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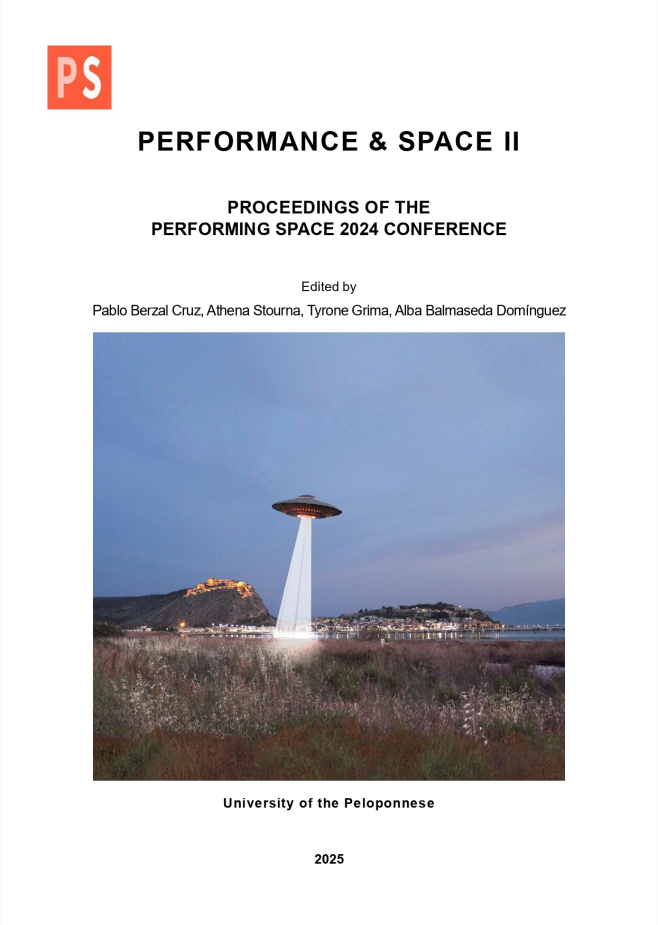

Rethinking Performance and Space: Generosity in a Seven-Factor Methodology to Design Alternative Worlds

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47

Rethinking Performance and Space: Generosity in a Seven-Factor Methodology to Design Alternative Worlds

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Abstract

As architects and designers of the environments we live in and considering that we live in a world increasingly full of different crises, climate change and social needs, it is urgent that those shaping common spaces consider new methodologies to stimulate design processes with new perspectives on integration and awareness. This challenge to performance designers and architects leads to ambitious intersections with other fields of knowledge to promote stronger research and more expansive speculation.

Performance designers can benefit from this methodology because it proposes new forms of engagement with others and the environment within the process of design itself. The efficient project equation and methodology proposed here develops an analytical approach that is incremental and more comprehensive than the traditional forms of design. The issues addressed underscore the pressing need to re-evaluate design processes and their outcomes around efficiency and efficacy, particularly in our current time of crisis and rapid technological advancements. Seven factors inform the thinking process proposed by this methodology. In this study, the arguments focus on one: generosity.

This paper expands on a methodology already developed in previous iterations, offering a design process that employs performance and performance design concerns to devise efficient projects. The methodology proposes different initiation points to the design thinking process and can propel different types of collaboration. As argued here, if performance refers, on one hand, to the design of a certain efficiency, it refers on the other hand to the construction of cultural and social meanings that activate social interactions. This second dimension can lead to designing aspects of experience, participation and social cohesion in ways that help us think about alternative worlds, different from the ones that we have designed and that already exist. This world might be collapsing as scientific research attests.

Keywords: performance, performance design, architecture, commons, design methodology

Factors to Develop Efficient Projects

The research behind this methodology has been developed over several years, in different workshops and in the contexts of different schools of architecture and design.[1] The work explored with students was aimed at developing a design methodology for an "efficient" project by looking at concerns that are crucial for framing different kinds of performance relevant to architecture and design: body, surface, material, programme, place and time (Tisi, 2008).[2] These design concerns became the incremental associative factors for the methodology that evolved later and that is presented here. It served to devise different steps for confronting each of the challenges that inform the design thinking process.

