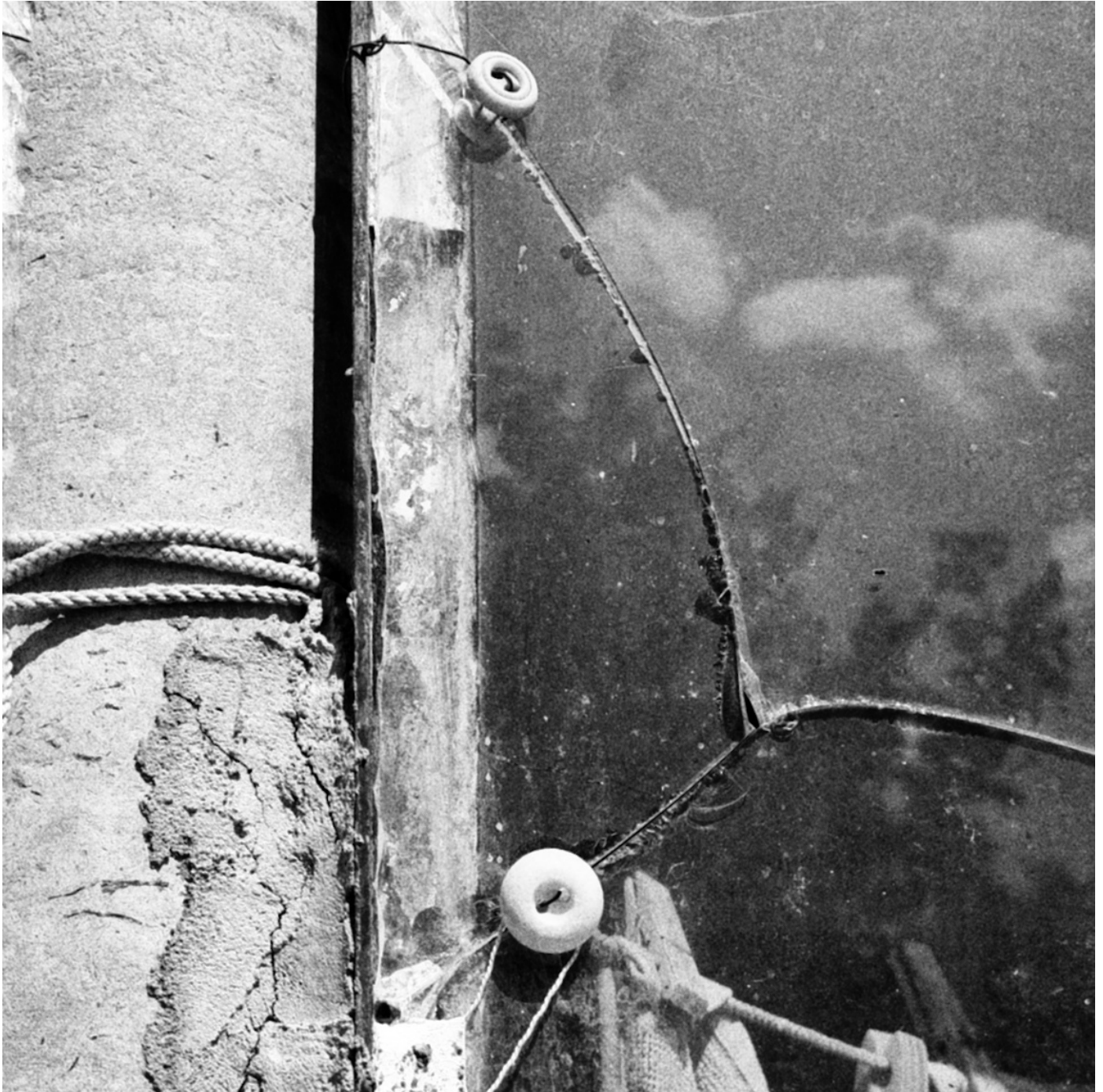


# POIESIS OF TRANSGRESSION

Exploring the generative potential of creative occupancy



Research plan  
Architectural Design Crossovers: Heterogeneous City  
Graduation studio  
November 2023

By Erkan Mestan | 4604229

VANDALISM  
GRAFFITI



Figure 1: The initial fascination which vandalism in the form of graffiti

AREA OF INTEREST

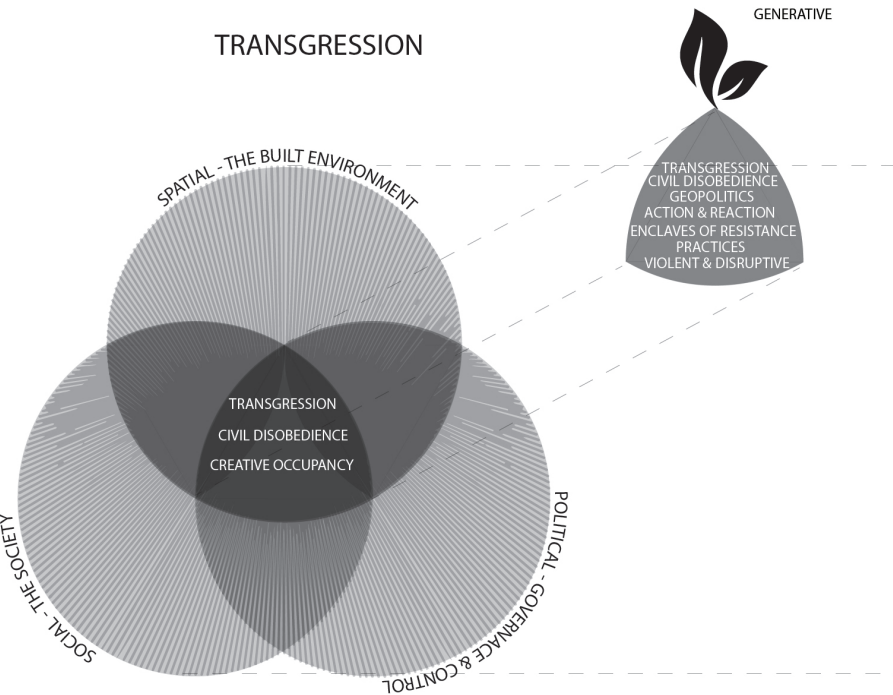
The most recent projects I've worked on have changed my approach to design for the better. Working on projects such as 'Ways of Doing' and 'Agential Materialism,' my approach to design has evolved to be less imposing. Other ways of doing architecture, the experimental side of it, have drawn my attention ever since. Considering the focus of these projects, I've uncovered that my interest lies in the otherness, the different, the alternate.

