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re:bodying the virtual: a bilateral excavation in virtual interior(s)

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abstract:

This visual essay is a constellation of images, text, places, objects, and projects which aims to interrogate the kind of interiorities that are generated when two bodies interact from distant locations through predominantly digital platforms.

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image credits:

Alis Garlick & Remco Roes (2014–2020), except for p.30: Pauline Poelmans, and p.31, white figure: Sophia Koudouris

As we melt between digital moulds and virtual shapes, only to take a breath in real life (IRL), our bodies and the objects that surround us remain stable. These conditions force us to examine an expanded notion of interiority; one that is brought about through the interfaced body.

This visual essay is composed of an associative thread of images that are sourced from several collaborative projects we (A + R) have conducted over the past six years. The context in which these collaborations took place include a symposium, exhibitions, various video works, and the teaching of a semi-virtual interior design studio in Melbourne. A crucial aspect within these situations was a shared spatial and didactical praxis that was located on opposite sides of the planet—Belgium and Australia.

The collaboration was thus largely determined by the gaps between A + R: the geographical separation, the physicality or virtuality of site, and the millisecond delay of the video feed. The virtual screen that speared through each interaction meant that the technologies and processes employed were often undulating attempts to minimise these gaps.

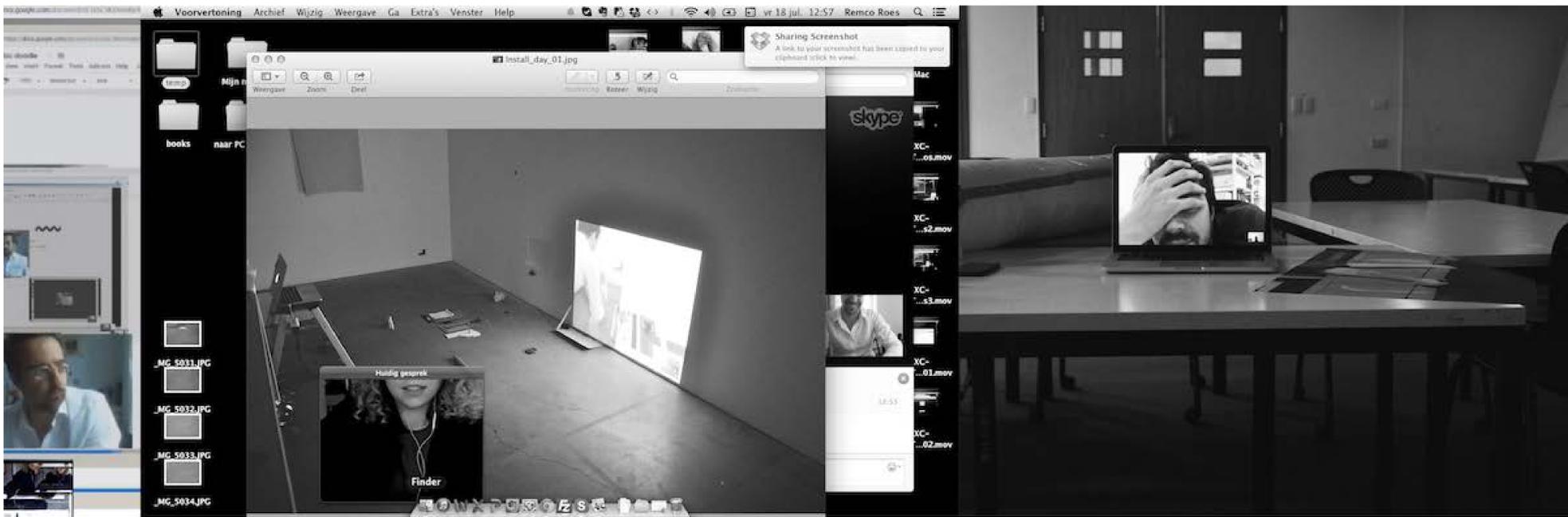
To compose this visual essay, the image archive of each collaborative project was examined through a peripheral lens, in order to create relations that interrogate the spatial and conceptual implications of bridging this physical distance. The anachronistic approach to the images allowed new forms of configurations to arise, emphasising the specific spatial situations over any previous context or anecdotal chronology.

