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# idea journal

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(extra) ordinary interiors:  
practising critical reflection

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vol. 18, no. 01

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2021

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the journal of IDEA: the interior design +  
interior architecture educators association



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**(extra) ordinary interiors:  
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**the journal of IDEA: the interior design +  
interior architecture educators association**

**about**

IDEA (Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association) was formed in 1996 for the advancement and advocacy of education by encouraging and supporting excellence in interior design/interior architecture education and research within Australasia.

[www.idea-edu.com](http://www.idea-edu.com)

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- (a) encouraging and supporting excellence in interior design/interior architecture/spatial design education and research globally and with specific focus on Oceania; and
- (b) being an authority on, and advocate for, interior design/interior architecture/spatial design education and research.

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- (d) to foster an attitude of lifelong learning;
- (e) to encourage staff and student exchange between programs;
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ISSN 2208-9217

eISBN 978-3-88778-918-3

Published by Art Architecture Design Research (AADR): [aadr.info](http://aadr.info).

AADR publishes research with an emphasis on the relationship between critical theory and creative practice. AADR Curatorial Editor: Dr Rochus Urban Hinkel, Melbourne.

IDEA (Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association)  
ACN 135 337 236; ABN 56 135 337 236

Registered at the National Library of Australia

*idea journal* is published by AADR and is distributed through common ebook platforms. Selected articles are available online as open source at time of publication, and the whole issue is made open access on the *idea journal* website one year after its date of publication.



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**cover image**

Lying motionless, listless. Consuming time; being present, each moment folds into another. Surfaces becoming expanses of inflections of hue. Normality expands into a stream of observing luminosity. Still image from video by Chora Carleton, 2021.

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**this issue's provocation**

(Extra) Ordinary Interiors calls for contributions from academics, research students and practitioners that demonstrate contemporary modes of criticality and reflection on specific interior environments in ways that expand upon that which is ordinary (of the everyday, common, banal, or taken for granted).

This theme has two agendas: First, the desire to amplify critical reflection as a key practice of the disciplines associated with this journal's readership. In short, to prompt interior designers, interior architects, and spatial designers to be more proactive and experimental in asserting their specialist knowledge and expertise as critical commentary. This asks authors to reconsider the role of critique and criticism in their scholarly and creative works, or, to demonstrate how to reflect critically upon a design and to locate the design's relation to material, political, social, cultural, historical and geographical concerns. Such an enterprise may reveal whether models of criticality centred on judgement, authority and historicism are relevant, constructive, insightful or generative, or, as Bruno Latour poses, have they 'run out of steam'?<sup>01</sup> This exercise may prompt some to revisit key thinkers who pose new discursive, visual and temporal models for critical practice in this recent age of criticality. We draw your attention to *Critical Spatial Practice* by Nikolaus Hirsch and Markus Miessen, which asks for thinking "about 'space' without necessarily intervening in it physically, but trying to sensitise, promote, develop and foster an attitude towards contemporary spatial production, its triggers, driving forces, effects and affects... [to] speculate on the modalities of production and potential benefits of the role of 'the outsider.'"<sup>02</sup>

We also look to Jane Rendell's introduction to *Critical Architecture*, which asserts that criticism and design are linked together by virtue of their shared interests in invoking social change.<sup>03</sup> Whether it takes written, built or speculative form, criticism is an action, which according to Roland Barthes, is a calling into crisis, a moment where existing definitions, disciplinary boundaries and assumptions about normativity are put into question.<sup>04</sup>

The second agenda of this journal issue takes heed of the ordinary, and how, in its intense observation, what is normal or often taken for granted exceeds itself, becomes extra or more ordinary. Everyday spaces such as supermarkets, service stations, laundry mats, hardware stores, parks and four-way street intersections, and banal gestures such as washing the dishes, walking the dog or street sweeping become subject to critical scrutiny and introspection. Xavier de Maistre's *Voyage Around My Room*, Julio Cortázar's *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds*, and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* are but a few historic examples that draw out critical depth and aesthetic meaning about ordinary interiors, interiors understood in the most liberal sense.<sup>05</sup> What new actions to the crisis of critical commentary lurk restlessly in ordinary interiors?

While a nostalgic or romantic response to this journal's theme may dwell on interior situations with no special or distinctive features, or explore the persistence and abundance of ordinary interiors, even commonplace spaces, noticed or not, it can not be denied that recent pandemic events world-wide have flung the many facets of everyday life into crisis, including long-standing notions of proximity, intimacy, hapticity, privacy, freedom and rights to access 'essential' services. For many, the world has become home and home has become an internal world, an interior contaminated or augmented by virtual technologies serving as lifelines to a previous highly social and diversified lifestyle. As the interior of one's domestic space finds coincidence with one's isolation bubble, many are finding that interiority and interiors are conflating to take on new meaning, new function, and new configuration. Ordinary scenes of dead flies on windowsills, sun rays pointing to poor house-keeping habits, mounting bags of uncollected rubbish and recycling, shuffling of mattresses, improvised work surfaces, revised chores rubrics, commandeering of the bathroom, and the commodity of headphones and adapters highlight an intensified condition.

Authors are prompted to practice a form of critical reflection on one (extra) ordinary interior.

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01 Bruno Latour. 'Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,' In *Critical Inquiry - Special issue on the Future of Critique* 30, no. 2 (2004): 25-248.

02 Nikolaus Hirsch and Markus Miessen, 'Architecture and Critical Spatial Practice,' 1 May 2020, [criticalspatialpractice.org](https://criticalspatialpractice.org).

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04 Roland Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, translated and edited by Katrine Pilcher Keuneman (London and New York: The Althone Press, 1966).

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# apartment 203

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## abstract

'How can everyday life be defined?' A set of 'found' photographs of Apartment 203 provide the start-point for this Lefebvrian enquiry into the domestic everyday and its expression through the lived interior. The subject — a friendship lapsed over time and distance, and a friend who inhabits a kind of fictional character— is reflected upon in an imagined visit that attempts to piece together the life lived now, through this (extra) ordinary interior.

This visual essay is assembled as a piece of 'semi-fiction' based in the imagery of an uninhabited apartment. Using a rationalising navigational approach including mapping the floor plan to determine interior activity, it speculates entering into the apartment through a narrative encounter. In what might be considered a study in 'scripted space,' the audience is encouraged to walk into the story, supported by readings that move in spatial and temporal reference. Across these layers of interpretation, multi-sensory evocation signals atmosphere, mood, and presence to situate the reader in the interior or, at least, in this game of occupation and identity.