This methodology is narrow and open at the same time.[3] It is narrow because it is organized under the factors that inform an equation to be resolved, open because each factor of the equation constitutes an opportunity to explore design in broad ways and

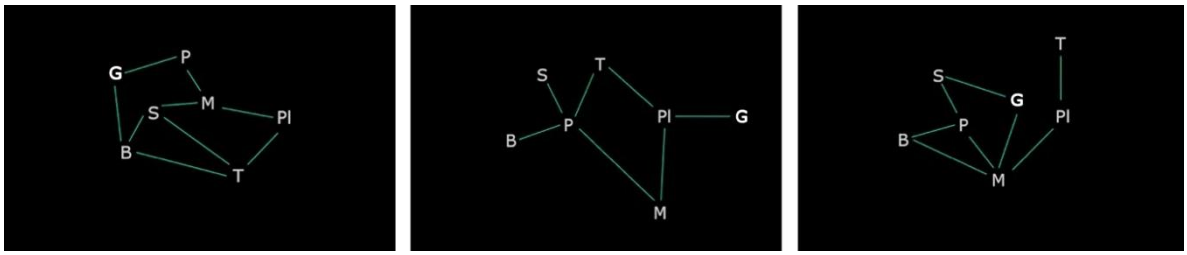
[1] This study is an evolution of the initial research that was conducted within different studios. In the first one, a 2005 advanced workshop titled *Spaces of/for Performance* realized at Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, Valparaíso, Chile, I presented six factors as initial considerations for projecting performance. Later, these became the core methodological issues of the equation proposed. See: Tisi (2006).

[2] Each of these concerns became a factor in re-imagining the design process. "BODY (B)" can be understood as a cultural construct that responds to specific conditions of site, but also as a dynamic entity capable of changing and subverting existing conditions and producing new spatial situations. Artifacts can also be understood as bodies that have a presence in space. "SURFACE (S)" concerns the way experiences are shaped by the understanding of spatial limits. These limits give form to spatial situations, negotiated by material boundaries which at the same time locate place and action. Surfaces constitute interfaces between us and the surrounding world, providing different possibilities of spatial communication and interaction. "MATERIAL (M)" serves not only to shape tangible forms but also to produce certain effects. Material assemblies construct different spatial situations and engender alternative spatial narratives. The adoption of novel and unconventional materials can create new possibilities of spatial interaction and behaviour. "PROGRAM (P)" is not only established through objective data and functions, but also shaped by cultural practices, social interactions, and temporal experiences. Rather than a static set of prescribed actions, program fluctuates: it questions situated activities in a contemporary world characterized by constant flux and rapid technological obsolescence. "TIME (T)," understood as a relative phenomenon, is, along with generosity, one of the most challenging dimensions of this equation for design for those interested in performance complexities. The configurations of different spatial forms slowly materialize perception and therefore architecture; meanwhile, architecture tends to perform even more gradually. Architects and designers can work with time to accommodate life customs but also to change them. "PLACE (Pl)" can be explored within specific constraints of time and location. Perhaps this is also one of the most relevant factors for architects and performance designers who want to challenge conventions or space normativity. Place is understood as a fixed location but can be also understood as the evidence and result of time, allowing a richer set of variables than the obvious parameters of contextuality.

[3] In the article *B+S+P+T+PL+ M: Six ways to approach architecture through the lens of performance*, (Tisi, 2008), I initiated a process that informed experiments conducted in the following years. This article was part of the research conducted for a doctoral thesis defended at the New York University department of Performance Studies; consequently, it informed the methodology. Different steps of this research and methodology have been published previously in different formats, including a book (can tis book be referenced?). All are part of an ongoing exploration into a methodology for considering different phenomena relevant to projecting performance not only from the perspective of architecture but also from the lens of art, the social and the humanities. The factor of generosity was added after defending the doctoral thesis at NYU back in 2011.

represent a world of themed possibilities. These factors are posed as design questions that can lead to different answers and different design approaches, depending on the interests and intuitions of the designer. Each of these factors constitute a space for the exploration of design methods that can respond to the challenges of performance that are not only within the scope of the project but also related to those around it, in the context where the design solution is proposed or will be situated.

Figure 1
"Measurable" dimensions of efficient projects. Diagrams by the author.



Note: Each diagram represents a different way to associate the factors. The design thinking process and the challenges of design scope guide the incremental methodology to consider all of them (7). Generosity is highlighted as the crucial factor of the equation, given currentday social and environmental challenges. The associative process propels the factors to complete a more comprehensive project.

The elaboration of design variables constitutes an opportunity for those of us who must constantly confront ambitious ideas while making decisions between different challenges that should, somehow, be measurable. Is it possible to measure design ambitions? The aim here is to encourage a design practice that can contribute in some way to the context where the performance (of any sort) will install a space. Perhaps the approach offered here can help space designers to think how to improve the damaged and suffering world that we inhabit. And it is from this angle that I think generosity, understood as a selfless concern to promote the commons, can play an important role.

