

# Places In-Between: The Transit(ional) Locations of Nomadic Narratives

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*...what does it mean to reflect upon a position, a relation, a place related to other places  
but with no place of its own – a position in-between?*  
– Elizabeth Grosz (2001: 90.)

*For me this space of radical openness is a margin –  
a profound edge.*  
– bell hooks (1990: 149.)

## Introduction

The guiding principle of urbanism was always division. Framing, fencing, dividing and limiting define enclosure and contrast, and generally the term *limits* stands for the boundaries that demarcate the spaces on either side. Following both Elizabeth Grosz and bell hooks' thoughts,<sup>1</sup> this text will discuss the possibility and openness of a third space between the two sides of the margin, i.e., the margin itself as a liminal space. In the context of this essay, both liminal and in-between refer to the transitional state between two phenomena. Spatially speaking, the position of the in-between implies a middle location between two events and opposed spaces, for instance: between in and out, here and there, this and that (sides). This paper argues against this encompassing dualism or binary logic, discussing the occurrence of a third physical position between them. The concept of in-betweenness will be considered as a natural process of place-making, since the in-between will be discussed as an entity *per se*, a bodily position linking the first space of origin or departure to the second space of arrival.

The term *in-between* has been largely depicted in cultural and social studies as a state of liminality and borderline, being often associated with contemporary

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<sup>1</sup>The concept of in-between is largely depicted both in philosophical and socio-political terms by Elizabeth Grosz (2001) and bell hooks (1990), respectively.

geographical, economical and political questions. It is also a status of margin or diffused boundary, frequently used as preferred passionate element for literary writings of poetry and storytelling – being between life and death, war and peace, love and hate, and so on. Similarly, the concept of the in-between is often used in numerous works of visual arts, giving title to emotional and ambiguous meanings, and thus surpassing the rationality embedded in its original mathematical and scientific forms (for example, the arithmetical theory of *betweenness* and the more common medical or astrophysical term of *interstice*).

One can almost say that the cliché of the in-between is everywhere, and every author has a different name or text to explain it. Even in lay terms, ‘being between something’ is often used as synonymous of *fusion-* or *multi-* something (e.g., the so-called food-fusion culture or the exhausted catchy-term of multi-disciplinary teams). However, I would like to suggest that the concept of *in-betweenness* implicates instead an *inter-* form, a prefix that means juxtapositions, overlapping, concurrence, layers, a dialectic *interaction* between things (objects, subjects and spaces). It is not just fusing ‘two in one’ or simply mixing modes, approaches or terminologies between disciplines. It is probably more a trialectic conversation between two opposite phenomena since it establishes new crossing points and possible connections. ‘To cross the line *between*’ is to give corporeality to this threshold line of transition. The location of the in-between comes to existence in the exact moment when the boundary line is crossed, overcome and experienced.

But *who? when? how?* and *where?* will be the questions that trigger this discussion within the framework of place-making studies, namely: architecture, urban design and street furniture design.

The text argues that built-environment disciplines often overlook both these simple questions of who and how, and recurrently the *in-between* location as a space on its own. Since it is based on a speculative classification and previous exploratory studies (Luz 2003: 52–57), the *in-between* concept will be explored as a potential canvas for new possibilities within urban studies, as a new place<sup>2</sup> for different design considerations.

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<sup>2</sup> In the context of this paper, *space* and *place* are slightly similar to that proposed by Michel de Certeau in his work *The Practice of Everyday Life*. For de Certeau, space (*espace*) is usually understood as an abstract term defined by ‘vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables’, and place (*lieu*) as a ‘configuration of positions’ (de Certeau 1984: 117). Like Marc Augé states: ‘place can be de-

## Contemporary city scenarios

To start with, our context: the contemporary metropolis and urban city centres. In modern urban culture, the most representative constant of our everyday life is continuous change. It is argued that city scenarios are characterised by complex dynamics of urbanisation (GUST 1999: 15); by networking of networks, speed and power (Thrift 1996: 256); and ultimately, by accelerated technological and communicational cyber-evolutions. In other words, by movement and mobility, by a continuous flux of people, things, events and information, which determine new spaces of exchange and social networks.

Many sociologists stress that the increasing social apathy and seclusion towards public life is due to many disruptive oppositions (e.g., lack of time vs. excess of time, global space vs. oppressive congested and capitalist spaces), but also to the cities' disjointed and discontinuous urban landscape. However, recalling Richard Sennett's paradigm *The Fall of Public Man* (1977), this nostalgic perspective of urban loss and the idea of an inhospitable, intimidating or 'robotic' public realm has been recently contested. Contrarily to the widespread urban life estrangement, some authors argue that the 'resurgence of public man' (Loukaitou-Sideris, Banerjee 1998: 181) has been reconstructed in new forms of public association, spaces of communication and new locations of cultural mobility. The new public domain, different from the past *agora* of public life, is literally experienced through a cultural geography of travel (Hajer, Reijndorp 2001: 21), cultural diversity, event-like experiences and new interpretations and meanings of/for spaces and things.

