematic or the ‘object-driven’ and that which might be developed through associations and inferences between concepts. As part of my conclusion I will describe the inclusion of research on collaborative modes of practice in my teaching. In what follows I describe 3 occasions (titles of design units in the stage 2 and 3 curriculum) where my teaching is informed by my practice.

Images: Amie Carter; interaction-ference and Tarra Perry; Reactive Response (stage 3 IAD, CSA 2008)

Images: Karin Riou; Diaphramatic Experience (stage 3 IAD, CSA 2008)
Lost in space; negotiating the transposition of disciplines (Stan Allen, 1998) as a learning tool

Lost in space is a project set-up combining two seemingly unrelated creative environments as the place where students explore notions of spatial composition. For the duration of two weeks students underwent training in contemporary dance. The contemporary dance studio served as an arena for experimentation appropriating students in spatial design to study the relationships between inhabitants and their physical and cultural contexts.

The project “Lost in space” sets out an investigation in new ways of exploring space. It deals with aspects of the cinematographic as addressed by Virilio. Through the project students were deployed in a situation where they questioned their vocabulary of spatiality. They explored aspects of movement and choreographic composition simultaneously recording this by means of cognitive maps to than built ‘support systems’ complementing the choreographic compositions studied.

Due to the overlapping disciplinary trajectories taken by the students, their thinking process started to show signs of gravitational slingshots that altered the path of students’ design during the project. This approach organising didactic slingshot manoeuvres aims to eventually change the students’ approach relative to the subject of research. As such students develop the ability to bounce off (or avoid altogether) patterns of everyday thinking and instead reflect on new ways of thinking and understanding. (This project is further explained in appendix 1; Evaluation of a learning activity; Lost in Space).
Language of vision; negotiating the non-authoritative drawing exploring intensive qualities of space

‘Language of Vision’ (Gyorgy Kepes, 1944) explores the act of design as a constant meandering between intuition or consciousness of an object and the concept of understanding that object. This falls back to a search for aesthetics submitting to experiential reflection. This reflection initially comes from an ideal conception as opposed to a pragmatic idea. In such a way that in parts of the design project the functional brief is replaced by a series of design instructions moving the designer further and further away from ‘the familiar’. For a brief moment, the ideal exists only in the drawing, free from concept, free from pragmatic application. Here design originates from a dialogue between determinate concepts and imaginative procedures.

This investigation in how new ways of drawing can be used interchangeably as instruments in a design environment appropriates the research question; can we develop a rigorous design process as a systematic approach or interplay between space and drawing?

By posing this question, design is viewed as a laboratory for experiments, interpretations and play. The investigation focuses on developing new methods for seeing, thinking and making of spatial design.
Several of these experimental exercises stimulate a look at space differently; annotating light and spatial compositional qualities (expressing tension, geometry, balance and repetition), essentially investigating drawing and thus designing the previously unseen. (Ref. perceptive representations notating ‘intensive’ spatial qualities (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 1987))

**Interior-loci**: a provocation for students to think about the nature of their practice

In relation to its procedural tactics, Interior-Loci describes an active research process with the aim to locate the birth of an Interior by posing the research question: “Where is The Interior?”

Interior-Loci (from Genius-Loci; Norberg-Schulz, 1979) explores the boundaries of “Interior Space”, investigating the occurrence of an Inside, the moment in space where Exterior becomes Interior. This type of project work supports the idea that the interiors course negates a single ideological representation appropriating a learning environment open to different notions of ideology. In the course of 3 years students are expected to position themselves and establish a critical perspective on Interior Architecture & Design and thus re-appropriate ‘owning’ their performance and role as a designer.

terior Space”, investigating the occurrence of an Inside, the moment in space where Exterior becomes Interior.
Interface; exploring collaboration between practice and teaching

Interface is a collaborative project between students from the Interior Architecture & Design course at Canterbury School of Architecture and Architecture Project. Interface presents itself as an object in space describing its own formal tactics. With the primary aim to curate the surrounding space, the object registers directional impact in the form of imprints or splices in its surface. The splice, as physical distortions of a boundary, appropriate interruptions in the movement around the object. Where these interruptions occur, drawings exist, exhibiting investigations in design processes explored during collaborative workshops. Interface was exhibited at the THAT'S DESIGN EXHIBITION at the Salone Di Mobile, Milan, 2008.
Challenging the space(s) we live in.

November 18th, 2009 - Challenged at

Challenged the space(s) we live in. 

In his essay "Deleuze thunderscence a "the of Sri Lanka" (The Colossus of Marouf) published in 1985, Foucault outlines the notion of heterotopia as three occasions: 

first, in the preside to Las Mila at the show "The Outdoor of the Mind" published in 1968, second, during the same year, in a radio broadcast as part of a series on the theme of utopia and literature and finally, in a lecture (Of Other Spaces) presented in 1977.