With these ambitious concerns in mind, what might "efficiency" mean? Or how might we calibrate the effectiveness of a design solution when projecting ambitions that cannot be measured?[4] The seventh factor for this equation, generosity, was added to the initial set to complete the thematic methodology proposed.[5] This dimension is crucial in defining an

[4] Publications authored and edited by Branko Kolarevic, Ali M. Malkawi, Yasha Jacob Grobman, Michell Hensel or David Leatherbarrow, among many others, also address concerns of design and architecture practices. Like this article, they all relate efficiency concerns to more subjective issues connected to the ideas of experience and being (with others) while navigating designed spaces. The contribution of this study then adds to those views of the similar problem, incorporating a relative issue that might contribute to the social fabric (generosity).

[5] Back in 2011, I defended a doctoral thesis, in this instance, this seventh factor was titled "Love," inspired by Alberto Pérez-Gómez's book *Built upon Love: architectural longing after ethics and aesthetics*. In following explorations this factor was re-framed as Generosity. For more information

“efficient” project because it problematises the idea of judging design performance with the commonly used, measurable dimensions of efficient projects (Figure 1).

Generosity (G)

Generosity is normally understood as an action of sharing or giving selflessly, without expecting anything in return. For this equation, a generous gesture can become an act of resistance to conventional forms of production, consumption, and individuality. This factor could be understood as the more challenging concern of the equation because there is an intrinsic paradox of how it might be measured to be designed. Is generosity made visible in the number of free square metres given for participation? Or is it measurable as extra green areas added to public projects? How can generosity be measured when designing and spacing the commons? How can a design project incorporate this variable when economic concerns and politics are seldom aligned with issues of empathy and dignity?

In a world full of events and social dramas, as well as political and economic forces, it is normal to understand “efficiency” under certain parameters of performance. This approach complicates things, because normally when the concept is used in other fields different from humanities, such as engineering—where things are numerically measured to account for optimal responses or solutions, ideas of generosity do not quite fit because they might be understood as more subjective (Several reports consider issues about this phenomena). Performance project ambitions could serve as an engine to design social cohesion, although from this angle the measurability of efficiency remains unclear when thinking about possible generous gestures. Yet we understand the value of generosity as a human dimension that is crucial for social well-being (Figure 2). Should it not therefore be a fundamental aspect of city design, architecture, and landscape design? Public spaces and the commons in Santiago should be reimagined as urban inequality grows. The privileges of quality and generous spaces remain only in some parts of the city (as is for certain groups of individuals). An efficient project would thereby become an opportunity to perform generosity, to install it, changing the reality of some civic public spaces that should be available to everyone. This paper argues that a project can only be truly efficient if generosity is incorporated in the process and becomes part of the result of the project. But how can we measure that aspect?

Several authors have called for new approaches to urban design and architectural design, promoting new perspectives on the design of civic space. The tone of these thinkers challenges us to ideate new practices in the design of our social environments. Other authors suggest that commonly used conventional practices are contributing to the collapse

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see the doctoral thesis: *Architecture as Performance: the construction of display* by Rodrigo Tisi (2011).

of our environment (Jover & Wall 2019)—preoccupations that have also been addressed by scientific research.[6] Unfortunately, it is not a surprise to hear news of social degradation and failure caused by inequality, environmental damage, social crisis, and climate change. These pressing challenges demand new ways of thinking about the future and certainly new kinds of design processes to repair the commons and care for what we have and share. Another interesting approach to think about performance and mindful objects or designs is defined by the category of performative objects which propel social interaction.[7]

Figure 2
Public manifestation in Santiago de Chile. Plaza Italia was a principal public space in contemporary Chile for promoting social cohesion as well as national identification, whether celebrating or addressing national concerns. Image by Álvaro Díaz. https://www.theclinic.cl/2010/06/21/fiesta-y-resaca-en-plaza-italia/

Equitable commons are a crucial goal and therefore must guide decisions for the conception of spaces that serve as platforms for social interactions.[8] These basic ways to

[6] Several studies and conferences, including "17 Sustainable Development Goals" and The Conference of the Parties for Climate Change (COP) organized by the United Nations, addressing urban and environmental concerns, have taken place over the last few decades, testifying to the urgency of current challenges. Although evidence of environmental damage is available, human action is not enough. Scientific research seems not to be enough.

[7] See the approach of Kristina Niedderer on her article "Designing mindful interaction: the category of performative object (2007)."

[8] The book *Architecture from Public to Commons* presents different issues around the concept of commons. The texts elaborate different plans for a more optimistic and coherent development of social grounds with wider perspectives of the social. The book contributes to thinking on the challenges of social needs, participation and cohesion that somehow should be considered when

space different lifestyles are inherently caring and human, and they are what performance design combined with architecture, social concerns and engineering can do to re-imagine and create the new spaces and environments that societies need. The combination of those practices with politics and economics, coordinated along with social and environmental sciences, can contribute to our future material culture and the way that we incorporate it and deal with it in our daily life. Generosity is central to this challenge. The design project framed under these concerns and including the factor of generosity (plus the six others) should focus on enabling positive performances of environmental repair and collective social good (Fig. 3).