Contemporary mobility is now creating continuous spaces of exchange, shifting the philosophical and built-environment discourses from the fixed spaces of staying<sup>3</sup> (buildings and edifices) to a new perspective regarding the 'spaces of going' (Careri 2002: 24) – the spaces of passage, nomadism, transition and circulation.

fined as relational, historical and concerned with identity' (Augé 1995: 77). For both authors, it is the practice of everyday life that transforms the geometrical/mental space into a practised place, into an anthropological space that is concrete and related to a cultural order and to the people who live (in) it. Similarly, in this essay the term *place* refers to the construction of relationships formed between the subjects and the objects that inhabit or define the space. Concurrently, the term *space* is not an abstraction, rather it refers to a physical location defined by its material variables and operations.

Therefore, in what follows, I will examine the possibility of two new standpoints regarding the built-environment practices and the location of the in-between.

First, and for design purposes, a theoretical inversion of what I call here the *solid-void dialectic* is proposed. In the conventional map or urban plan of a city, the black or full-colour solid rectangles represent buildings and monuments to go or visit, whereas the empty and white lines usually define streets, squares, gaps between buildings and thus voids. However, while the traditional practice of place-making disciplines presupposes that the fixed spaces of staying of cities (buildings, edifices and other urban volumes) are *the* solid matter and that spaces of going just the hollows in between, this paper suggests an inversion of that condition. In our contemporary metropolis and cultural geography of travel, spaces of transition should be examined not as gaps between but as a potential solid, the new concrete location of everyday life – Georges Perec’s space of the ‘infra-ordinary’ and Henri Lefebvre’s ‘other’ space. Both authors proposed new readings for simple everyday-life practices and production of spaces, revealing the extraordinary intricacy of ordinary daily routines (Perec 1997: 209–49) and everyday spatial constructions (Lefebvre 1991: 16, 38–46). Following their work, this is the proposition: the in-between as the ‘solid ground’ of new interpretations.

Secondly, the paper argues against the surrounding idea of polarities, which usually characterise our social and spatial organisation. For instance, the so-called conflict between private and public spheres, local and global markets, nature and culture paradoxes, capitalist and socialist structures, physical and virtual realities, and so forth. Following Lefebvre’s work, and also Edward W. Soja posterior thesis of ‘trialectic of spatiality’ (Soja 2000: 13), it is possible to draw a category of a third space, another space where the everyday practice occurs.<sup>4</sup> For Soja, as for

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<sup>3</sup> For Careri, whereas the spaces of sedentary activity are defined as *spaces of staying*, *spaces of going* are the ones where human journeys and nomadic activities occur (Careri: 2002: 21–25).

<sup>4</sup> In his book *The Production of Space* French theorist Henri Lefebvre defines a conceptual triad to express space: (1) the *spatial practice*, or the ‘perceived space’ between daily reality (routine) and urban reality (the routes that link up the places of everyday life); (2) the *representations of space*, or the ‘conceptualised space’ of relations between signs, codes, relations and abstract conceptions; and (3) the *representational spaces*, or the ‘lived space’ of everyday production associated with images, symbols and complex codes (Lefebvre 1991: 38–39). Edward W. Soja deepens this concept, by drawing an interpretive category of *thirdspace*, where the lived space extends the dualism between the first space (perceived) and the second (conceived) (Soja 2000: 13–30).

Lefebvre, throughout the history of western philosophy and social theory, there was always a reductionist and persistent dualism between mental and materialist approaches to space. Soja explains:

Whenever faced with such Big Dichotomies, Lefebvre sought to break them open to new and different possibilities. As he would repeatedly say, two terms are never enough to deal with the real and the imagined world. *Il y a toujours l'Autre*: there is always an-Other term, a third possibility that works to break down the categorically closed logic of the “either-or” in favour of a different, more flexible and expansive logic of the “both-and-also”. (Soja 2000: 20.)

What Lefebvre and Soja suggest instead is the actual existence of an in-between reality, a third instance, by introducing an-Other reality, ‘a different alternative that both reconstitutes and expands upon the original opposition’ (Soja 2000: 20). In other words, one can say, for example, that the ‘amorphous’ and abstract space between public and private spaces is in fact a real space that is *both-public-and-private* (commonly prefixed with the term *semi-*, such as semi-public or semi-private, again leading to an *inter-*situation or middle location).

In Ray Oldenburg’s work *The Great Good Place* (1999), for instance, the essential argument is that daily life must be balanced between three realms of experience: the first place – domestic, the second – work, and the third – social. The author argues that, though seemingly ‘amorphous and scattered’, informal public life is actually highly focused, emerging in ‘core settings’. His term *third places* refers to the ‘great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work’ (Oldenburg 1999: 16). The most important aspect to retain from Oldenburg’s proposal, as from Lefebvre’s and Soja’s, is that contemporary third places are now what constitute the common ground for the new public realm and that its ‘core qualities’ may also stand for the key attributes of new in-between designs.

### **Between disperse urban fragments and writings**

The underlying rationale behind the aforementioned works is that the mobile agents and nomads, who inhabit our spaces of transition and social mobility, can produce ‘new’ spaces as they go and move along with their everyday lives, places which although transient can sometimes offer new possibilities.