'Apartment 203' is the visual and aural narration of an interior, as mapped through a specific human story. Like the friendship at the core of it, it is formed in an amalgam of the present, memory, and imagination over something that is precise and static. This journal contribution approaches critical relations between the interior and image, with the form of the visual essay taken up in a playful challenge to how we represent interior spaces beyond the purely visual and, in turn, how they can communicate the stories of people who bring them to life in everyday use.

## cite as:

Martin, Louise, and Dominic Robson,  
'Apartment 203,' *idea journal* 18, no.01 (2021):  
173–204, <https://doi.org/10.37113/ij.v18i01.425>.

## keywords:

everyday interiors, domestic spaces, scripted  
spaces, visual narratives, soundscapes, design  
fiction, wunderkammer



### four corners

Within classical representation of the iconic qualities of 'home' there is the suggestion of a crucial sense of intimacy, or what interiors historian Mario Praz identifies as '*stimmung*' [mood or atmosphere]<sup>01</sup> 'a characteristic of interiors that has less to do with functionality than with the way that the room conveys the character of its owner.'<sup>02</sup>

A publication such as *idea journal* is a medium of communication. Typically, the form of a visual essay, such as this one based in photography and the act of publication, tends towards 'fixing' discourse that is, whilst not closed, certainly not flowing. With an interest in taking the project of interior representation (and that of the visual essay) beyond image and towards *stimmung*, I seek to bring the reader along with me inside Apartment 203 and its lived situation by means of exploratory layers that animate and mediate the *mise-en-scène* through a human register.







Central to this study in communication is an interest in movement and encounter. How can we orientate within an immersive, unfolding context, where the emphasis lies in understanding of our surroundings rather than trying to get somewhere in particular — the importance of creating an experience over delivering a pre-conceived outcome. Establishing a set of photographs as our unfamiliar terrain, a series of responsive narrative devices is used to chart<sup>03</sup> this interior: the guide, signposts, and path/way. In combination they shape an implicit and cumulative knowledge.

### **guide — the narrator**

The concept of guide has evolved from a person who leads others through the unknown or unfamiliar territory in the context of a specific journey, to any number of formats that replicate this service and make it accessible to a larger audience.

In this visual essay, the guide is the narrator; this is my first-person account of an imagined visit to the apartment. Just as the land survey is a research tool for understanding landscape through analytical techniques applied at varying scales and resolutions, so, here, the framing is personal and uneven. The eye moves in and out of focus across the image grid, with interrupted layouts that reflect the way in which our mind works to take in information.

In a loose form of fieldwork, saccadic content lists are plotted around the architectural landmarks — mostly threshold features of doors and windows. For these are the most stable points of connection between inner and outer realities: Apartment 203 and the present from which I view it. The texts set up atmosphere and lend emotion at the same time as profiling the scene through more standard object descriptions — possible materialities, quantity, origin ... — and general observations.

The occupant is not home but instead traced through the interior and invoked across all the senses. For example, in the consideration of a disposable lighter proximate to an open window, near to a series of textile hangings. Something of the apartment's smell is

suggested and the reading becomes situated in a more fully dimensioned space. Organised by the movement of the visitor and their subjective agency (my response to the source material) 'le banal, le quotidien, l'évident, le commun, l'ordinaire, l'infra-ordinaire, le bruit de fond, l'habituel'<sup>04</sup> become, quite literally, remarkable.

### **signposts — frozen music**

A signpost is put in place by someone of knowledge. It typically indicates destinations, their relative proximity and direction from where one stands. Located variously at critical junctions and, more often, a seemingly random point generated through triangulation of references.

In dialogue with the first-person narrative, selected titles of songs exchanged over the duration of the friendship become re-ordered in a 'found poetry'-cum-compilation track listing inserted around scenes within the apartment. These titles may or may not evoke in the reader the sound of music (wilfully obscure references as they are) nor the specific memories of when and where they came into consciousness. But, as a kind of 'frozen music,' they convey sentiment through a rhythm and tempo that is felt in the verbalism and graphical setting as much as any individual meaning.

Undoubtedly, these compositions are as reflective of where I am now as the interior which we are studying. Mediated through the mood of the present, these compositions frame as well as look back in time and space. In this sense, they might be the most accurate

captions. A selection of the titles is adopted as section headings within the visual essay's accompanying text.

### **path/way — soundscape**

Both path and way originate from the idea of physical walking routes connecting one point to another and have evolved more broadly to suggest general progression from one situation to another. But where a path might indicate a prescribed route, a way could be any number of less formalised *traversées*. Both remove the need to consider the larger context — one may simply follow the path or way. Desire lines are also worth noting here — a path variant formed through individual will and invention.

A soundscape exploits the digital format of the journal to flow across pages and focus the different scenes within the apartment. Like text-based narratives, it is a means of situating the reader in the space, and perhaps most directly, creating an experience in real-time. It also purposely slips in and out, with different levels of clarity in much the same way that the outside world registers on and defines our periphery in a blend of the present, memory, and imagination to register the actual, the perceived, and the tangential.

Developed in collaboration with sound and interaction designer Dominic Robson, the acoustic environment proceeds from the curated image and text content to form a further layer of critical distance, as well as that which cannot be fully anticipated or controlled. An overall sound picture for each scene was built up through sampling and

original recording, which responded to the perceived qualities of surface and density within the photographs, alongside observed objects on display. While architectural details punctuate the physical space, in this interior, ambiences are mixed with textures to create appropriate shifts in place and the possibility for contemplation.

Human activity is always referenced indirectly, at a remove — sounds heard through walls or around corners — with some ambiguity between what might be 'real' and what is a projection. Nevertheless, it serves to suggest presence, and with that, acknowledgement of our moving through this most intimate of spaces that is the domestic interior.