Initially, while working on this project, I was intrigued by such an example: graffiti (see Fig. 1). It was something I encountered during my recent field trips. I was struck by the creative manner in which it conveyed messages. However, graffiti is only one example of a broader, more overarching term I have adopted: transgression.

Transgression is a complex occurrence that intersects with spatial, social, and political aspects (see diagram 1). It is inherently violent and, therefore, has a disruptive nature, mostly perceived as disobedience and violation of rules, as damaging public and private goods, which is problematic in its own right. However, I see an opportunity and a platform for discourse and the exchange of ideas that can inform architectural and urban design.

I am particularly interested in the generative potential of civil disobedience rather than its destructive aspects. Transgression or civil disobedience might have the power to change how humans interact with and shape the built environment. This concept is closely related to the marginalized communities within cities, who have developed ways to cope with injustice and creatively claim and occupy urban spaces. Therefore, my research focus is on exploring the generative potential of civil disobedience through creative occupancy.

Diagram 1: Depicts the area of interest which consists of transdisciplinary domain of spatial, social and political



transgression:  
an act that goes against a law, rule, or code of conduct; an offence  
Source: Oxford Languages

## MEANING OF THE CONCEPT

The term 'transgression' finds its roots in the work of the French philosopher Georges Bataille, in his book 'Erotism: Death and Sensuality,' alongside other related concepts such as taboo, sacrifice, language, death, and sensuality.

According to Bataille, transgression has an inherently violent element; it makes the difference between life and death. However, it is important to recognize that transgression, despite its inherent violence, does not always harbour destructive intentions.

*Transgression opens the door into what lies beyond the limits usually observed, but it maintains these limits just the same. Transgression is complementary to the profane world, exceeding its limits but not destroying it.*  
Georges Bataille, 1957, p.65

The intentionality behind such acts of violence is of crucial importance. Through the following analogy, this aspect can be clarified: Performing surgery and cutting a patient open with a knife is a violent act, but ultimately, the intention is to aid and heal the patient.

Our society and the built environment are often products of human constructs. While they may serve essential purposes, such as safety and health, they can lead to overdeterminacy in the name of these core values. Therefore, it is crucial to question these boundaries critically and continuously. The latter is relevant in terms of temporality, given the evolving nature of our societies and our understandings over time.

For me, transgression encompasses diverse acts that go beyond established norms and practices, beyond accepted ways of doing. It is violent in its nature but, in the context of our societies, only to humanity's own constructs, implying that we possess the agency to recalibrate these constructs when circumstances demand it.

## DICTIONARY

### transgression:

an act that goes against a law, rule, or code of conduct; an offence

Source: Oxford Languages

### poiesis:

bringing forth, the process of emergence of something that did not previously exist.

## ETYMOLOGY

### Transgression in:

#### Late 15th c. English

To sin

#### Modern English: /transgression/

An act that goes against a law, rule or code of conduct; an offence

#### Spanish: /transgredir/

Actuar en contra de una ley, norma, pacto o costumbre

Acting against a law, rule, agreement or custom

#### French: /transgredir/

Passer par-dessus (un ordre, une obligation, une loi)  
Go over (and order, an obligation, a law)

#### Greek: /Καταπατάω/

Tresspass, intrude

#### Latin: /Praevaricatio/

To make a sham accusation, deviate (from the path of duty), literally "walk crookedly"; in Church Latin, "to transgress".

#### /Transgredi/

Trans (through or the other side or across) + gredi (to go)

#### Dutch: /Overtreden/

Je niet aanhouden aan (een regel of wet); Bepaalde denkbeeldige of daadwerkelijke lijnen te buiten gaan.

Not adhering to (a rule or law); to go beyond certain imaginary or actual lines/limits.

**The definitions listed above and considering the etymology of the word from Old French and Latin, the following meaning is adopted:**

/actions that deviate from the norm and go beyond certain imaginary or actual boundaries such as laws, rules, limits and customs/



## TRANSGRESSION & ARCHITECTURE

*... transgression is a whole, of which architectural rules are merely one part.*

Bernard Tschumi, 1976, reprinted in 1996, p. 78

As this quote clarifies, the term 'transgression' in architecture is going beyond accepted ways of doing that have become the norm and exploring other ways of making architecture. These norms have become the standardized ways of doing architecture.

In an architectural domain dominated by standardized ways of production, a consequence of industrialization's drive for efficiency, we encounter a globalized, homogeneous built environment (see diagram 2). Places become like every other place (Unknown). Although standardization is not evil, since it ensures a mass supply of things and ensures efficiency, it leaves little room for progress, for novelty. Architecture, therefore, became a tool of capital, complicit in a purpose antithetical to its social mission (Architectural Review, n.d.).

Although there have already been attempts in the architectural discipline as counter-projects to question and criticize the way the built environment is shaped. Artists and architectural collectives such as Archizoom, Superstudio, Ant Farm, The Anarchitecture Group, and Drop City are some examples that were exploring alternative approaches. Their counter-projects have broadened the spectrum of possibilities and fostered critical discourse.