Mobility and the mobile act of transition between spaces usually creates an 'other' place in space, which is neither the place from where it originally came (the departure point) nor the place which it is the objective of situation (the arrival point), but is related to both. The 'transit' between creates another reality, literally a short-lived **transit(ional)** place. Its mobility generates, and paradoxically stabilises, these momentary spaced-places.<sup>5</sup> These mobile spaces are in essence a space in which several incongruous sites and moments in time are juxtaposed, co-existent and layered together. They are urban *constructed situations*,<sup>6</sup> passing moments, urban fragments and other spaces different from the ones we were used to. These transit(ional) spaces resemble Michel Foucault's spatial zone of heterotopia in *Des Espaces Autres* (1967), a zone which accommodates shifting senses of time and place. Repeating Foucault's definition, heterotopia is a counter-site in which all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted (see Foucault 1999). According to the author, the heterotopia space is capable of juxtaposing in a single real space several sites that are themselves on opposite sides (for example, in this paper: the entry that becomes exit, the inside out, the public privacy). Moreover, this paradox of dialectical existence represents also the heterotopian place to be 'elsewhere'. Elsewhere is somewhere else different to the place of beginning or *situated* here. It is not 'here', but 'over there'. It is something that exists functionally and formally by moving within a physical space of two locations (here and over there).

Hence, it is possible to say that this instance of between or this space of transition is an experiential zone that is ideologically and literally erased after the time of happening. In-between spaces are always perceived to be transitional, temporary, changeable and between social places already hybrid – places made up of interlocking and exchange.

Like heterotopia, transit(ional) places are ambiguous two-way systems that 'close' what was left behind and 'open' the passage to what is ahead, and vice versa. The transition space is a sporadic site, which is at the same time acces-

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<sup>5</sup> A text can have, for instance, single, double or 1.5 line spacing, which means that between the lines there are spaced places, empty spaces of transition between words and letters. Using this analogy, in the practise of passing from one space to another space (e.g., from here to there), there is also a spaced place, a third place that occurs momentarily, waiting to be written or crossed.

<sup>6</sup> Refers to Situationist writings, in particular to the definition of 'constructed situations', which are 'a moment in life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events' (see Knabb 1989: 43–45).

sible and 'invisible'; it is a fragment space where mobile activities are carried out unconsciously in lapses between the fixed spaces of society (locations for work, leisure and rest). Nonetheless, in spite of being understood as a 'corridor place' for people's usage, it does exist.

In this sense, the purpose of this study is to identify and explore its most evident spatial attribute: the transient condition – to find its momentary location(s) in space and its meaning, through the fragmentary and sometimes displaced nature of its temporary positions and subject-users. The question now is how, and through which theoretical framework, can we study the condition of liminality? In a surrounding place-world, which is spatially configured as 'public' and always divided amid binary logics, the concept of in-between space has made both the non-visible (the society's mobility) and the invisible (the contemporary hidden places of exchange) very visible, if not palpable. It has produced a different type of space, which has not yet been classified, it still remains to be 'in-between' something.

Working from several social and cultural studies it is possible to state that presently the concept of in-betweenness is 'worn out'. However, the in-between has been a privileged concept for only a short time. Only in the last century has it been recognised as a 'space or as positivity at all, as something more than a mere residue or inevitable consequence of other interactions' (Grosz 2001: 92).

In her work *Architecture from the Outside*, Grosz explains that the first in-between thinker was probably Henri Bergson (1944), for whom the 'question of becoming', the 'arc of movement', was the most central frame (Grosz 2001: 91).<sup>7</sup> This model of in-betweenness, of indeterminacy or undecidability instigated the writings of contemporary philosophers, including Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Jacques Derrida, Michel Serres, and Luce Irigaray, often under a number of other different terms: *difference*, *repetition*, *iteration*, *the interval*, among many others.

Moreover, when reviewing diverse writings, the transit(ional) space between things (Bergson's arc of movement between entities or things) can as well be found in numerous literary texts and fragments, such as the aforesaid Pécoc's concept of the infra-ordinary (the ordinary, the habitual, the banal, the everyday

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<sup>7</sup> Bergson defends that instead of conceiving relations between fixed identities, between entities or things that are only externally bound, the *in-between* is the only space of movement of development or becoming: the in-between defines the space of a certain virtuality, a potential that always threatens to disrupt the operations of the identities that constitute it (see Bergson 1944: 303, 306–314; Grosz 2001: 92–93).

life); Marcel Duchamp's infra-thin (the passage between two states, the thinnest interval or moment between two conditions) and hooks' location on the margin (the place of radical openness and possibility for futurity). These poetic and artistic works should be here complemented by two other important studies: Homi Bhabha's extensive work on the articulation of cultural differences which suggests the in-between spaces as locations of culture (Bhabha 1994: 1), and equally Marc Augé's concepts of non-places and supermodernity (Augé 1995: 78), somehow similar to this imprecise 'non'-definition of the transitional places in contemporary modern cities.

Nevertheless, despite all these widespread references, synonymous and crossing terms to define the meaning of the in-between concept, one still remains 'out of place'. If all aforementioned authors describe and almost exhaust the same concept in one way or another, by choosing different terms and essays to explore the existence of a third space, where can I as a designer find this in-between, the location of a possible place of difference?