# la porte

I approach the door  
From where? Qui peut dire

*Presentation piece #1*

*Les petite annonces*

*Fanfare for your museum of choice*

# l'entrée

OPEN

*Observing systems*



# l'entrée



*Imaginary ordinary*

*Dreamback*

*These days*

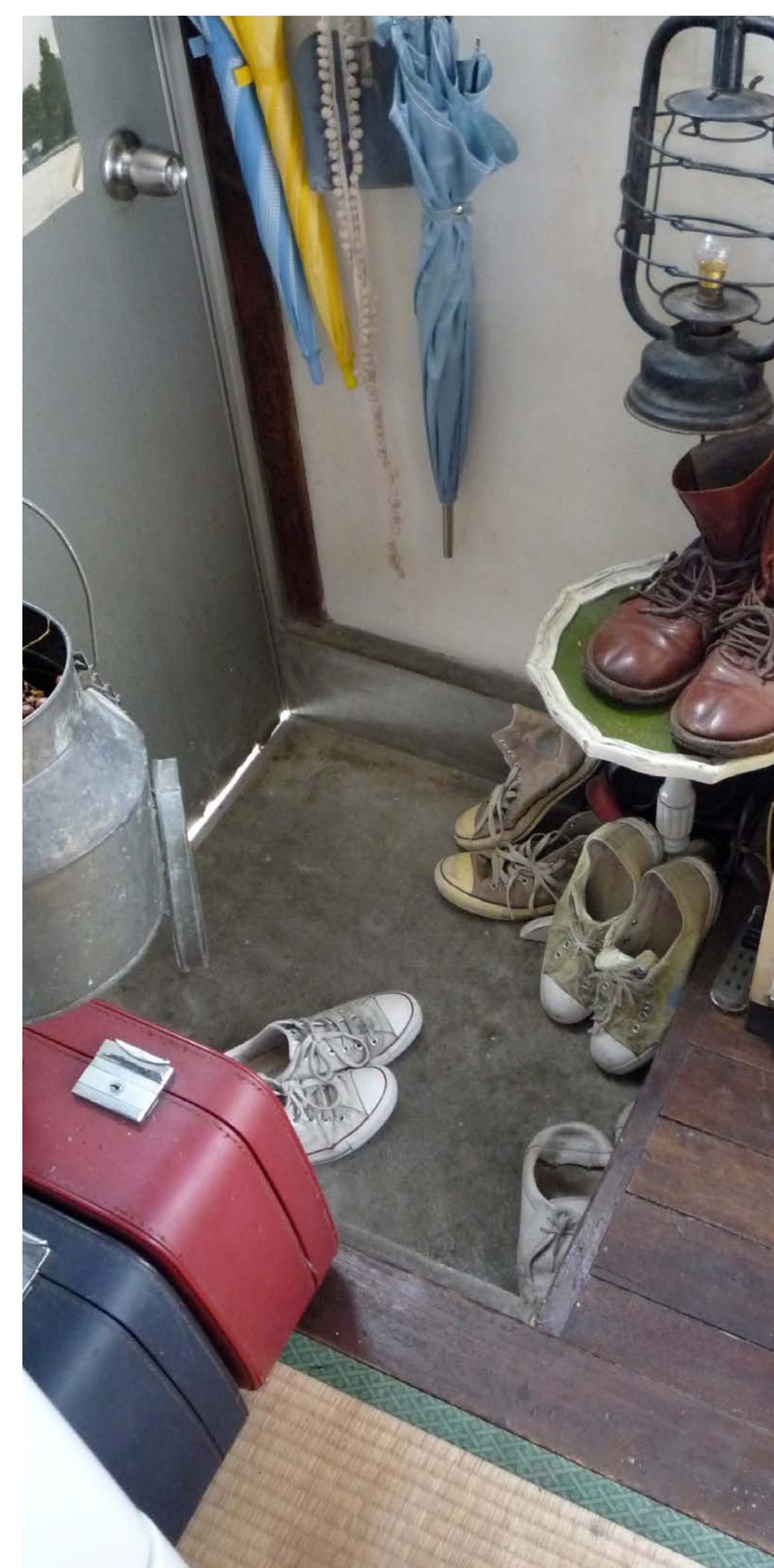
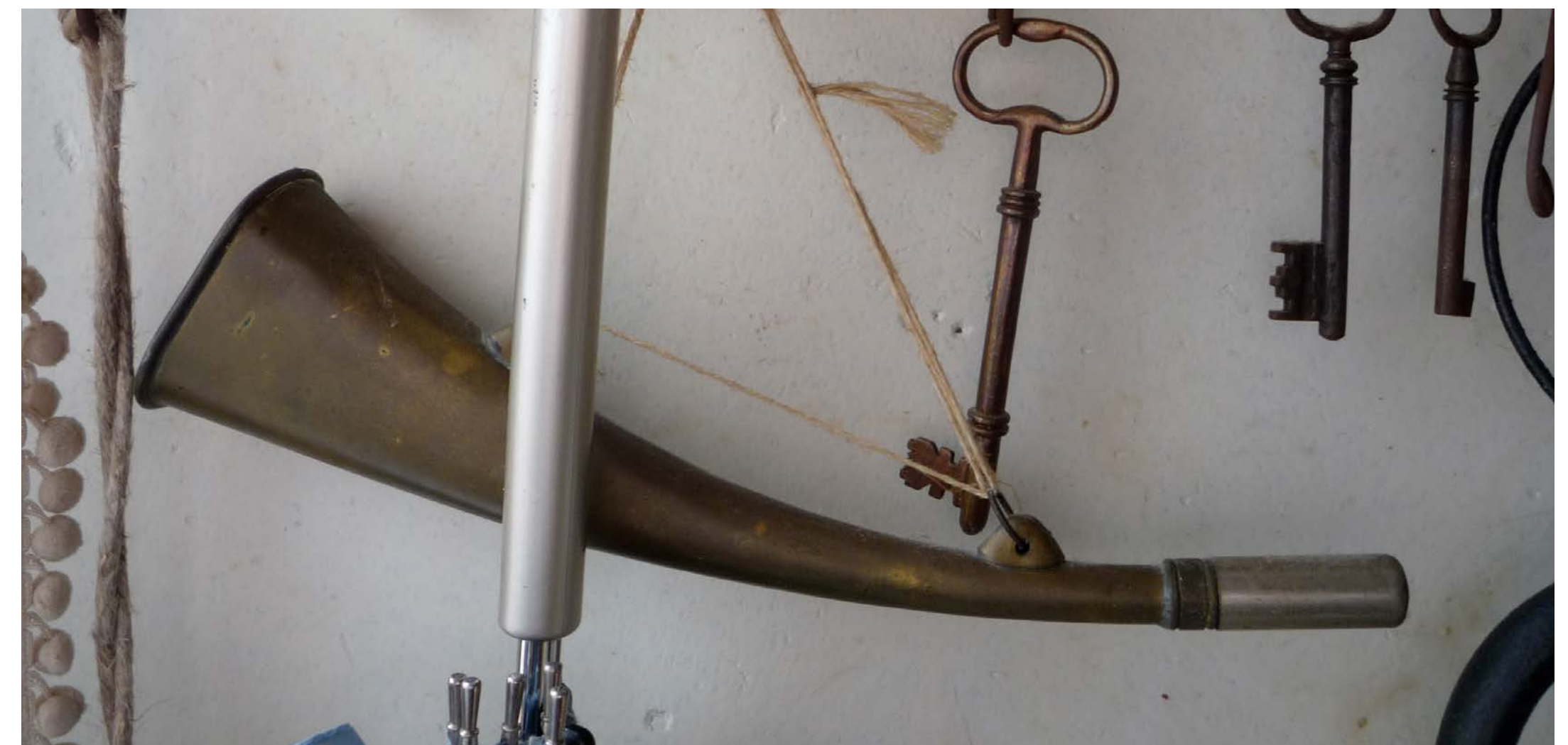
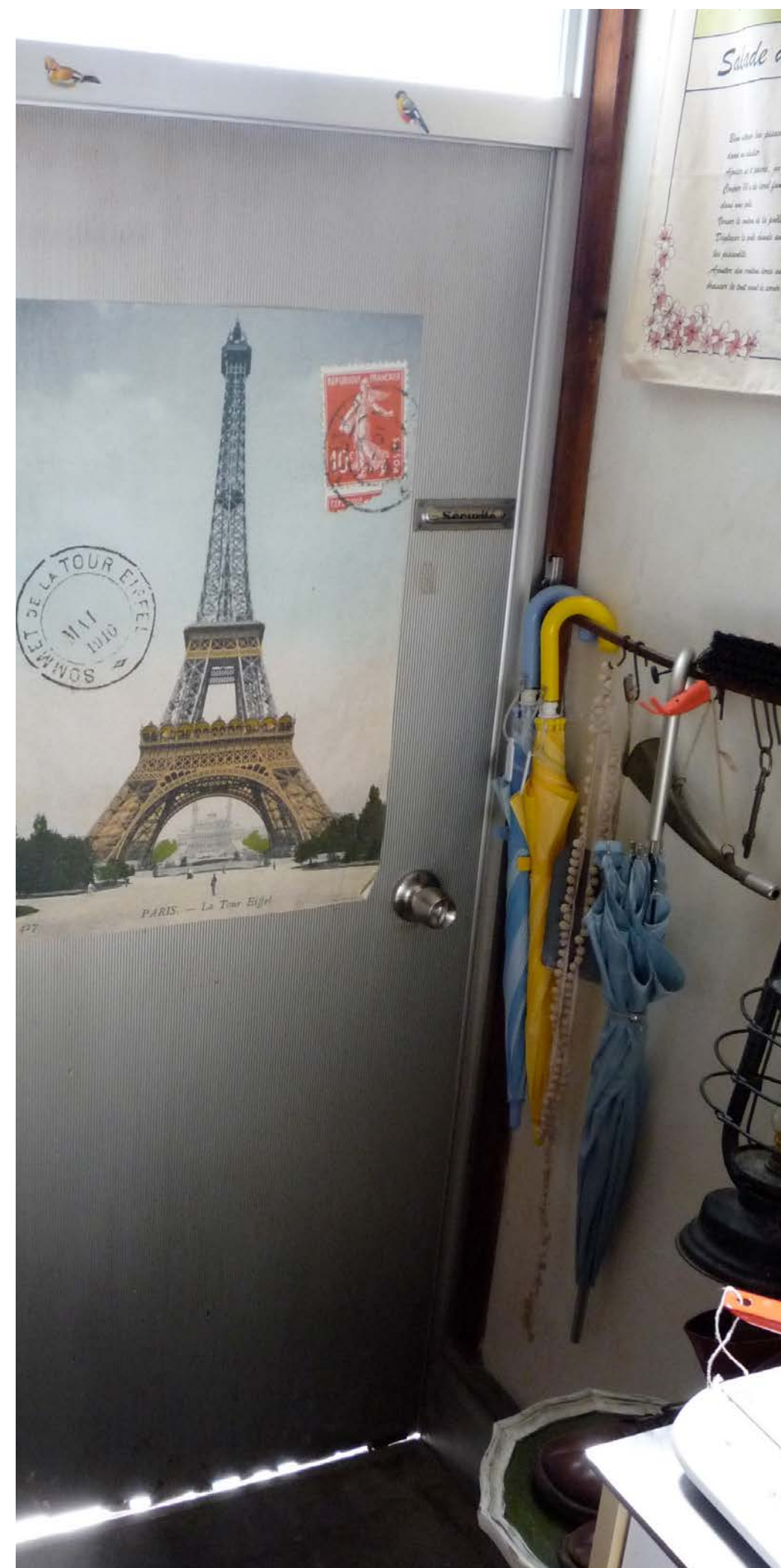
*Long, slow, distance*