As a consequence, elaborating on the precise details of each project seems to be somewhat beside the point. In fact, prosaic descriptions detract from what is actually important about these interactions. The textual interspersions throughout the essay are attempts to develop

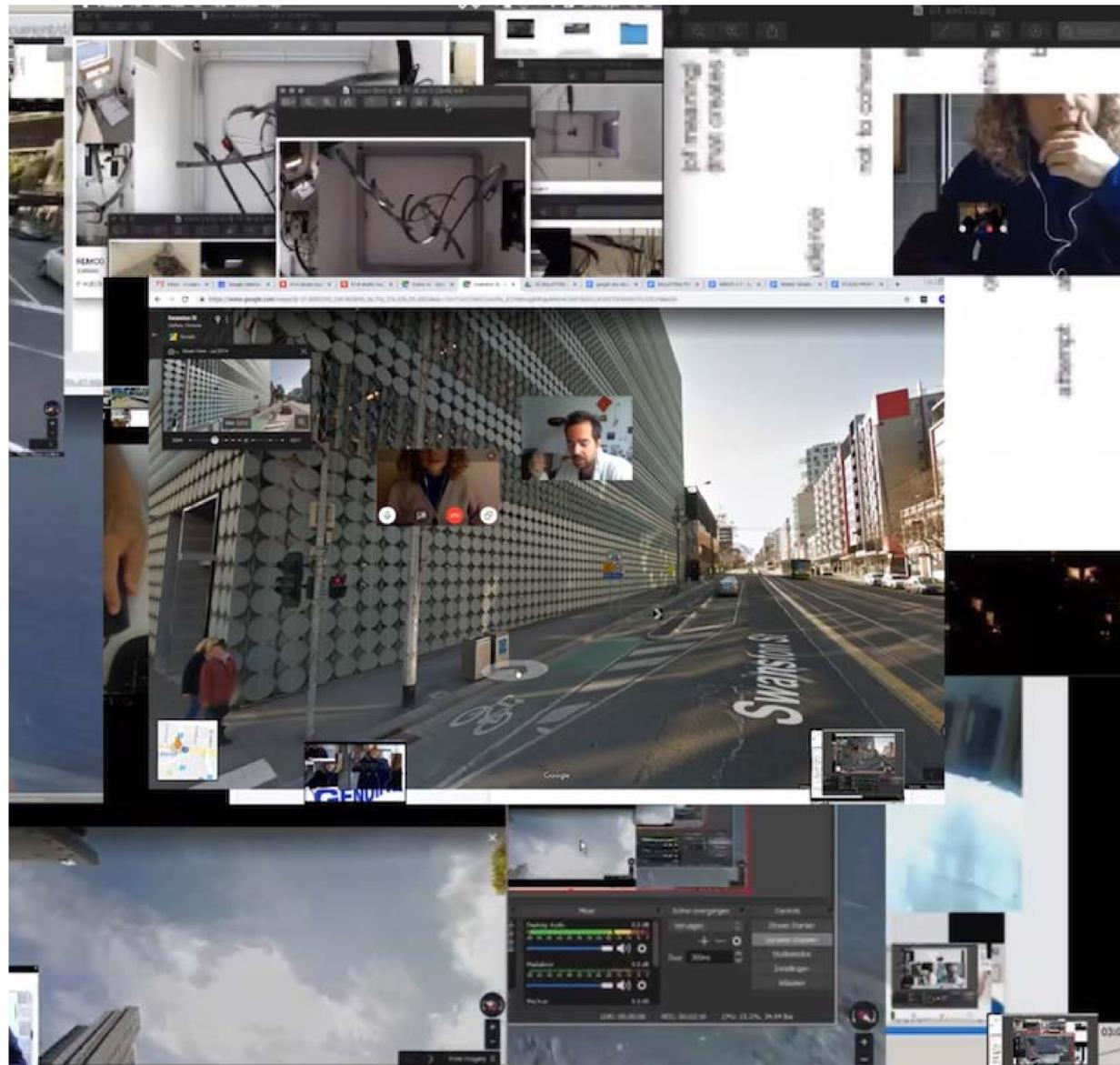
a syntax for pointing out what is conceptually relevant. They try to unpack—or make more accessible—the visual argumentation that the essay is constructed from, without ever claiming or providing unisonal clarity. The words do not function as explanations, but instead as musings that attempt to mark—and disclose—the various typologies, as well as to narrate the transition between them. They are attempts to describe both the experience of the digital landscape and the terrain itself.