### **Transit(ional) locations of in-betweenness**

Theoretically, the position of the in-between is constantly associated with readings on mobility, transit, passages, nomadism and nomadology, or limits and liminality. Again, the cliché is present: the 'between' word is part of our routines, our everyday practices of coming and going, our mobile narratives and nomadic stories. While we occupy, claim and explore the city and its spaces, we interact bodily with objects and spaces on a daily basis. As nomadic subjects we are constantly in a state of transition between things. The claim is that this active engagement during the transit(ional) situation, the act of producing, consuming and using the urban locations, constitutes the starting point to characterise the in-between place.

The most straightforward mode to define its *locus* is by answering the three questions where, who and what, which eventually will lead to how we may potentially rethink, improve or enjoy the transit(ional) locations of urban scenarios.

Regarding **where**, there is no site-specific place or precise point in the city map that corresponds exactly to *the* in-between location. Transit spaces are here defined as momentary (spaced) places. In that sense, the following classification is laid out as *a* possible taxonomy, based on a speculative study developed during previous academic studies, and thus subject to refinements. The scale of the

in-between location will 'grow' progressively and literally from 'little corners' and small objects to the 'larger picture' of big spaces. However, sometimes the in-between occurs by overlapping two or all definitions. Within the urban fabrics of city spaces, we can 'find' or experience the in-between at:

1. the *liminal places of transition* and passage (Hajer, Reijndorp 2001: 128). These are the physical locations of transitory functions, as they are the limited spaces of entry/exit and thus the border space between two opposite spheres or intangible locations. For instance, between domestic and communal, private and public or indoors and outdoors. *Par excellence*, the place of the threshold can represent the most straightforward example of the in-between location. Like doorways, entryways, entrances, entry or exit points, these boundary positions are usually demarcated by 'barrier' elements such as doors, windows, gates, fences, walls, steps, doorsteps and many other guardrails;

2. the *spaces between buildings*. Literally, the 'leftover' spaces *adjacent to, behind, beside, in front of, and on top of* solids and buildings. Once outside, the person in transit will be frequently moving amid volumes, in a dynamic state of in-between. Commonly referred to as the elements of the urban matrix and city voids, these spaces between buildings are: streets (avenues, boulevards, roads, paths, sidewalks and also canals), alleys (passageways and alleyways), squares (plazas, parades and piazzas), parking areas and green areas;

3. the *transit(ional) localities* of transportation or communication. Abstractedly resembling Augé's definition of non-places, these transit(ional) areas are of three types: *transport* (e.g., airports, bus and train stations, underground, terminals, motorways and other arteries of circulation); *leisure and commerce* (e.g., market places, museums, libraries, shopping areas, supermarkets, stadiums and other sports facilities); and ultimately, a *mixed space of communication and transportation* (usually described as 'virtual space' or the 'networks of information', media and telecommunications).

To note that this selection is based on the transient character of 'short-stays' (i.e., itinerant-use, transient passage, temporary tenancy, momentary stopping, etc.), in which the subject-user is defined by his bodily movement, speed, pace and motion.

This also means that these spaces imply a certain trace of anonymity, traffic and people **who** circulate in continuity. Pursuing Simmel's concept of the *étranger*

(1990), recent studies on city theory associate urban mobility with the concept of intimate anonymity and human interaction. It is argued that the future of urbanism lies in understanding the city not as a fixed sculpture of urban patterns, but as a human event. Urban spaces are expected to be the place for spontaneous use of a variety of activities and services, while manifestly used by large numbers of random passers-by. Urban settings should be the place that allows human beings to form relations with others at various levels of intimacy while remaining entirely anonymous. In Simmel's terminology, the stranger is not just a wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, having no specific structural position. The capacity of spatial-temporal articulation allows the stranger a synthesis of *proximity* and *distance* set among the *crowd* (cities social groupings) and frees him to change his social and spatial position (see Simmel 1990: 53–59). The same line of thought can be found in the work of Walter Benjamin, through his overly familiar figure of the *flâneur* ('pageant'), to whom travel was fundamental. Benjamin's work *The Arcades Project* (see Benjamin 2004), which attempted to read the work of the poet Charles Baudelaire in the context of nineteenth-century capitalism, takes up Simmel's notion of the stranger but links it to the idea of the urban spectacle. This interpretation of Simmel's character has its origins in Benjamin's interest in the way people experience cities during the course of ordinary work and leisure activities. The *flâneur/promeneur* forms his perception by moving in *dérive* and almost taking a voyeuristic pleasure in watching detachedly the doings of fellow city-dwellers.

Hence, the person who inhabits the transit(ional) location is the anonymous public man, or more specifically, the nameless pedestrian, or simply the walker. It is important to mention that sometimes the walker is also designated as the wanderer, the drifter, the strider, the (r)ambler. However, whereas pedestrian or walker clearly implies the ordinary and simple act of travelling by foot, these latter terms involve too many psychosomatic connotations or randomness in intention. In the in-between location, the *dérive* is not vague or even aimless. Everyday pedestrians 'move on' and act with intention. They are travellers or more commonly called *commuters*, usually urban dwellers/urbanites, which travel between one point to another with a purpose, even if initially unclear or later on changed.