*Hier ou demain*

*Di doo dah*

# l'entrée

*Un jour comme un autre*



*Let's be still*

*Take a picture*

*The language in things*

Where shall I hang my coat

Between le parapluie and le cor d'harmonie

Catherine and Françoise?



# l'entrée

The door is a lightweight panel and hardly creates a seal  
But I feel the transition it marks

In light and temperature — cool, suddenly out of the sun  
(The apartment must be ranged east-west)

In acoustics — hush

Save for far-off sounds of the outside world

Continuing beyond an open window somewhere

Hanging lace panels and other textiles soften the atmosphere

My gaze pauses on a twee tea-towel with duck illustration

I wipe my feet and remove shoes

Being careful not to upset the hanging milk pails with their dried flowers

And the pair of matching suitcases (one red, one navy) sitting on the floor

Are you going somewhere?

Or simply signalling a resistance of commitment to any one time or place

My shoes join 4 other pairs

Ranged round what feels to be an out-of-place traditional parlour side table

Was the table on on its way out the door when it found a purpose?

Or perhaps it was already out, you rescued it from the street

And so it is also just acclimatising

Who sent you the Russian package I wonder

And have you kept the box because of the graphics, or perhaps to reuse

Sending something, somewhere, sometime — to me?

It's sitting on a rice cooker which I'm sure you must use regularly

Unless it's broken

And this is a pile for recycling

I don't know how all that works in this city

There are layers of careful order here, but I'm still orienting myself in all of it

Meanwhile, so many little birds surround me, keeping watch

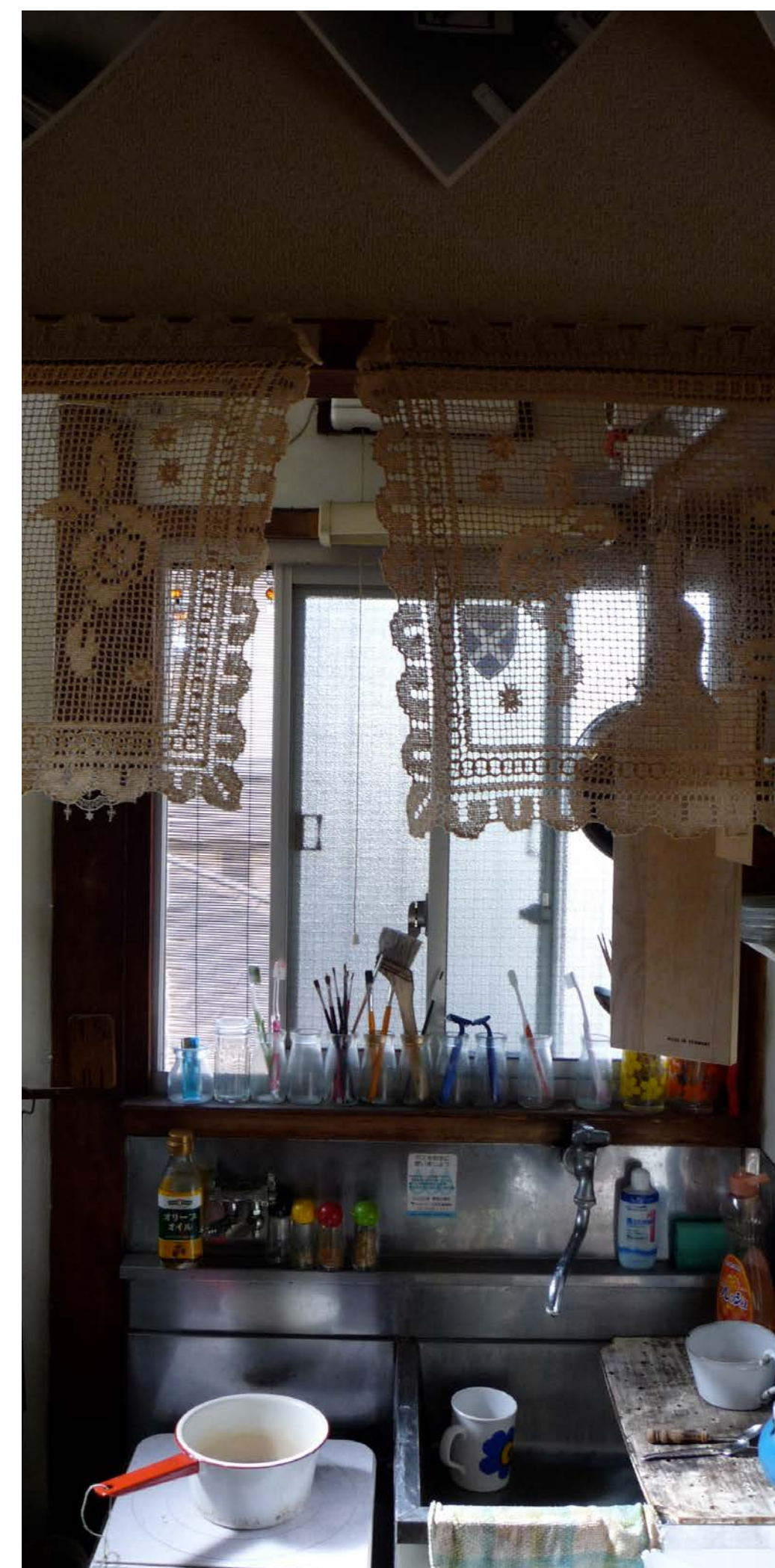
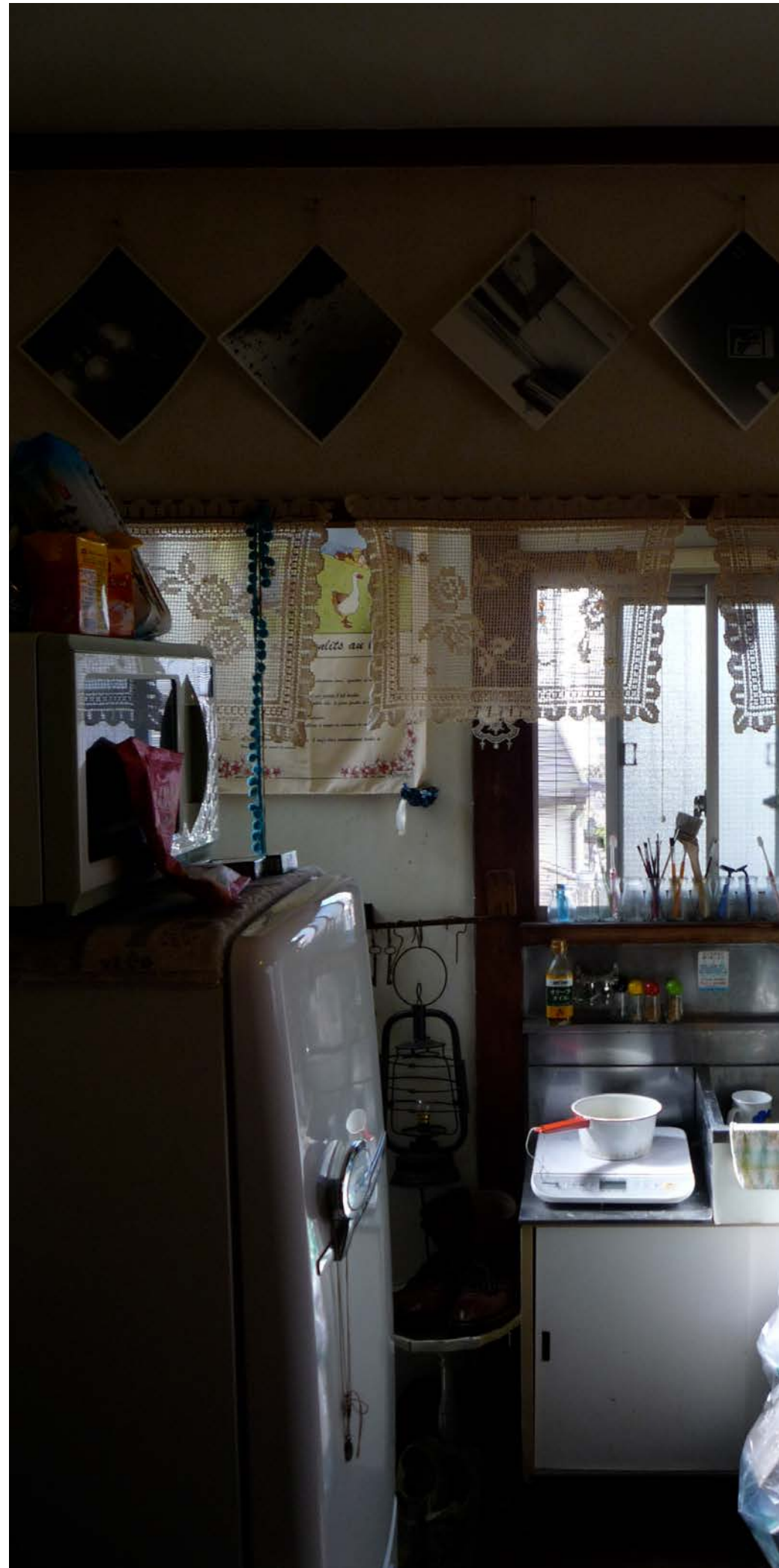
I think they sing in French, I don't understand all the words