This is where transgression finds its power — anger and frustration are the driving motor. These marginalized groups, due to exclusion, resort to acts of transgression to assert their rights and secure their livelihoods. However, these types of civil disobedience are mostly not tolerated and are met with repercussions instead of acknowledgement. Most of the time, their intention is to get justice and assert their rights to the city as citizens

While transgressive practices can be forceful, charged with anger and frustration, the focus of this research is not the destructive aspects of it. This side is recognized but already extensively explored in multiple disciplines. Instead, the focus of this research is the generative potential of transgression. The aim is to explore how transgressive practices, such as civil disobedience through creative occupancy, can inform architecture and urban design. The objective is to open up discussions to explore how architecture can create contemporary situations.

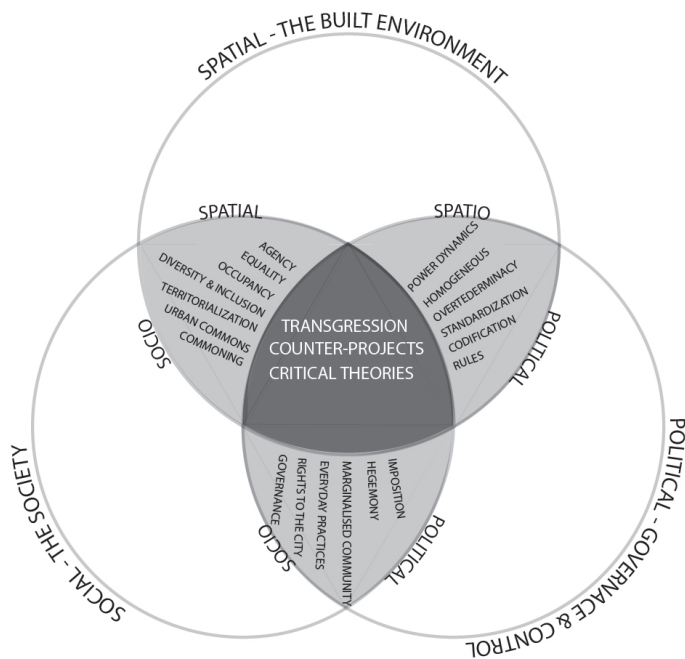
## CONTEXT

In addition, this topic holds relevance within the context of the ADC studio, which directs its focus towards urban commons like soil, water, energy, and mobility in the city. To study a city and neglect its sewers and power supplies means you miss essential aspects of distributional justice and planning power (Graham & Marvin, 2001, p. 16). So, urban commons are imperative to understand equality and justice. These commons are highly governed and controlled, directly juxtaposing transgressive practices. However, urban commons can be utilized to facilitate commoning to create a more just city based on the notions of the right to the city in a less imposed manner.

### Madrid as backdrop

Transgressive practices are more prevalent in bigger cities, like Madrid, which is the context for this project. As a metropolis, Madrid has complex structures of hierarchies, laws, and a diverse array of marginalized communities who do not or cannot conform to the established way of life.

Madrid, like many other urban centres, has witnessed countercultural movements and transgressive practices. An important moment of transgression in the form of urban squatting at Puerta del Sol in 2011 manifested itself in the built environment. It was a powerful movement/protest that showed the generative potential of civil disobedience.



**Diagram 2:** Shows the relevant concepts in overlapping domains where things become productive

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### **Main research question:**

*What if transgressive practices through occupancy, such as squatting and public space occupation could inform architectural design and, in turn, generate other ways of living for the marginalised groups and communities of Madrid?*