In these thematic paragraphs, we have attempted to find language that resonates with the configurations of site that come together through the juxtapositions within the visual sequence. The collected imagery has been curated to lay bare the constituting components of this shared experience within digital space. In this way, the essay as a whole can be read as a subjective taxonomy of our digital communication of place as well as a truly digital simultaneous compression of it into one singular entity.

Ultimately, the resulting transmedial constellation of images, text, places, objects, and projects aims to interrogate the kind of interiorities that are generated when two bodies interact from distant locations through predominantly digital platforms. It describes an exchange between the virtual spaces that we occupy and the physicality of the bodies and objects that remain essential for this virtual occupation.

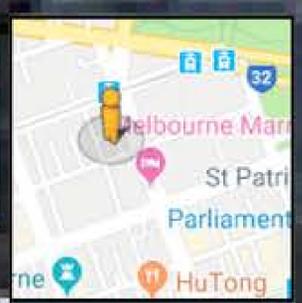
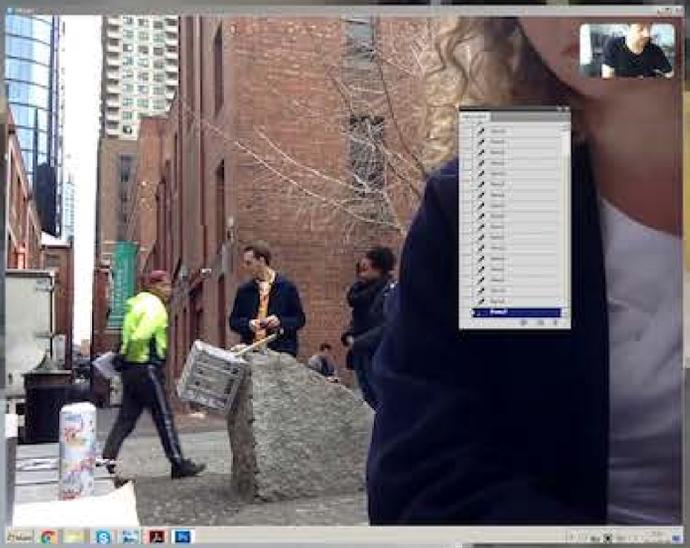
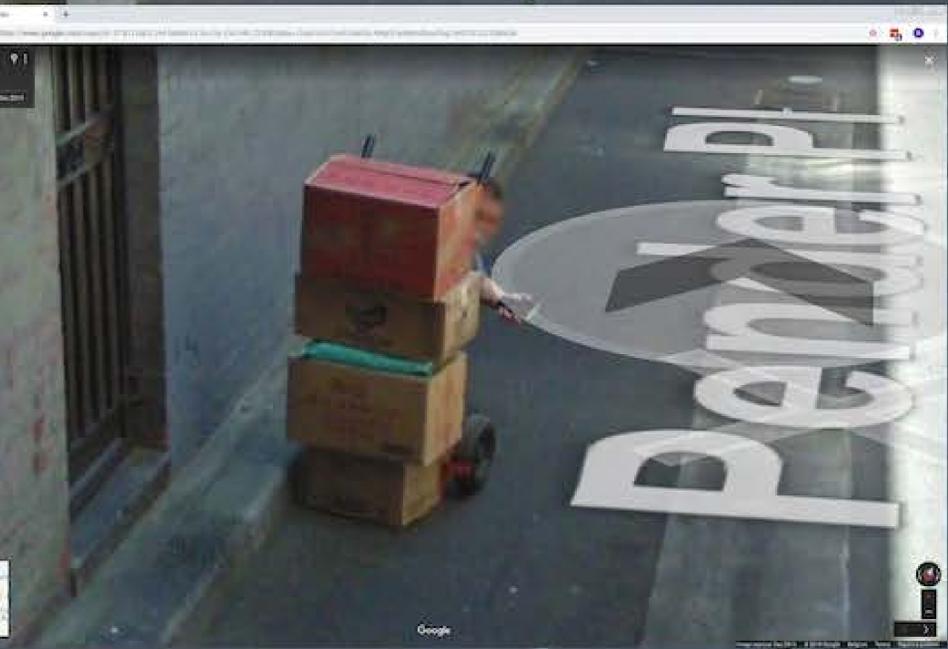
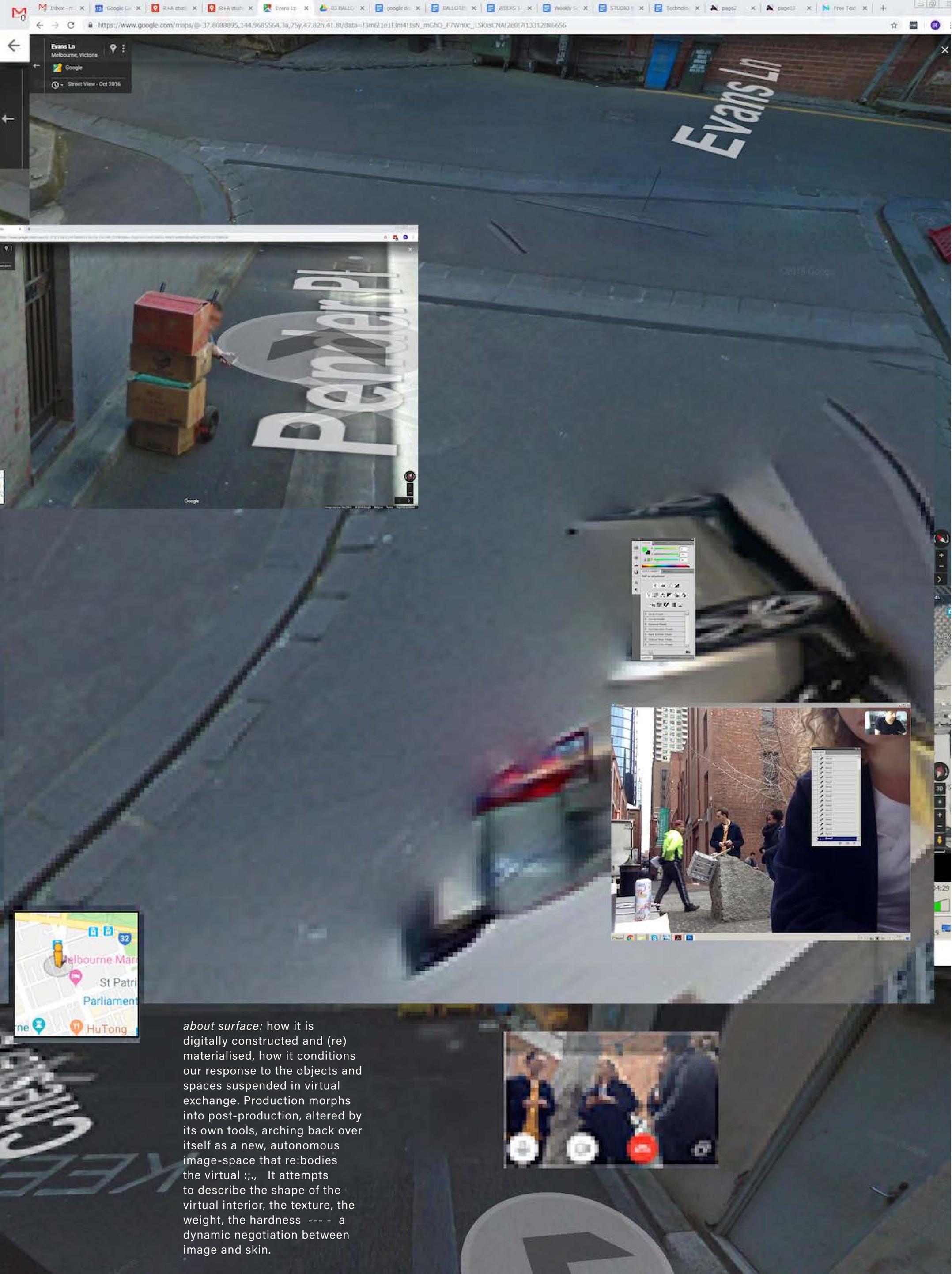