Didn't we both learn German in school, for the history?

The familiar is never so exciting



## la cuisine



You have been here

An old enamel saucepan sits on the electric hotplate

A mug (white with blue flower design) is in the sink

To the side, a ceramic cup (with silver detail)

And 2 teaspoons (one with a turned wooden handle) are drying

On the sill, to the window that is open but screened through a light bamboo blind

There are 4 toothbrushes (2 pairs), 2 disposable razors, 10 paintbrushes

And 1 disposable lighter

I'm not sure how you use all of these

I also count 3 clear glass dinner plates

— Jammes, Francis and you?

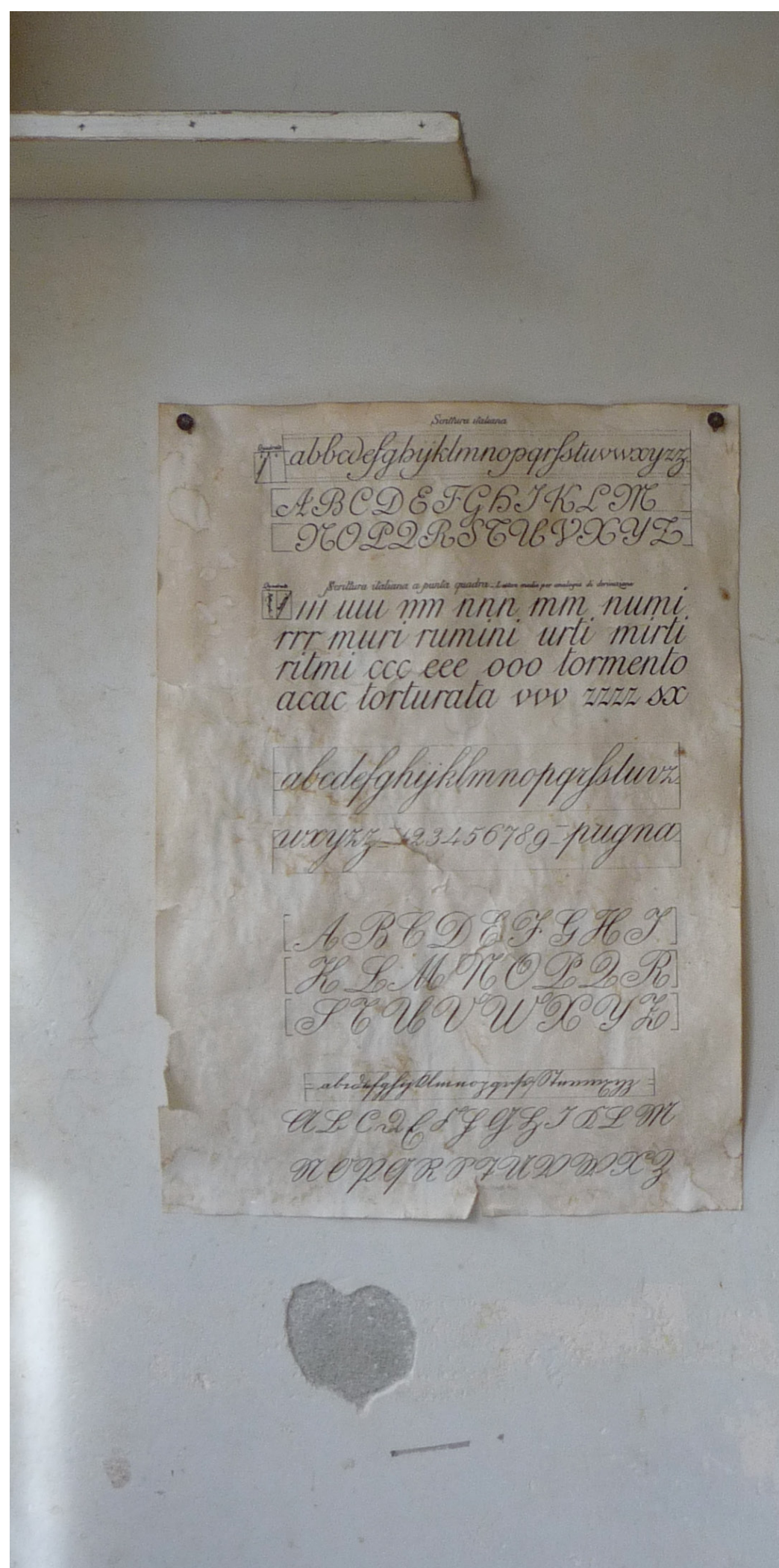
# la cuisine

*Arrangements of shapes and space*



# l'antichambre

*Are you awake?*



# l'antichambre



*Four corners*

*Shadows*

*The dust of months*

*Out the window*

*Two sunsets*

*De plus en plus, de moins en moins*

*The last shapes of never*

*This nothing in the faraway*

*Different day*

*A completely identical dream*

I find the washroom tucked discreetly behind the kitchen

# le cabinet de toilette

*Petite ouverture a danser*



*Bim-bom  
Bubble gum*

*To and fro  
Two circles  
Mic et mac*

*Innocent sorcerers  
Double feature*

*Au suivant*

I clean my hands  
In the sink that's part a part of the cistern  
Quite traditional, no?