### **Sub-questions:**

#### **Explorative part:**

**Q1:** Who are the marginalized groups in Madrid that engage in urban space occupation?

**Q2:** How do these marginalized communities occupy various urban space?

**Q3:** To what extent do these transgressive practices provide empowerment for these marginalized communities?

**Q4:** What were the underlying reasons behind engaging in these transgressive practices?

#### **Speculative part:**

**Q1:** What if objects and systems of transgressive practices are utilized in order to dissipate inequality?

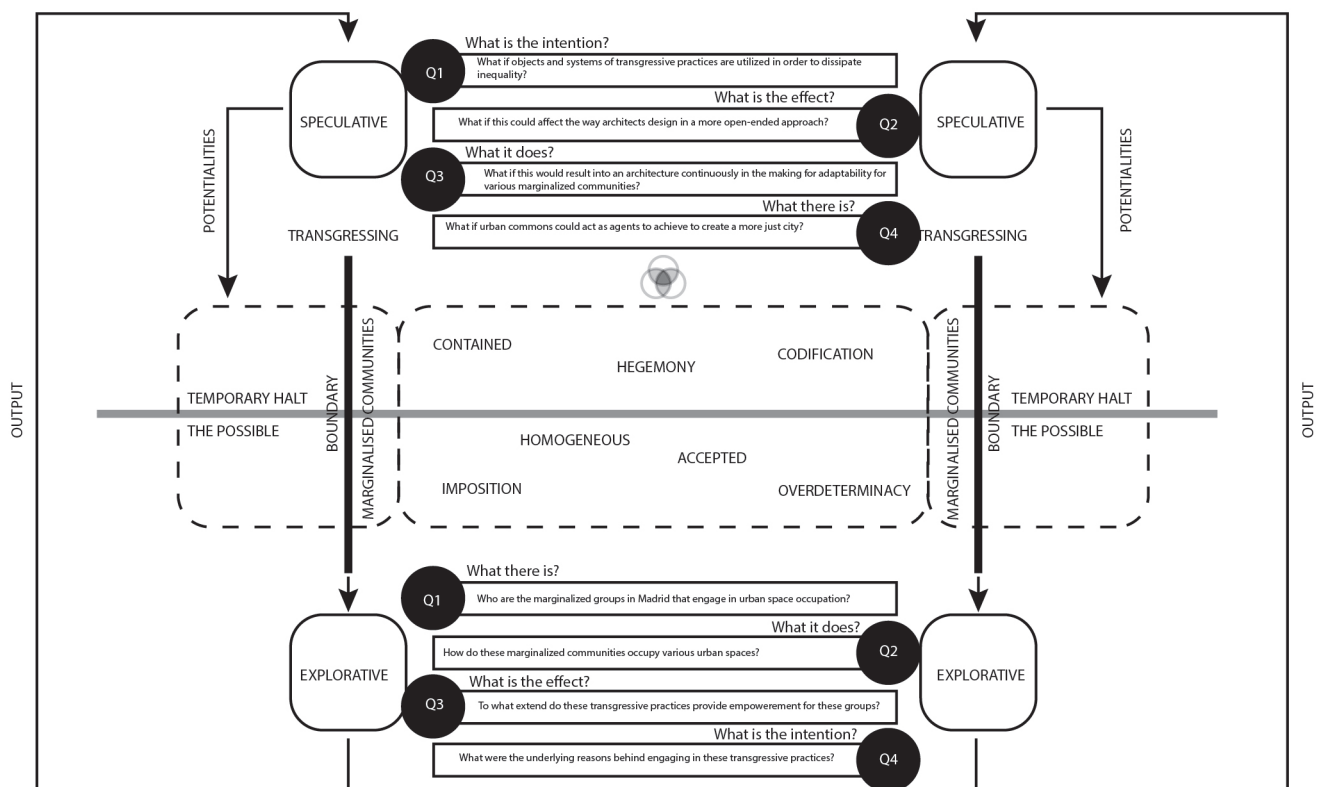
**Q2:** What if this could affect the way architects design in a more open-ended approach?

**Q3:** What if this would result into an architecture continuously in the making for adaptability for various marginalized communities?

**Q4:** What if urban commons could act as agents to achieve to create a more just city?

# PROBLEMATIZATION DIAGRAM

**Diagram 3:** Shows how transgression occurs and shows the explorative and speculative distinction with the subsequent research questions



## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*"Limits remain, for transgression does not mean the methodological destruction of any code or rule that concerns space or architecture. On the contrary it introduces new articulations between inside and outside, between concept and experience. Very simply it means overcoming unacceptable prevalences."*

Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture & Disjunctions*, p. 78

Although transgression was introduced in other disciplines, architect Bernard Tschumi conveyed this bridge and brought the concept of transgression into architectural discourse. Tschumi argues that architectural theory is an elaboration of rules and that theorists rarely talk about their transgression. However, he explains that transgression is a whole, of which architectural rules are merely one part (Tschumi, 1996, p.66). In essence, this suggests that anything beyond accepted and tested theories and rules may be considered transgressive, yet it represents only a part of the possibilities within architectural practice.

Bernard Tschumi concludes his essays by emphasizing that in order to change the capitalist, imposing nature of cities, one ought to design the conditions that will make it possible for a non-hierarchical, non-traditional society to happen. As Michel Foucault points out, there is no liberating architecture. He argues that liberty is a practice. Non-hierarchical composition cannot guarantee an open society or equality in politics (Allen, 1999, p.102).

Tschumi, on that account, suggests that our experience should be strategized through architecture, steering away from imposing masterplans and fixed places, and instead embracing the concept of a new heterotopia (Tschumi, 1996, p.259). A term extensively explored by Michiel Dhaene and Lieven De Cauter in their book 'Heterotopia and the City,' including heterotopia as Michel Foucault coined it and a new understanding of public space heterotopias.

In 2013, the *Architectural Design* journal dedicated an entire issue to the topic of 'Architecture of Transgression,' delving into the challenging and generative potential of transgressive practices in the realm of architecture (p. 15).

*Transgression is neither good nor evil, it depends on the personal position. It is a challenge that forces recalibration of what is accepted. It is pushing at the boundaries of what architecture is, and what it can be. For architecture to have a fertile design culture, it has to move along with the times, so that the core is challenged and propelled forward by those operating at the margins*

(*Architecture of Transgression*, 2013, p.5)

As previously discussed by Lefebvre, the journal issue also emphasizes the role of events outside the official world. These events serve as the temporary suspensions of the established norms and allow us to revisit our understanding of those norms and to recalibrate their meaning (*Architecture of Transgression*, 2013, p. 19). One illustrative example is the carnival. As an analogy, it introduces the notion of architecture that transgresses the normative hierarchies and processes of production.

## GLOSSARY

**Transgression:**

An act that goes against a law, rule, or code of conduct; an offence

**Dissidence:**

Protest against official policy

**Governance:**

The action or manner of governing a state, organization, etc.