With the above, I argue that an efficient project also means to grow and expand the concerns into a new set of variables related to participation, empathy, and cohesion. These variables might complicate the question of efficiency, as they can be understood as more intangible or subjective, and therefore difficult to account for via statistics and measurements. In addition, current social events of environmental and social dramas complicate the norms by which we can interpret optimum performances of design. This is what the humanities can contribute to the equation. The challenges described above demand a radically different and more ambitious understanding of the "efficient," in order to develop a truly generous project.

The hypothesis behind this equation sustains that there is an interdependence between the seven factors. It is not possible to consider one without the other. Yet generosity should be considered as the main crucial factor to interconnect the challenges and fulfil ambitious scopes of the project. With this methodology, performance design then becomes an opportunity to understand different project concerns as intertwined challenges of empathy, which should be solved in a way that integrates various objective but also subjective relationships. Each of the seven factors constitute a starting point to the project and from there, each following factor will add complexity to the next one through the natural development of the project. Each layer adds a new set of concerns and therefore a new layer of complexity to be designed (Tisi, 2023). This design thinking method might help to establish new challenges and thought procedures for the ways we see and understand collaboration when projecting the future. At the end, all these dimensions require an integrated and ambitious way of working with different disciplines and knowledges. Technology helps in these processes and challenges new forms of thinking under the umbrella of performance design understood in a broad integrational sense (architects,

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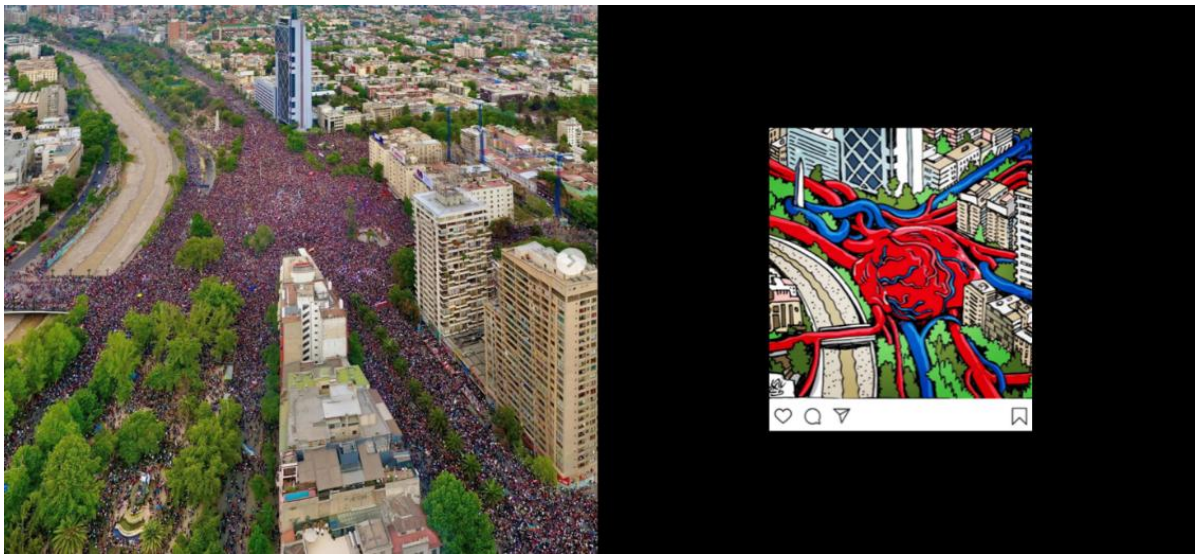
thinking and projecting architecture (Lopez-Dinardi, 2024). Another contribution that contributes to this perspective, *Critical Care: Architecture and Urbanism for a Broken Planet*, highlights the need for new design considerations when thinking about economy, social ecology, and city projects (Fitz & Krasny 2019). In this book, Tronto argues that "using care as a critical concept will require a fundamental reorientation of the disciplines of architecture and urban planning." This seems crucial to the performance design methodology offered here, as it points to challenges in improving society, social cohesion, and the surrounding environment that we now face. Ambitious projects should consider these dimensions if we are truly thinking to have more sustainable (alternative) futures.

urbanists, engineers, market entrepreneurs, landscapers and politicians are some dimensions to introduce in the process of this expanded methodology by means of generosity).

Figure 3

Left: March for Dignity in Santiago, Chile, October 18th, 2018. Performed by 1.5 million. This major public protest called for radical changes and led to a social outbreak of large proportion. Image by Carlos Molina. Right: Beating heart at the centre of Chile. Meme found on Instagram after the march. Several images were displayed on public digital networks highlighting concerns about empathy, generosity, and state care.



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