

Queer Anti-Urbanism: An Exploration of Queer Space Through Design

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Abstract : Queer discourse has been tied to a middle-class, urban-centric, white approach to the discussion of queerness. In doing so, the multilayeredness of queer existence has been washed away in favour of palatable queer occupation. This paper uses design to explore a queer anti-urbanist approach to facilitate a more egalitarian architectural occupancy. Scott Herring's work on queer anti-urbanism is key to this approach. Herring redeploys anti-urbanism from its historical understanding of open hostility, rejection and desire to destroy the city towards a mode of queer critique that counters normative ideals of homonormative metronormative gay lifestyles. He questions how queer identity has been closed down into a more diminutive frame where those who do not fit within this frame are subjected to persecution or silenced through their absence. We extend these ideas through design to ask how a queer anti-urbanist approach facilitates a more egalitarian architectural occupancy. Following a "design as research" methodology, the design outputs allow a vehicle to ask how we might live, otherwise, in architectural space. A design as research methodologically is a process of questioning, designing and reflecting – in a non-linear, iterative approach – establishes itself through three projects, each increasing in scale and complexity. Each of the three scales tackled a different body relationship. The project began exploring the relations between body to body, body to known others, and body to unknown others. Moving through increasing scales was not to privilege the objective, the public and the large scale; instead, 'intra-scaling' acts as a tool to re-think how scale reproduces normative ideas of the identity of space. There was a queering of scale. Through this approach, the results were an installation that brings two people together to co-author space where the installation distorts the sensory experience and forces a more intimate and interconnected experience challenging our socialized proxemics: knees might touch. To queer the home, the installation was used as a drawing device, a tool to study and challenge spatial perception, drawing convention, and as a way to process practical information about the site and existing house – the device became a tool to embrace the spontaneous. The final design proposal operates as a multi-scalar boundary-crossing through "private" and "public" to support kinship through communal labour, queer relationality and mooring. The resulting design works to set adrift bodies in a sea of sensations through a mix of pleasure programmes. To conclude, through three design proposals, this design research creates a relationship between queer anti-urbanism and design. It asserts that queering the design process and outcome allows a more inclusive way to consider place, space and belonging. The projects lend to a queer relationality and interdependence by making spaces that support the unsettled, out-of-place, but is it queer enough?

Keywords : queer, queer anti-urbanism, design as research, design

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