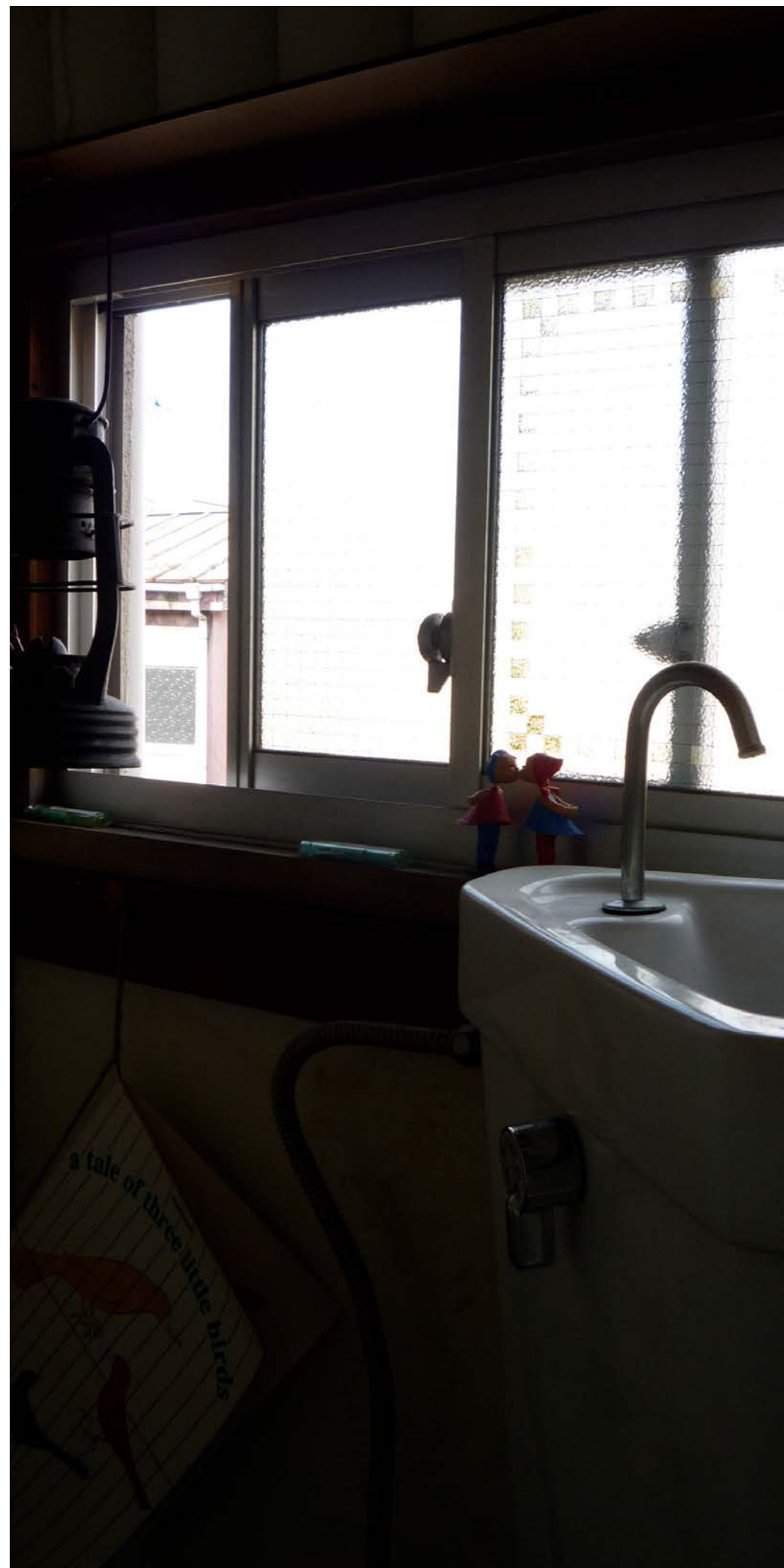
It's cold  
I mean the atmosphere (we're facing north now?)  
But also the fixtures  
I don't really think of you as utilitarian  
I don't think you do either

A tale of 3 little birds  
And decorative mouldings of rabbits — 1 pair together, 1 pair apart  
A little boy and girl figurine in traditional dress, in embrace  
A third figure (a character from the future?) looks on  
From an oil lantern hanging above