The key element to describe the transit(ional) subject is her/his body, her/his spatial language and behaviour. Resembling Erwin Goffman's theory of 'bodily vehicles' (Goffman 1963: 33–43), these nomads use their body as the vehicle of sensory experience, the membrane between perception and cognition. Even if

skaters or cyclists move in different speeds or through mechanic *wheelprints*, they are as well bodily users, bodies in motion. Although in reality individuals travel by other means of vehicular transport and information (physical and virtual), pedestrian journeys are the foremost dynamic and active instance of being in place. Through the act of moving on foot from place to place, pedestrians experience different rhythms, paces and capabilities of locomotion. Locomotion stands for 'local' (*locus*, 'place') plus 'motion' (*motio*, 'movement'), which by definition means the ability or power to move from place to place, but also a self-propelled movement (travel), a motivity (the quality of being influenced by motives; motive power). Walking and moving with a purpose means to take or use time and space to experience, pause or become involved.

Following this argument, and in order to 'embody' the transit(ional) in-between place, one has to consider at least two conditions of locomotion, which are closely similar to the iconography used in audio pictograms and video interfaces. Firstly, the condition of moving forward: the *play* and/or *fast forward* rhythm of walking (▶), rushing or running (▣). And secondly, the *pause* and suspended moment of lingering, waiting, stalling, slowing down (▣); quite often followed by the *stop* condition of literally stopping over, staying longer, sitting and resting (■).

Being in-between means constantly being between these walking and non-walking conditions. People sit, stand and lean, but they walk and move along/beyond/across/through in between all three states of body postures (sitting, standing and leaning positions) – all day long, throughout their entire life. Walking (or not) then becomes the spatial practice that embodies the in-between.

The aim here is to study both the spaces where the transit action happens as well as how people proceed from the walking action to the momentary non-walking pauses. For example: from walking to waiting at a train platform or a bus stop, or stopping at a traffic light, or waiting for a friend, or lingering while smoking a cigarette. Such moments of brief stillness and everyday unconscious performances interest me most. One does not want to disrupt the flux of movement, the flow of walking or pedestrian transit. However, in a monotonous, grey and tiring everyday urban routine, it is possible to discern an increasing opportunity for the design of place-making in such transit(ional) locations. In their work *In Search of New Public Domain*, Hajer and Reijndorp mention 'more friction and freedom, please', asking designers to focus more on the design of the transitions, the crossings, the connections and the liminal spaces (Hajer, Reijndorp 2001: 130).

The argument is not so much the problematic and controversial lethargy of contemporary public spaces (Augé's non-places, Baudrillard's terms of simulacra, and many other authors' concerns regarding the capitalist, consumerist and spectacular display of modern society), but rather how to study, design and improve the liveability and aesthetic experience of these transit(ional) places.

At this point, the last questions emerge: **what** are the things, objects or non-objects that populate the in-between? and **how** can we experience or achieve a fulfilling pause in these momentary spaced-places?

The urban studies of Herman Hertzberger (1991, 2000), Jan Gehl (2001) and Peter F. Smith (1979), as well as the experimental work of the Situationists (both past and pro-situationists), and even several other literary works on city and travel writing (see, for example: Auster 1987; de Botton 2003; Pope 2000) can clearly indicate a potential line of thought. Despite their use of different terms and approaches, they all propose the same thing: a new exploration of the city and urban forms based on the active engagement of everyday use, in particular on the pedestrian walking mode of discovering the city. In other words, to engage and literally find new stimulus, new objects and sometimes non-objects like 'bits and pieces', as unexpected appropriations in the urban situations of the disconnected city. It is almost like discovering new aesthetic orders, new relationships between individual conceptions (schemata and psyche) and everyday urban geographies. Ultimately, it is the pedestrian or city explorer who uncovers new opportunities of use and occupation, redefining the momentary meaning of the urban solids (not just buildings, but at last the street itself and its street objects).

In our new urban public domain, the user is not subservient to the form of an object and to what its conventional use dictates. For instance, whilst the concept of bench is still kept by a series of associations (to sit, to rest, etc.), simple gestures such as sitting on a doorstep, on a base of a column, on a windowsill, or leaning on a railing and resting near a wall, give more prominence to what is already there (or what can be new *elsewhere*). This reflects what Hertzberger called the 'habitable space between things' (Hertzberger 1991: 176) or what Gehl proposed as 'the life between buildings' (Gehl 2001: 155). Hertzberger mentioned that 'we must take care not to leave any holes and corners behind which are lost and useless, and which, because they serve no purpose at all, are uninhabitable' (Hertzberger 1991: 186). Equally, Gehl sustains: 'if spaces are desolate, two-dimensional

and empty [---] and if the facades lack interesting details – niches, holes, gateways, stairs, and other semi-public, semi-private situations – it can be very difficult to find places to stop’ (Gehl 2001: 155).