**Boundaries:**

A line which marks the limits of an area or conceptual boundaries

**Limits:**

A point or level beyond which something does not or may not extend or pass

**Codes of conduct:**

Set of rules around behaviour

**Norms:**

Something that is usual, typical, or standard

**Violation:**

To break or fail to comply with a rule

**Disobedience:**

Failure or refusal to obey rules or someone in authority

**Marginalized:**

A person, group or concept treated as insignificant or peripheral

**Urban politics:**

Diverse political structures in urban areas

**Civil disobedience:**

The refusal to comply with certain laws considered unjust, as a peaceful form of political protest

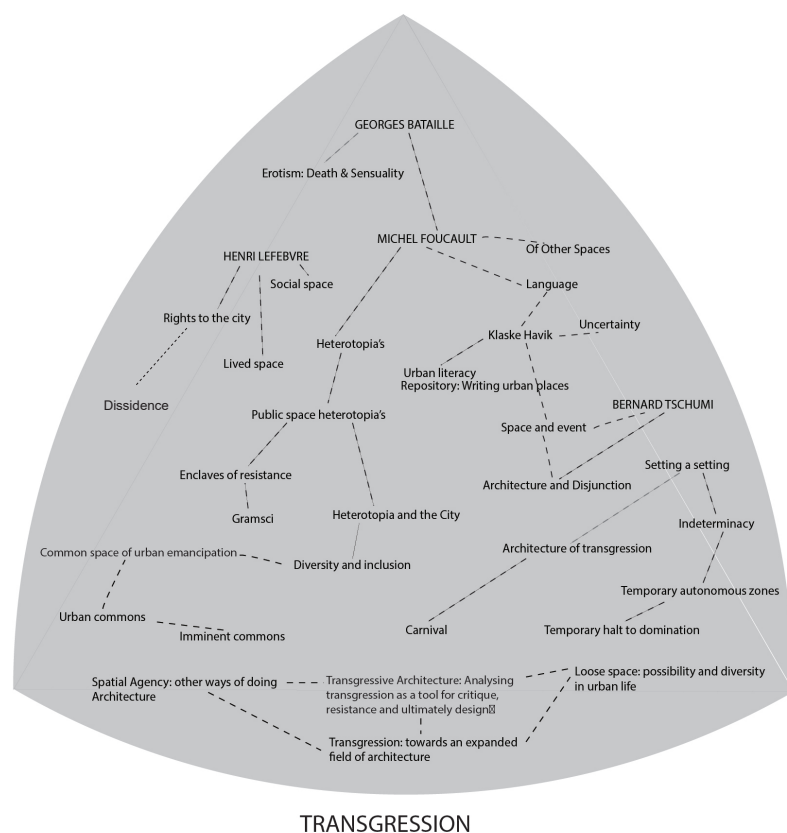


## THEORETICAL LAYERING

For the theoretical approach, diverse related concepts will be explored, on top of the existing literature about transgression (see diagram 4). Dissidence is another key term that will be explored further. It is a fundamental questioning of professional, cultural and political conventions (Weizman, 2014, p.1-12).

Examining the 'right to the city,' as coined by Henri Lefebvre, emphasizes the importance of equality, which encompasses not just equal rights and opportunities but also the equitable distribution of urban resources. Closely related aspects to equality and the right to the city are diversity and inclusion, essential for coexistence in the city. Creating this diversity within a city enhances its vitality and fosters multiple and varied activities (McGrath, 2013, p.46). As Can Altay argued, society is a collective of individuals that have nothing in common. Therefore, we should strive for diversity and inclusion within our cities (Architecture of Transgression, 2013, p. 104).

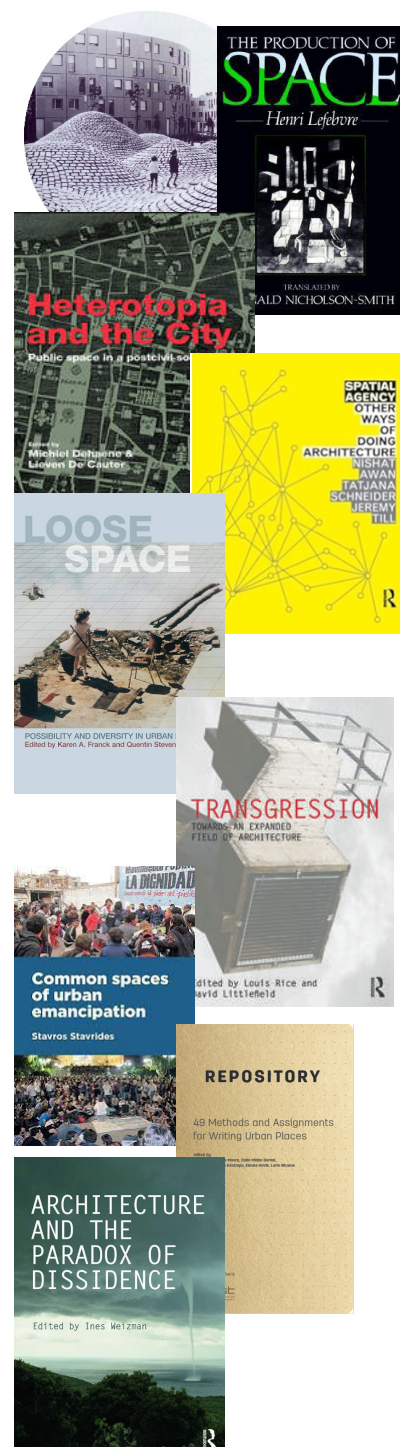
Bernard Tschumi emphasized the need to design conditions, an idea put differently by Can Altay and coined as 'setting a setting' (Architecture of Transgression, 2013, p. 107). The concept of 'temporary autonomous zones,' introduced by Hakim Bey, will be explored further on this account. Emphasizing individualized architecture that caters to inhabitants' needs, this approach creates flexible cities that embrace uncertainty (McGrath, 2013, p.46). A loose fit is proposed between the activity and the enclosing envelope. It is an architecture not invested in durability, stability, and certainty, but an architecture that leaves space for the uncertainty of the real (Allen, 1999, p.102).



Poiesis of Transgression  
THEORIES TO EXPLORE

Henri Lefebvre

## The Right to the City



**Diagram 4:** Visualizes the correlations between related, authors, readings and concepts, to the concept of transgression

## METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This research aims to gain a better understanding of transgressive practices like the occupancy by marginalized groups and communities, assess their generative potential, and explore alternative ways of making architecture in response to their needs.

