Intimate practice: exploring context through the culture of play

verbal presentation / screening

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Critical practice must deal with the specificity and inclusivity of context, and how to make it relevant and intimate to the design process. It is an intimacy that requires one to launch oneself into the environments one inhabits. Our presentation elaborates on our research into play as a mode of engagement which affords such a closeness, beginning not with a literate reading of a place, but with the pure apprehension that accompanies inserting oneself into an environment.

The presentation will draw substantially from a series of workshops conducted over the past two years as a collaboration between architecture, devised (in-situ) theatre and story-telling/making. These workshops sought to reveal the pleasures and possibilities of built environments, otherwise hidden due to habitual use and familiarity, by inhabiting them creatively - through physical games and body-work - emphasizing an active, performative experience of space. The choices of locations were opportunistic, revealing
the physical characteristics and potentials of the built environment, often disregarding representational ones.

With our desire to explore play, we are moving into architecture’s expressive culture of the intimate, the fragile, the hidden and the ephemeral. There is a sustained allusion: the work of architecture be returned to the stuff of life. Not all elements, or even all of the structures of everyday life are always evident. They become part of our “habitus” as conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu as part of the experience of lived practices. Play momentarily reveals the facade of these structures. To that extent, working with play as a methodology is akin to doing a form of archaeology. What is revealed is the enduring; a glimpse of a buried or underground river. In this, ‘play’ is difficult to capture, and is fluid in its nature. Through the practice of play, we look at revealing everyday practices fossilized by their very “everydayness”; or through sheer repetition of habit and forgotten possibilities within the built environment. Play, then, is a serious way of opening up a way of understanding the built environment, and those who use it.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Author:
Shubhra Raje is an architect and educator who is the founder-principal of shubhra raje_built environments, an inter-disciplinary design and research practice based in Denver (USA) and Ahmedabad (India).
Shubhra has designed projects that range from community facilities in Aurora CO, rehabilitating masonry structures in Egypt to the design of art spaces, single and multi-family housing, as well as social and educational institutes – thereby engaging diverse issues, multiple constituencies and varying scales from interior design and architecture to community design and conservation. Some of her more recent projects involve culturally and environmentally contested sites in the peri-urban neighborhoods of Denver (USA), Abydos (Egypt), and Jharsuguda (Odisha).

Collaborators:
Gauri Rajesh holds a PhD in Anthropology, has worked as a film editor and trained in storytelling during her research with Dangi communities in India, and with UK and U.S. based storytellers. In the UK she works with asylum-seekers and refugees on their stories of exile and home. Her work explores the significance of creating and telling stories about places, land and urban environments as a mode of healing wounds and re-creating selves. She currently runs a storytelling project with first generation migrants telling stories about making home in the UK. Gauri has been conducting workshops for adults, facilitators in schools and children from the ages 6-11 years, and performs in India for 3 months every year.
Mare Travethan has performed Inupiat folk tales in Barrow, Alaska, stage managed dance theatre in Tokyo and studied Chekhov in Vladivostok, Russia. Colorado tamed her wanderlust and has been home since 2001. As the associate artistic director of Local
Theater Company, she develops new plays and organizes artist training. Mare is an audio book narrator with more than 400 titles recorded for the National Library Service.