Based on the appropriation of these ‘inviting forms’ (Hertzberger 1991: 174) for different uses it is suggested in this essay a new urban vocabulary. The ‘things’ that populate the in-between are not just street objects or urban products; insofar these terms usually assume the design and topography of simple urban furniture (benches, lampposts, litters, etc). It is also outlined here that the current ‘speed up’ state of our modern material reality is based on ephemeral and undetermined ‘event-like’ things. Everything is changeable and ‘on the move’.

As the concept of transit(ional) places also comprises several references from social and cultural studies, architecture, urbanism and applied arts, the term *urban artefacts* withstands as a potential one for the definition of **what** constitutes the in-between.

The previous ‘by-the-book’ decisions of place-making based on manuals of street furniture commodities is shifting from conventional applications (seating areas to sit, parks to active engagements, etc.) to a whole new universe of hypothesis and circumstances. Moreover, it is necessary to be aware of the time, lack of time or accelerated time of our contemporary urban settings for mobility: occasion and articulation are the praxis for this appropriation of architectural, urban and public elements of buildings and urban spaces. The design of the in-between lies in fact on the urban details appropriated from architecture and urbanism (thresholds, steps, escalators, protuberances, barriers, fences, etc.). As well as, deriving from interventions and installations related to public art, and also new writings and site-specific projects that explore the non-palpable and almost invisible elements of mobility (crowds, tiredness, sweat, weather conditions, wind, games of light and shadow, nothingness, thoughts, displacements and misplacements, etc.).

### **The *non*-state of the art of the in-between**

At the moment, the existing design of transitions and some built-environment practices are easily trapped within classic, yet still controversial debates. In fact, in order to define the (*non*) state of the art of the in-between, it is possible to point out three commonly used ‘excuses’.

Firstly, the well-known case of egocentric star-system architecture, understood and defended as work of art and contemplation, or else imposing and

assuming spatial behaviours and urbanites' desires, uses or movement. To this point, one must add two other contentious but still persistent common facts. On the one hand, architectural photos or magazines frequently display architectural forms stripped off everyday users. With exception, of course, of one little human figure that is always strategically positioned in relation to the building for scale duty, architectural photography is seldom full of life or actual usage. On the other hand, visual representations of architectural projects are also typically presented from a higher focal point, i.e., almost following aerial or bird views without acknowledging the actual pedestrian viewpoint from above, within and around the existing 'solid' (voided) forms of architecture.

Secondly, it is important to point out the situation of our contemporary urban design practice, or in particular the street furniture design practice. Carefully not including it within the domain of policies development and city management, the 'street furniture designer' is ambiguously confused with the *urban designer* of planning schools or spatial designer of art schools. This role is currently performed either by industrial/product designers (who shift their expertise from the domestic, indoors and hand-held scale objects to the large gesture of the outdoors), by architects (professionally accepted as masters of space and place), by artists and landscape designers (who freshly introduce site-specific public art or new forms of urban landscape), or ultimately by *multi-disciplinary* teams of urban city planners/designers (with their fixed spatial analyses).

This means that some of our urban scenarios are still filled with the 'remains' of the past, the outmoded and old-fashioned urban design typologies for long-standing street furniture (where sitting commodities means exactly that: park benches). Or else they are filled with scattered overly-designed urban furniture, usually a mirror of architectural models or micro-architecture objects, which obey a master plan of planning and architecture.

In contrast, we should not forget the 'moveable' or 'semi-fixed' furniture of capitalist societies. Product marketing and services' advertisements are constantly recreating new spaces for ads' display, for instance: glued to public and private vehicles in motion; located at strategic places of passage (such as stations exit steps or in the pavement near ATMs and ticket machines); passing in the hands of 'hand-out pamphlets-people' on high-streets; fixed to temporary hoardings and buildings facades; and also projected on high-tech LCD screens, strategically located at transitional places of waiting such as train terminals and airports.

These new locations of media display are still connected to the idea of an overflow of excessive advertising. They are perceived as a collection of waste, garbage and even imposed consumption, thus not being considered as proper urban or street furniture.

Ultimately, and closely related to this scenario of rubbish, the chestnut of place-making: everyone claims that we live in a chaotic landscape of disjointed spaces. Our cities are in pandemonium and do not work as continuous compositions. Several authors ascribe this to: 1. the neglected, dumped, grey and ill-defined spaces of abandonment and wasteland (old parking lots, empty warehouses and residential areas, spaces under motorways and bridges – spaces of nothingness, home of the homeless, etc.); 2. the urban myth of urban sprawl, suburbs and periphery (our base camps, dormitories, refuge, exiles); or 3. the spaces of uncertainty of entertainment and consumption (shopping centres and leisure parks). Following the predicate of the Dutch team Hajer and Reijndorp, or as to that matter several other practices and recent developments in the Netherlands, it is possible to rethink these ‘leftover’ and ‘dirty’ spaces as liveable fragments. Spaces of uncertainty can be reused, reasserted within local communities or even reinvented as new places of ‘temporary staying’ (e.g., empty warehouses as art galleries or (il)legal sports’ spots, for squatters or even spontaneous flea markets and street bazaars, reminiscent of the Egyptian Cairo’s local markets *al-fina*).

