

# **POROSITY STATEMENT**

## **Background to the Porosity Studio**

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My vision for the city is bound up in the idea of architecture as a process of becoming rather than a grid of pedestal objects. I am interested in the parasitic structures of connection, between public and private zones, and how they might be theoretically framed and accelerated in production. I see the city as a landscape, a three-dimensional journey, and believe in the dissolution of architecture, as we know it.

In 2000, I established the "Porosity Studio" at the UNSW College of Fine Arts. This group of practitioners and students forms a think-tank to explore all ideas associated with public space and to establish a model for a future Research Centre within COFA.

I received a 3-year Australian Research Council Discovery Grant in 2003 to test my own works in this field. The title of this research is:

***Porosity: The revision of public space in the city using public art to test the functional boundaries of built form.***

This research tested the functional boundaries ascribed to the physical dimensions of public space in the city. It did this via the device of public art and the procedure of comprehensive mapping of both internal and external spaces in Sydney.

The term "*porosity*" describes the nature of the edge condition, which exists between the skin of architecture and the public space of the city.

**Following this research I hope it will be possible to predict or dictate where new connections or parasitic attachments might occur.**

Porosity research accelerates the process of making public space by re-negotiating corridors of private space, which carry the "public" on its journey from public to final private destination spaces. These spaces include lift wells, fire escapes, lift lobbies, toilets, corridor connections etc. By characterising these spaces, and colouring them with particular qualities, types of public spaces are invented.

The research resulted in a series of virtual 3D maps, computer driven images and physical scale models of an expanded field of public space in central Sydney. It also produced an index of spaces, which redefines our perception of the limits of both architecture and public space. Public space is largely misunderstood and under-utilised. Proof of this lies in the endless empty foyers and deserted leftover spaces in subways and beneath freeways. Currently, the boundary for public space exists at the threshold of architecture. However, this orthodoxy has left the definition of foyers, toilets and the means of egress within and between buildings within an indeterminate zone. The mapping of all the ancillary spaces, which facilitate public space or movement, will create a comprehensive understanding of the totality of public space in the western city.

**The desired effect of this research is to expand the uses of public space within the city and alter the design of buildings via their linking structures.**

The research builds directly on Rosalind Krauss's theory of an *Expanded Field* of practice in which "axiomatic structures" intervene in the real space of architecture. It also builds on the works of Gordon Matta Clark, and the writing and works of Vito Acconci.

Gordon Matta-Clark's physical attacks on architectural fabric illustrated graphically how vulnerable architecture can be to redefinition via art. The image of an artist physically cutting slots and holes in a range of buildings, changed for all time the relationship between art and architecture and reduced buildings to armatures for future actions. This image reinforces the aim of the study to challenge the current perception of buildings in the city and reinforce the idea of buildings merging into a viral mass breathing the oxygen of public space.

Lebbeus Woods adds to the predictive power of Matta Clark's actions by creating images of radical reconstruction of cities damaged by war. Fragmented facades become the platform for scab-like attachments and connectors. These new structures mediate between the armature of the architecture and public space. More recently, these virtual actions mirror the theoretical positioning of Diller and Scofidio whose practice as artist/architect/academics has used architecture as a surgical instrument to operate on itself. Via installations, which often use devices such as video surveillance, their art activity addresses the blurred boundaries of

architecture and the body public. This work points to another frontier of construction which will invert our perception of what a city is, pushing the emphasis towards attachments and penetrations rather than the built envelopes of buildings.

Central to the idea of Porosity is the vision of the city as a landscape, which responds to the nomadic movements of the pedestrian. Porosity research will map nomadic space and overlay it with sedentary space. Essentially nomadism gave rise to architecture through the development of *Menhirs*, our first symbolic structures within the landscape. It can be argued that “wandering” created a need for these symbolic structures as a way of ordering our world. Thus, the space of the path precedes architectonic space. Nomadic space is “smooth” space as described by philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, as opposed to the “striated” or structured space of conventional architecture. Nomadic movements within this smooth space are marks or strokes that shift with each journey. Understanding more about these journeys, and the qualities of the spaces which influence them, will help to reinforce priorities in urban planning which lean towards the visitor rather than the owner.

As a direct result of this position, my interest is with the artists, architects and art movements who look at the built environment as a place they can directly reinterpret or change. This project moves beyond Modernism to embrace the site and context. The direct lineage of Porosity lies in the anti-art movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Challenges to Modernism were led by the phenomena “Dada”. In 1921 the Dadaists created their first urban excursion to “banal places” in Paris and in so doing took us from the “spaces of spectacle” ie Galleries, to the open air. These attempts to link the everyday life with art were picked up by the Surrealists, under Breton, in an ongoing series of what they called “Deambulations” and “driftings” within the city. Artists met and navigated parts of cities and the countryside mapping dislocated journeys of chance in order to find a new poetry within built form.

Breton transformed Dada anti-art into surrealism via the expanded field of psychology. The surrealists sought a type of pscho-geography within their city roarings or deambulations. The new city maps they created sought to colour spaces that you like against spaces that you might avoid. Grey zones represented an oscillation between attraction and repulsion. Avoiding the nihilism of Dada they sought to expose something hidden, in keeping with their links to Freud. If Dada had led the charge in its direct intervention within the city, it was the Situationists in the 60’s, under Guy Debord, who challenged the Surrealists and again sought to take the potential of the Dada project to its extreme consequences. ie: direct action leading to revolution.

So we have moved through the banal city of Dada, with its automatic writing in real space, through the unconscious and dreamlike city of the surrealists and onto the playful and nomadic city of the Situationists.

**The next stage, I believe, lies with Porosity which will combine the direct action of the Situationists with a new and refined methodology, seeking to accommodate speculation about subtle programmatic shifts using new connective structures. Via such a methodology artists will invent projects with architects and collaborate with interested stakeholders in projects, which transform existing structures via the process of retrofit.**