The multidimensional nature of transgression, spanning spatial, social, and political domains, requires a methodology that reflects the interdisciplinarity of the topic. A mixed-research approach is suitable, given all the diverse analytical methods needed for each of these domains.

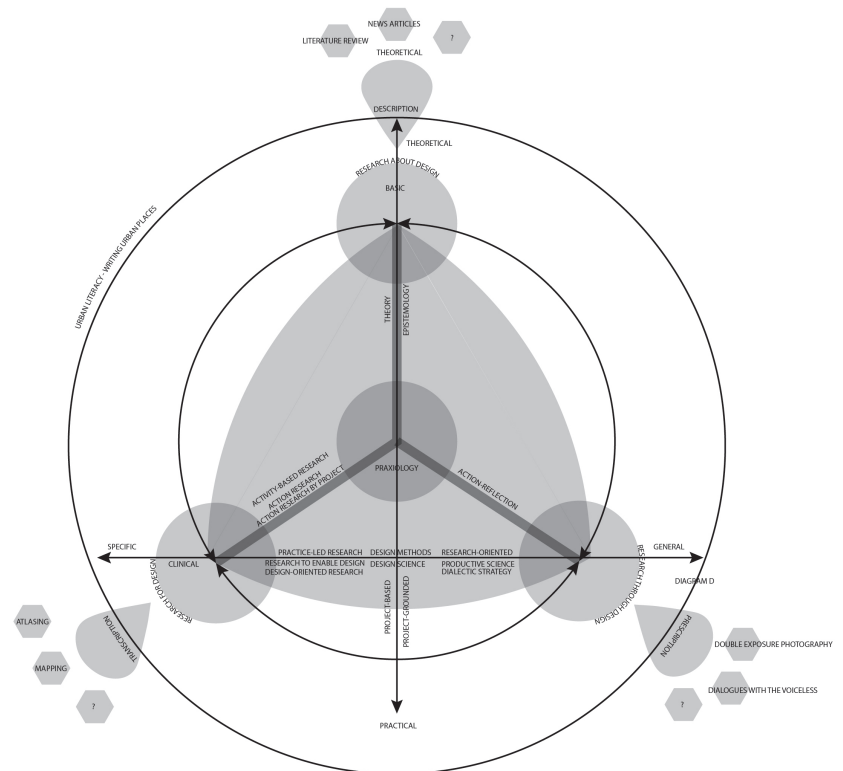
Those who say that architecture is impure if it must borrow its arguments from other disciplines not only forget the inevitable interferences of culture, economy and politics but also underestimate the ability of architecture to accelerate the workings of culture by contributing to its polemic. As practice and as theory architecture must import and export.

*Bernard Tschumi, Architecture and Disjunction, (p.17)*

As the quote by Bernard Tschumi clarifies, and Klaske Havik has expanded on it further, it is important to bridge different disciplines for the exploration of this hybrid topic but also to employ different sets of methods that would aid in uncovering aspects for a better understanding of it (Havik, n.d., p.59). Architecture must operate at the scale of a broader territory (Sheppard, n.d., p.79), in order to create these bridges.

This research consists of three parts: theoretical, explorative, and speculative approaches. This division is essential in understanding transgression within the architectural discipline, in practices, and in imagining other ways of making architecture. There is a clear distinction between lab-based research and field-based contextualization to create meaningful ways of living at the local level. This division aligns with the praxiology of design research that elaborates on research about, for, and through design, as structured by Frankel & Racine (Frankel & Racine, 2010), (see diagram 5).

**Diagram 5:** Visualizes the methodological approach based on design praxiology, added layer of urban literacy and the subsequent methods what will be employed



# METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

## Urban Literacy

Based on my experience in experimental writing and building stories, I've recognized the generative potential of this method. Rather than imposing specific programs or designs, I will use urban literacy as an interactive dialogue. In urban literacy, language becomes a tool to describe experience but also generate meaning. In literature, the experiences of space and spatial practice are often much more accurately described than in professional writing on architecture and cities (Havik, n.d., p.59). This relates to the lived space. This approach aligns with Bernard Tschumi's concept of how architecture scripts spaces and sequences, as seen in his *Manhattan Transcripts*, for example.

**Theoretical Part:** The Preparation

**Urban literacy:** Description of ambiguous relationships between concepts and the spaces, between the subjects and the objects

In this initial phase, the research inquiry will adopt a research-about-design approach and delve deeper into transgression in literature, in particular, the occupation of space. It will expand on related literature and concepts as discussed in the theoretical framework.

**Explorative Part:** The Lab --> The Field

**Urban literacy:** Transcription of transgressive practices and interactions

In this second phase, the research employs a research-for-design approach, focusing on real-world cases of space occupation within the context of Madrid.

This phase involves creating an atlas of specific transgressive practices, emphasizing the connection between objects, spaces, and events. For this research, objects and things are the focus of the atlas, as they are the signs where human relations are embedded. Our relationships, social bonds, would be as airy as clouds were it not for the contracts between subjects. The object, specific to the Hominidae, stabilizes our relationships (Serres, 1995, p. 87). To achieve this, marginalized groups and communities will be approached to gain firsthand insight into their daily lives and narratives. Additionally, in order to uncover these practices in the context of Madrid, various methods, such as mapping (cartographic and experimental) and actor-network visualization, will be employed to uncover the phenomenon. Therefore, methods of anonymization have to be explored.

**Speculative Approach:** The Field --> The Lab

**Urban Literacy:** Prescription of Reality and Imagination

In the final phase, the research shifts towards a research-through-design approach, which has a speculative nature. The research outcomes will inform the latter part of the graduation studio, informing the design as an experiment. It should, however, be remembered that the aim is not to provide concrete solutions but to create design knowledge based on practice and resulting in an applied experiment through imagination. Architecture has too slow of a pace for fixing things, however it can speculate.