### **Designing and co-producing the in-between**

At this point the intention of this presentation becomes clearer by obstinately challenging the image of a chaotic city and scattered non-places. It is argued that the dynamics of our contemporary transit(ional) places is in fact drawing an opportunity, a design possibility. By embracing the recent (re)claims of urban space and street movements, the design of place-making should adopt new ‘techniques’ and methodologies for urban exploration based on everyday occupying practices. The aim is to shift from the previous spatial narratives of preset planning into a more social-based approach, which identifies the user as the creative element in the construction of the transient situation. Contrarily to fixed spatial syntax analyses, recent studies sustain that the user is the most productive element and thus the co-author or co-producer of our production of spaces and places (Hill 2003: 62; Dunne 1999: 59). Based on the user’s capability to adapt to different situations, spatial behaviour should be considered as an invariant variable, open

to chance rather fixed in predictions. Therefore, ambiguity, flexibility or at least 'elastic' meanings and uses, must be included in the materialisation of our settings (Hertzberger 1991, 2000). Based on these groundings, an alternative design strategy is considered by means of concepts such as adaptation, reinterpretation and misappropriation, based on the way people use, reuse, 'misuse' or even 'abuse' their urban spaces and things. For instance, the simple acts of sitting on the footsteps of an entrance, on the sidewalk, on the top of a car, on a roof, or awkwardly talking on a mobile phone inside a phone box. Through an expedition journey within the city, there are plenty of other modes of urban exploration that deserve a second look, and do not fit in the textbooks.

First, one recalls the recent semi-illegal practice of *buildering*, which consists of literally climbing a building, a public monument or any other urban solid, following the rock-climbing technique of bouldering (i.e., bodily engaging with the textures of the building through motor and sensory experience).

Secondly, the graphical modes of graffiti, tags or markings that 'embellish', populate and visually mark our city territories. Together with the young computer generation of night web-chalking<sup>8</sup> and other less known pictorial 'drawings on site', on pavements and buildings surfaces, urban artists such as Banksy and so many other illegal urban painters constantly 'open the door' (urban space) for new design locations. Public art, site-specific work and the introduction of playful meaningless objects or games in the urban scene also represent another sign of interdisciplinary spatial practices.

Again referring the Situationists' methods of exploring the city, the walkscapes of our contemporary scenarios are now the stage for numerous spatial and socio-projects of pro-situationist *dérives*. Such methods usually recur to similar yet updated techniques: new psychogeographies through digital imagery collages, visual essays of automatic writing and drawing, websites for city-walks and walk-talks, specific designed computer languages (e.g., Psycho-geography Marked Language – PML), mathematical notations and algorithms for drifting, etc.

This entire urban buzz means that city dwellers are (re)claiming their 'place in space'. They are moving away from the fixed preconceived idea of the Greek *agora* and the public life confined to the city central squares of political, economi-

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<sup>8</sup> *Web-chalking* or *warchalking* is a code marking practice, done with white chalk or special markers on the pavements or building surfaces near where computer users can find 'free' network connection spots and navigate the web illegally using the leaking electromagnetic waves of big corporate spaces.

cal and social powers.

The opportunity provided by the spaces of transit(ion), the leftover places and other uncertainty spaces suggests the development of new 'clever' designs, where experiencing the urban space could be more than seeing or passing by, but instead occupying, co-producing, touching, tasting and listening to different textures and sounds.

In conclusion, and based on some examples of urban design (or should I call it spatial design? street furniture design? in-between design?), I will present a possibility for unexpected familiar urban artefacts. At the time (between the winter and spring of 2003), these artefacts were the result of my masters' exploratory study as a pedestrian researcher. My design for a 'place and location' was to connect the unexpected boundaries between spatial design disciplines and their overlapping processes, but also to propose different urban signs for new mobile situations (Luz 2003).

### **Urban artefacts and liminal spaces**

The setting selected for the urban intervention was a passage place, a transit(ional) location of circulation, departure and arrivals. The physical site was the liminal space of a threshold, the public entrance space of an art school in London: Central Saint Martins, College of Art and Design, School of Graphic and Industrial Design, University of Arts London, former London Institute, United Kingdom.

The design approach reflects on every argument pinpointed earlier in this text: the user as my co-producer and co-author of this specific in-between location; the search for new urban explorations and new inviting forms; the analytical method of spatial practices associated with ethnographic and social studies; and ultimately, the flexible design plan for urban artefacts open to chance, indeterminacy and ambiguity.

The project aim resided on my pedestrian users' immediate social responsibility, spontaneous and unpredictable behaviours. The objective was the search for new uses and appropriations of urban details that already existed in that small 'squared' corner and passage between Holborn and the British Museum. When asked to briefly describe the 10x5m rectangle site, pedestrians usually referred to the two existing buildings (the art school and the Cochrane Theatre), the long and black guardrail that fences the opposite corner, and both traffic light crossings which demarcated the remaining space. In addition, they would refer to the



Figure 1] Main entrance of Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London 2002 (photo by author).

people passing by between the crossing, one or two big trees, bike racks and ‘art-*ish*’ people hanging around.