about chronology: a first dialogue of seven weeks. The objects were found and not searched for. Aimed not to belong to any aesthetic program or be of any particular scale. Likewise, written words were found and not searched for. Used to inject the objects with meaning and to solidify their purpose within the ongoing conversations. But always shifting. — We would work in two rooms simultaneously. The parameters of our collaboration were measureless, as our practices became tangled in a continuous exchange. This mode of working saw an emphasis on the dialogue surrounding the work, as opposed to the physicality of the objects themselves, using gallery and exhibition as laboratories for translating our language and our work.



about interfacing: not a spatial interface but a temporal moment, the networked space itself as a fluid medium. Its multiplicity lies within these edge conditions - in the RL but also within the unfolding, virtual interior. More than a multiple, the digital interfaces are a multiplicity with their own time zone; a revolving storage of objects, fields and relational assemblages. Circular time now streams objects in virtual space to become production tools in the performance of our shared duration.

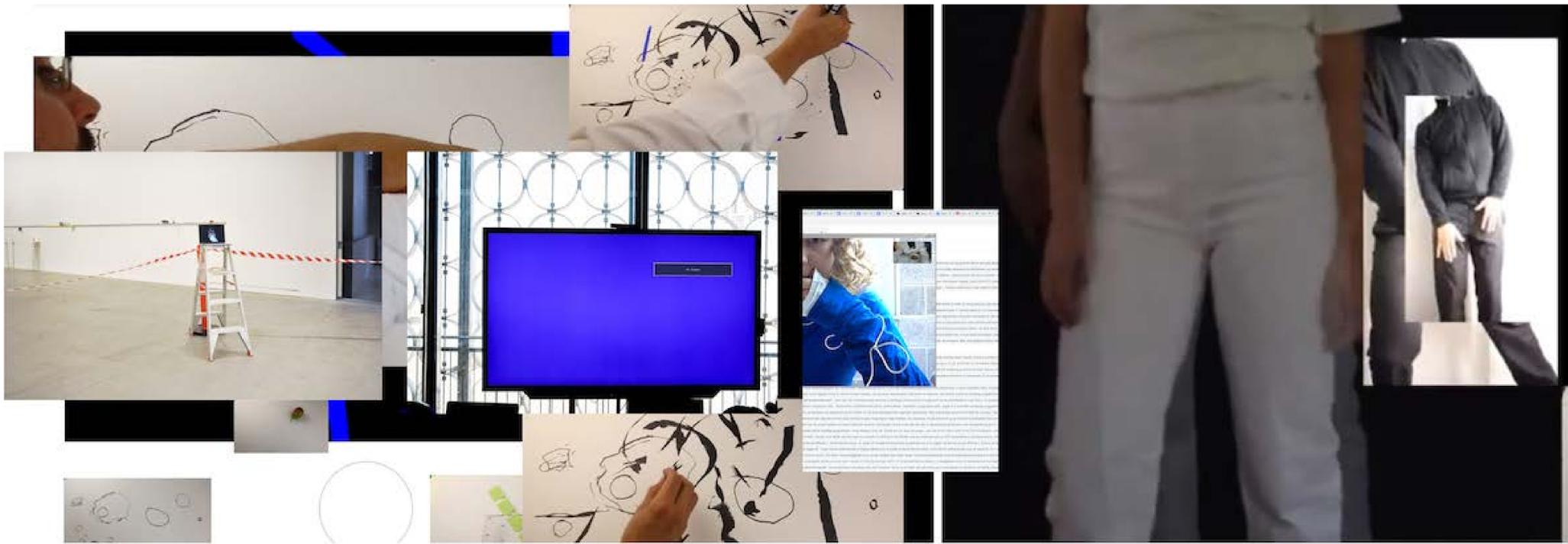
about desktop and tabletop: an exchange between digital and real-life spaces. Executed as a series of exercises that approach the urban within the context of interior design education. The city scaled down, from grid to a table, scaled up from a mark on a desktop to an intervention in actual urban space. _____, Students worked cross-dimensionally, observing opportunities where the mind and interfaced body are both intrinsically linked in dialogues with virtual spaces.