Therefore, the research will employ imaginative methods that afford a shift in perspective, including double-exposure and dialogues with the voiceless - both human and non-human agents (Bernal, Havik, Moura, Niculae & Restrepo, 2023). Since this would be context-specific, the design outcomes cannot be considered applicable to other contexts, but its approach could serve as an example in similar conditions for a design assignment.

## ARGUMENT OF RELEVANCE

### **How could this topic be relevant to the architectural discourse and urban planning?**

Architecture has a social duty, but the capitalistic approach often places it in an antagonistic position. This domination of the built environment has caused marginalized groups to be deprived of their rights and opportunities. In Madrid, like many other big capital cities, this inequality can be observed, and it is palpable in the topography of the city. Marginalized groups are struggling with the societal boundaries imposed by hegemonic structures.

Transgressive practices are attempts to transcend these constructed boundaries. While it is a violent act in the sense that it overcomes and goes beyond these boundaries, it harbours generative potential since this is the only attempt that explores the uncharted, the unknown. However, rather than having a black-and-white, inside-and-outside division of the two sides of these boundaries, it is essential to place these practices on a spectrum.

Understanding these practices is crucial for the creation of non-hierarchical, more equitable cities where diverse communities coexist. These practices serve as temporary halts to domination, everyday life, and hegemonic structures, providing the space to question reality and come up with other ways of making architecture that is diverse and inclusive. This will recalibrate our ideas on hierarchies and drive societal progress in necessary directions.

This research does not aim to offer universal design solutions, given this notion goes against the discussed concepts in the previous chapters. Rather, it acts as a didactic and pedagogical guide on how to navigate similar conditions beyond conventions and poorly understood, marginalized communities."

*With its threefold phases - not necessarily in the same order, ideally moving back and forth - aims to understand the transgressive practices both in the architectural discipline and practice in order to shift the perspective rather than imposing a design on a poorly understood part of society. It aims to understand and, through urban literacy, imagine other ways of making architecture that are not yet studied.*

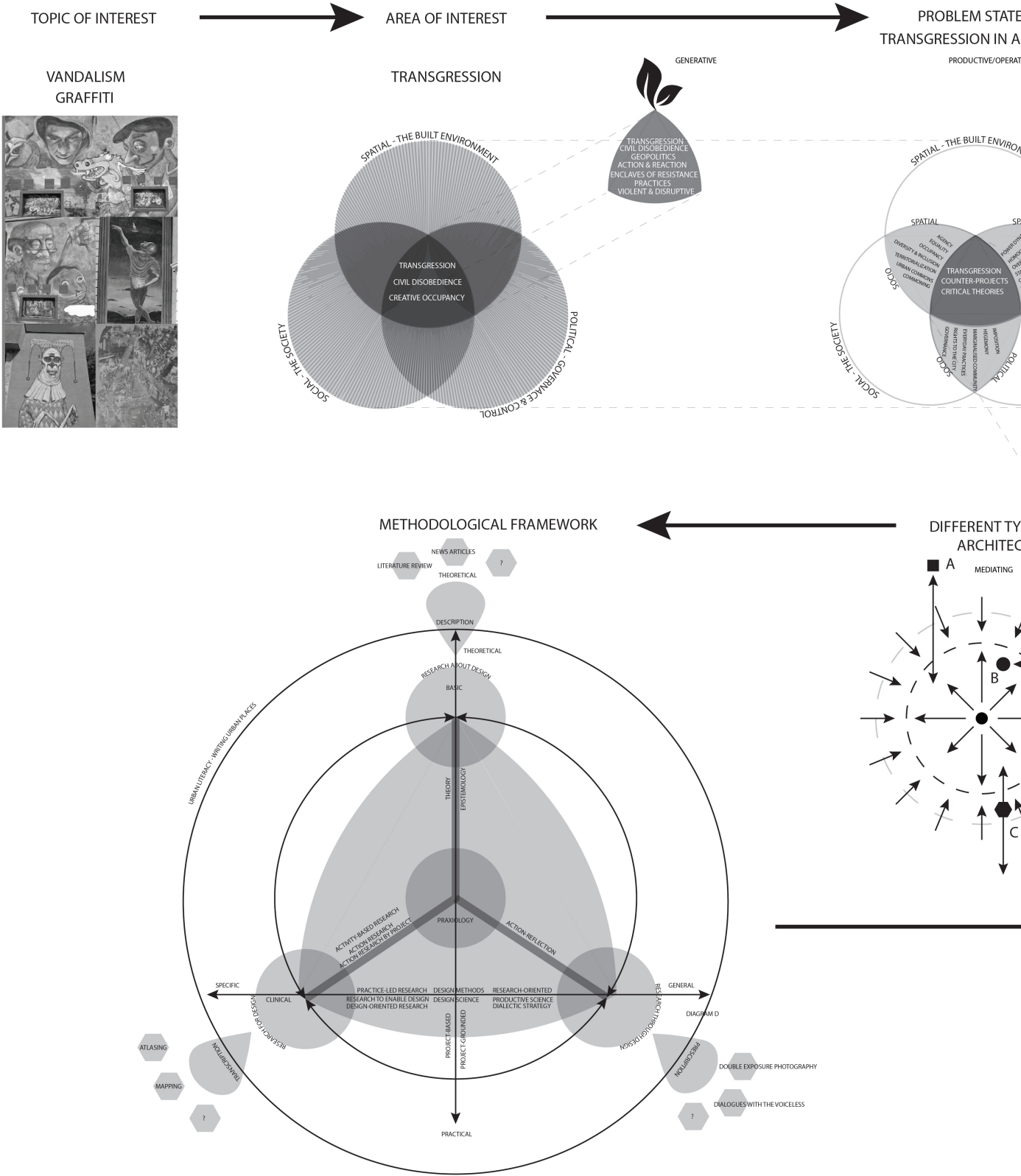
*Transgression is a part where architectural rules make up only part of the potentialities. This goes to show that boundaries are constructs and we should overcome these to explore what potentials lay out there.*