Spatially speaking, these answers said it all: for these pedestrians the building-solids were just scenario and its street furniture was perceived as poorly designed. As always, traffic and transit played an important role in spatial perception; users’ profile was entangled in a transient-tenant-occupation; and the most common feature of this in-between was the practice of walking ‘through, along and away from’ that space, scarcely liven up by some lingering and momentary waiting.

Based on these considerations, some examples of the site-installations, urban interventions and temporary artefacts developed were: *mind your step*, *colour in architecture* and *zebras crossings*. Using simple approaches such as ‘drawing on site’ and ‘subverting conventional uses’, the design solutions were a combination between playful elements and, at the time, liminal responses to the lack of resting and social areas.

*mind your step* played with the typical London road markings of ‘look left, look right’, by dislocating the words to the inside of the sidewalk and creating a sequence of directions, which led the pedestrian-reader to ‘look inside’ the building. Additionally, the entrance floor mat was covered with daffodils and other flowers, creating a strange sense of displacement regarding indoor and outdoors materials and the careless act of stepping over an indoor freshly flower carpet. Hence, provoking so briefly a disruptive momentary stop, before and after the entrance; but also a smile and a second look to the threshold of their daily routine space.



Figure 2] *mind your step*, London 2003, Central Saint Martins entrance (photo by author).

The second work *colour in architecture* used again the ‘writing on surface’ technique, now through the aid of colourful adhesive tape, stripped fabric and users’ *hands on approach*. The aim was to somehow connect the forms of the building to the grey and monotonous London’s concrete pavement. The almost-DIY act of sticking the tape over the metric and grid of the building stone façade and over the pavement slabs encouraged the users to reinterpret and perceive a connection or ‘line of continuity’ between the building (solid) and the street pavement (void). This project was also supplemented by another outdoor installation: deckchairs or bike racks’ chairs. Using fabric and simple linking elements, the niche of stationary bike racks ‘furniture’ was transformed in a social sitting area, propitious to short stayings, lingerings and resting moments. Fortunately, the work did not suffer any act of vandalism and what was supposed to be a one-off daily installation became a two months appropriation and positive element of the place of passage.

Figure 3] *colour in architecture*, London 2003, Central Saint Martins entrance (photo by author).





Figure 4] *zebras crossing*, London 2003, Central Saint Martins entrance (photo by author).

Ultimately, the *zebras crossings* artefacts were one of the final settings for the *in-between* design practice. It consisted of displacing the element of the zebra crossing into the middle of the sidewalk and squared space, causing again a feeling of ‘misplacement’. Initially, this piece of street furniture was not obvious and the visual composition only reinforced subliminally the pedestrian circulation route. However, the revolving zebra-line-sitting soon became part of everyday meetings, playful stages and momentary pauses of resting. Several art students used it for their own projects, children made up games and the typical passer-by slowed down the pace just to look at it, even during peak hours. The temporary installation remained there for a month, but due to safety and logistical reasons it had to be eventually dismantled.

### Nomadic narratives...

Even today, when I go back to that now naked place and experience the tiredness, greyness, stressful transit flows, nothingness and apathy at that in-between entrance, I am perplexed with such neglected spatial practice. As many other places in my urban everyday life, this place remains a space of mobility, of exchange. Displacements, new meanings and places for occasion make the ‘difference in the likeness’. In the nodes of transition and in-between places there are movement generators, but also a place for triggers to pause, to enjoy the moment, to smile and look at. In practice, the ultimate purpose of walking is stopping. If the in-between stage of our mobility can offer us places that encourage momentary stops, as well as stopping situations that encourage prospective enjoyable movings, then

the design of transit(ional) spaces will be 'moving on'. More friction, please.

To illustrate my point, I conclude this paper with a nomadic narrative that borrows hooks' *position in the margin*, and which retells my everyday life among so many in-between spaces of transition.

(Through a hybrid form of prose and poem, this final piece is part of current research work and is usually 'performed' in person, while walking 'on stage', and read in consonance with the visual projection of a one-minute clip of time-lapse excerpts of city dwellers' rushing hours and busy traffic.)

**between nowhere**

ana luz, july 2004

*i'm also located in the margin, in a footnote, an endnote,  
between the lines, between words and bodies,  
crossing the line, in between the lines.  
at a point, at a spot, at a site...  
at an open space, at a site, specific site, at a location,  
at a place, space, place, spaced place, sense of place.  
displace.  
in, out, out in, in/out/in,  
going, coming, going, staying, going, going, going...  
staying... stop.  
please, stop.*

*amidst the foot traffic, steps, feet, street,  
amidst the every now and then  
passages of elsewhere,  
i go there, then i go there and then there, round here, along and up here.  
here, there, everywhere.  
then i come back, again, here i go again, there. then here. then there.  
stop.  
please, stop. i am tired.*

*wait. just for a short while. while, while.  
while, whilst, whereas, where, there. everywhere.  
I'm tired, stop.  
stay, in the middle. in the margin.*

*i am located in the margin, in a footnote. in a footprint, feet note.*

*among so many mes. among, amongst, with. without.*

*out. go out. go. leave... go away, stay.*

*don't. don't stay, too long, among, so long.*

*just go, go. elsewhere. there.*

*there, here. in.*

*in-between.*

*i am located in a margin.*

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