about surface: how it is digitally constructed and (re) materialised, how it conditions our response to the objects and spaces suspended in virtual exchange. Production morphs into post-production, altered by its own tools, arching back over itself as a new, autonomous image-space that re:bodies the virtual ;,. It attempts to describe the shape of the virtual interior, the texture, the weight, the hardness --- a dynamic negotiation between image and skin.

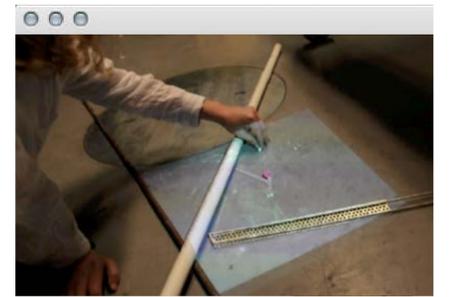


about perforations: a
perception for the un-seeable,
our collision between objects
and body, from one edge to
another. Movements from
inside to outside and back
again, until these edges meet.
The body mostly exists outside
this frame, these frames,
always isolated, through
the consequence of the digital
as we navigate our way back
inward, reaching toward
the next, objects, screen,
field, skin, ~ each / all /
contributing points in the net .



about connection: a digitised skin that has been constructed from two sides to bridge the delay between bodies. The ability to feel the assemblage through the screen distributes an agency for interconnectedness, not within the objects, but within the (re)production or digitisation of the situation itself. This extension of 'skin' within the 'virtual' results in a questioning of the veil-like qualities of 'digital connectivity' - now - draped over ~our engagement with 'body'.





about interpunction; a spatial
 connectivity that masks
 our physical distance --
 increasingly used in ~this
 dialogue - a
 remnant of these ___ slips in/
 of meaning. { a remaining ,
 revolving, evolving
 element of our interaction }
 *

the linguistic act of
 forcing a label
 (reasoning) (a fixed meaning)
 onto an event has, as a side-
 effect, resulted in the use
 of an expanded
 language, , , and a
 more overt use of
 symbols

and spacing.

'''

not as an
aesthetic
device - _____

but as a way of articulating
pluriformity
and marking ambiguity of
the actions that
took
place in
space.

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Remco Roes is an artist and a postdoctoral researcher at Hasselt University. His artistic practice departs from an archive of observations, traces and spaces that he happens to find on his path. Working attentively amongst these fragments results in spatial installations, artist publications and video works, balancing between speaking and remaining silent, intention and coincidence, purposeful work and the usefulness of residues and accidents. Roes' research focusses on disclosing the spatial concepts within his artistic practice ((secular sacred) (space) (in digital times)), as well as exploring the visual essay and vulnerable dialogue as vehicles for artistic research communication.

With an education in Commercial Photography and Interior Design (RMIT), **Alis Garlick's** practice explores the boundaries between image and object, engaging in diverse methods of spatial production. Alis explores the role of an interior designer potentiated within a contemporary art practice, shifting between the positions of observer and collaborator, neither singularly artist nor designer. With interests drawn from the intersections of curatorial research, recovered material and the virtual interior, her work uses collaboration as a tool for understanding and generating spatial dialogue(s).

We acknowledge that we live and work on the unceded lands and waters of the Boon Wurrung and Woi Wurrung people of the eastern Kulin Nations. We pay respect to country; to elders, past present and emerging.