In his essay, Michel Foucault reflects on the concept of seeing systematically a range of "cultural spaces" that somehow challenge or contain the space we live in. As such he identifies the authority of competing heterotopies (as opposed to utopias), the authority of "absolutely other spaces" (Foucault, 1980).

Today the notion of place cannot designate a "fixedness" or an absolute employment. When we look at a site, a location, a place, its scholarly character is defined through relations of previous connecting a network of data such as form, program, event, performance, etc. Places in itself is thus inevitably relational to its surrounding. It exists as simultaneously segregated and integrated in its context. As one: distant and near, connected and disconnected part and whole.

Michael Foucault, Of Other Spaces (1987), Heterotopias.


Michel Foucault, Of Other Spaces (1987), Heterotopias.

This master has been a progression towards a practice where I operate as a practitioner and an academic exploring possible overlaps between practice and teaching. During the course of this research I explored a number of collaborative modes resulting in different design outputs. An understanding of these outputs was then transposed to the curriculum design for the course I teach. The collaborative modes in my practice now exist on multiple levels. As I explain in this catalogue, in practice I collaborate with practices and people.

To develop the notion of the collaborative in teaching I started work on an online tool for collaboration between students and people from practice. This tool acts as a platform between academia and practice to share research in design through the concept of a good conversation. This platform is intended as a supporting structure for individual and collective investigations in design processes. This platform is called www.InsideOpen.net and is a website merging the concept of user driven information directories through the social concept of cooperation and social networking environments that enable profile creation to accommodate peer learning. I develop this idea of peer learning with the clear intention to deploy this in both practice and teaching. (Appendix 3 provides a critical reflection on the didactic and operational backgrounds of InsideOpen)

InsideOpen aims to examine how the integration of the principles of personal space forums (inclusive online discussion forums) which most individuals use as part of their everyday life (Doolan, 2007) will improve a collaborative learning/design experience. The website, designed as an interactive online discussion forum aims to develop into a user-driven directory for research in spatial design (due to the accumulation and categorisation of posts) produced and maintained by its users. This recourse aims to accommodate users from different backgrounds, both students and practitioners from different universities and professional environments (student from my course and people working in Architecture Project to start with). Together with the notion that this platform is user driven and not controlled nor linked to any institution, the concept of mixed demographics is an important strategy to accommodate individuals with a learning/research platform they can use and feel comfortable with outside the university or practice.

Françoise Détienne (2003) writes the following in Memory of past designs: distinctive roles in individual and collective design; “Empirical studies on design have emphasised the role of memory of past solutions. Design involves the use of generic knowledge as well as episodic knowledge about past designs for analogous problems: in this way, it involves the reuse of past designs. We analyse this mechanism of reuse from a socio-cognitive viewpoint … linked to the problem solving activity itself…”
In short about myself;

I have been working internationally before starting Architecture Project - London in 2006 with Riet Eeckhout, Tom van Malderen and the four founding partners of Architecture Project - Malta. With my work I have been focusing on the investigation and development of contextual design strategies. After three years of practice in Malta I worked in Malaysia with Dr. Ken Yeang predominately on sustainable building systems. In Kuala Lumpur I also worked independent on projects within architecture, theatre and sound and lectured at the University of Malaya. In London my practice exits in two-fold between teaching and practice. I was a visiting lecturer at Westminster University in London. Since 2005 I am the course leader of Interior Architecture & Design at the University for the Creative Arts in Canterbury.

With InsideOpen I address the collaborative by the proclamation of identities constantly being readjusted (blogs accumulate post after post, profiles are adjusted, images updated) through the notion of these reuse mechanisms linked to cooperation, even confrontation and finally (possibly) integration of viewpoints.

InsideOpen is set as a framework to appropriate and study these mechanisms of reuse. In doing so, two important aspects need to be identified; access or source of information and the use or target of this information vis a vis a particular design task. In short; source and target situations.

Individual blogs, when they are used to describe a design discourse, can accommodate the construction and representation of target situations (setting out a design task) yet at the same time act as source situations for others. The retrieval and selection of source situations will be analogous to particular target situations. Indirectly one could therefore expect bloggers, through the use of comments, to start engaging in the adaptation of their source situations to accommodate their target situation signaling the birth of a collaborative.

Here reuse is bipolar and not just one person seeking inspiration by looking at the work of others but becoming actively engaged with the work of others just by the nature of the blog.

Does this coinciding of source and target situations through the network of blogs indicate a new type of author? Or does it eradicate authorship altogether? (Article published on InsideOpen by me)
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