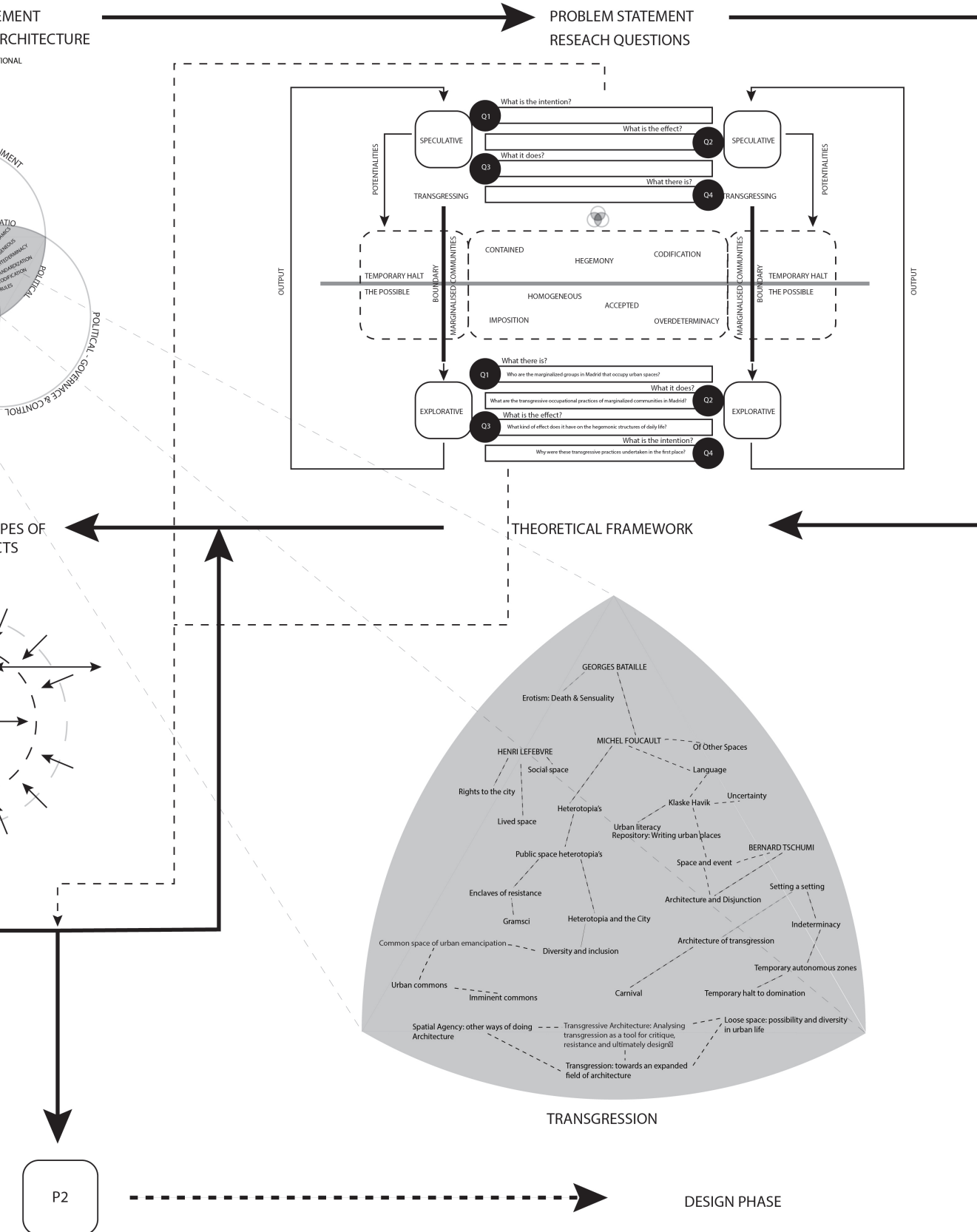
*Bernard Tschumi, Architecture & Disjunction, 1996, p.66*





RESEARCH DIAGRAM





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## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Annotation for some of the books do delve deeper into:*

### **Architecture and the Paradox of Dissidence by Inez Weizman**

This book expands on a spectrum of dissident spatial practices to highlight the overlapping web of politics, culture, forensics and agency of the term dissidence.

### **The dead zones and the Architecture of transgression by Gil M. Doron**

This book investigates the dead zones and how transgressive practices can be adopted to subvert power structures. It explores the potentiality of transgression.

### **Loose space: possibility and diversity in urban life by Karen A Franck and Quentin Stevens**

The book explores the experimental and informal use of public spaces and how users appropriate these spaces according to their needs. Activities like familiar, unexpected or planned, momentary or long-lasting make urban spaces loose according to the book.

### **Spatial Agency: other ways of doing Architecture by Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider. Jeremy Til**

Collated examples of alternative approaches to architecture and design. These are good examples of how architectural practices can become more richer, open and inclusive.

### **The Architecture of Transgression by Jonathan Mosley, Rachel Sara & Can Altay**

Transgression opens up new possibilities for practice. Highlights the positive impact of transgressive practices to reinvent and reposition the architectural profession.

### **Transgression: towards an expanded field of architecture by Louis Rice and David Littlefield**

This book explores how the transgression of physical and conceptual boundaries produces new architectures and discourse. It draws an interdisciplinary approach from disciplines such as architecture, geography, urban studies, sociology, fine-art, film-making, photography and environmentalism.