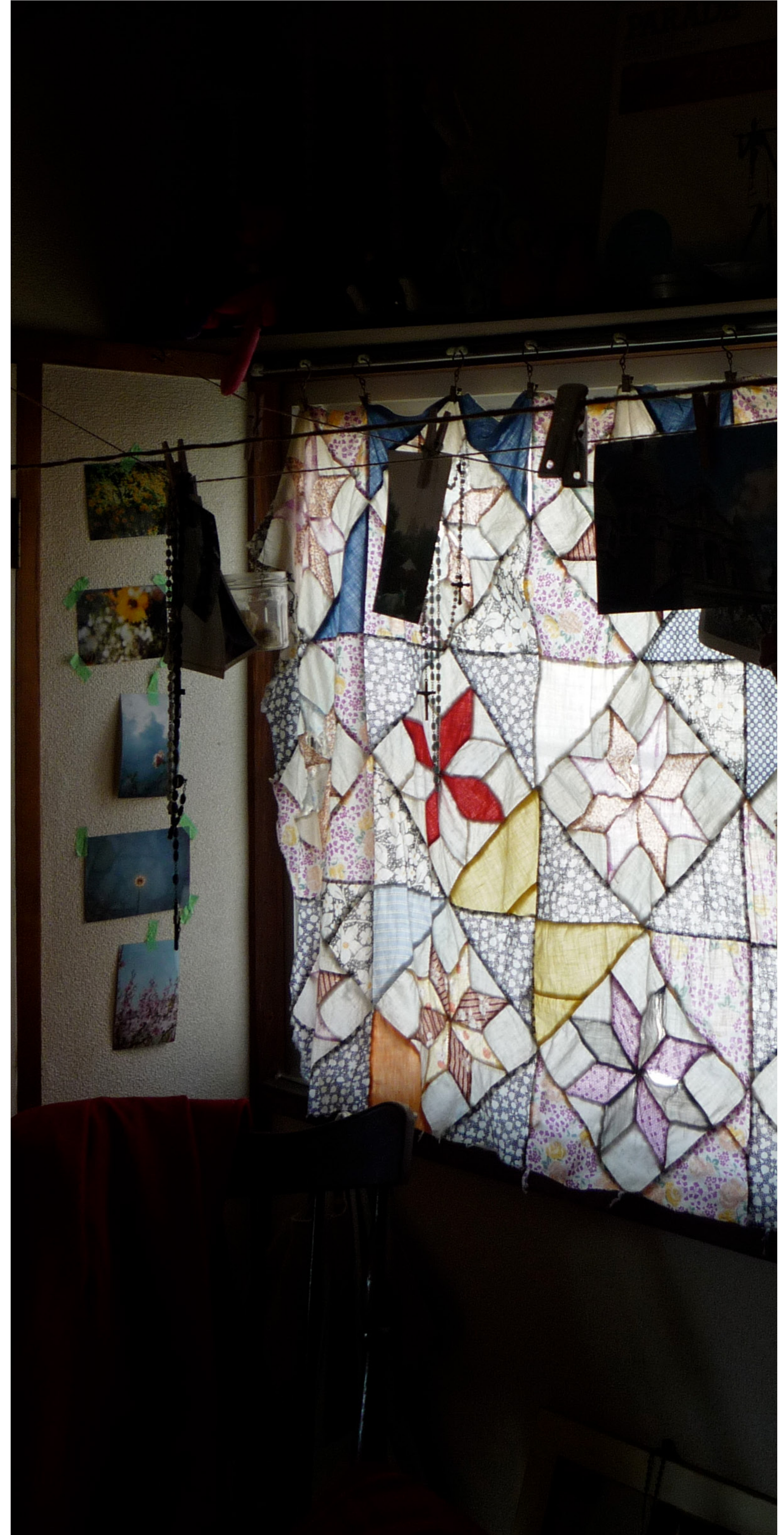
The glass is removed, as the one in the entrance  
The lights are not on, nor is anyone home  
But here I am



# le cabinet de toilette



*Qui peut dire*



Another disposable lighter on the sill, and this window is also slid open  
You still smoke sometimes

# le salon



*Yesterday, yes a day  
The future, wouldn't that be nice?*

*Scissor, paper, rock*

*The long tomorrow  
Languor on the balcony*

*Les langues de chat*

*En melody*





# le salon

## *Les rencontres*

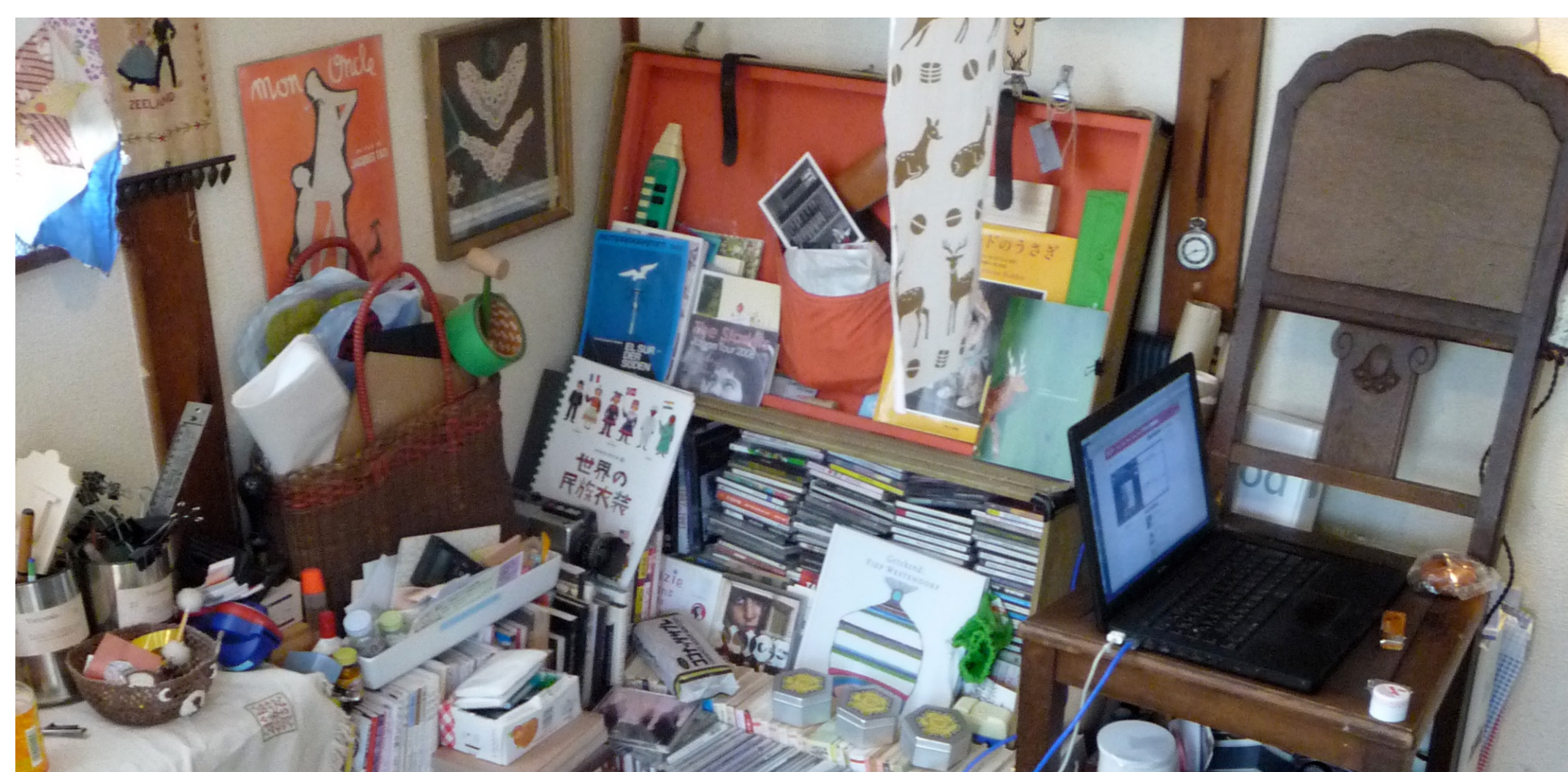
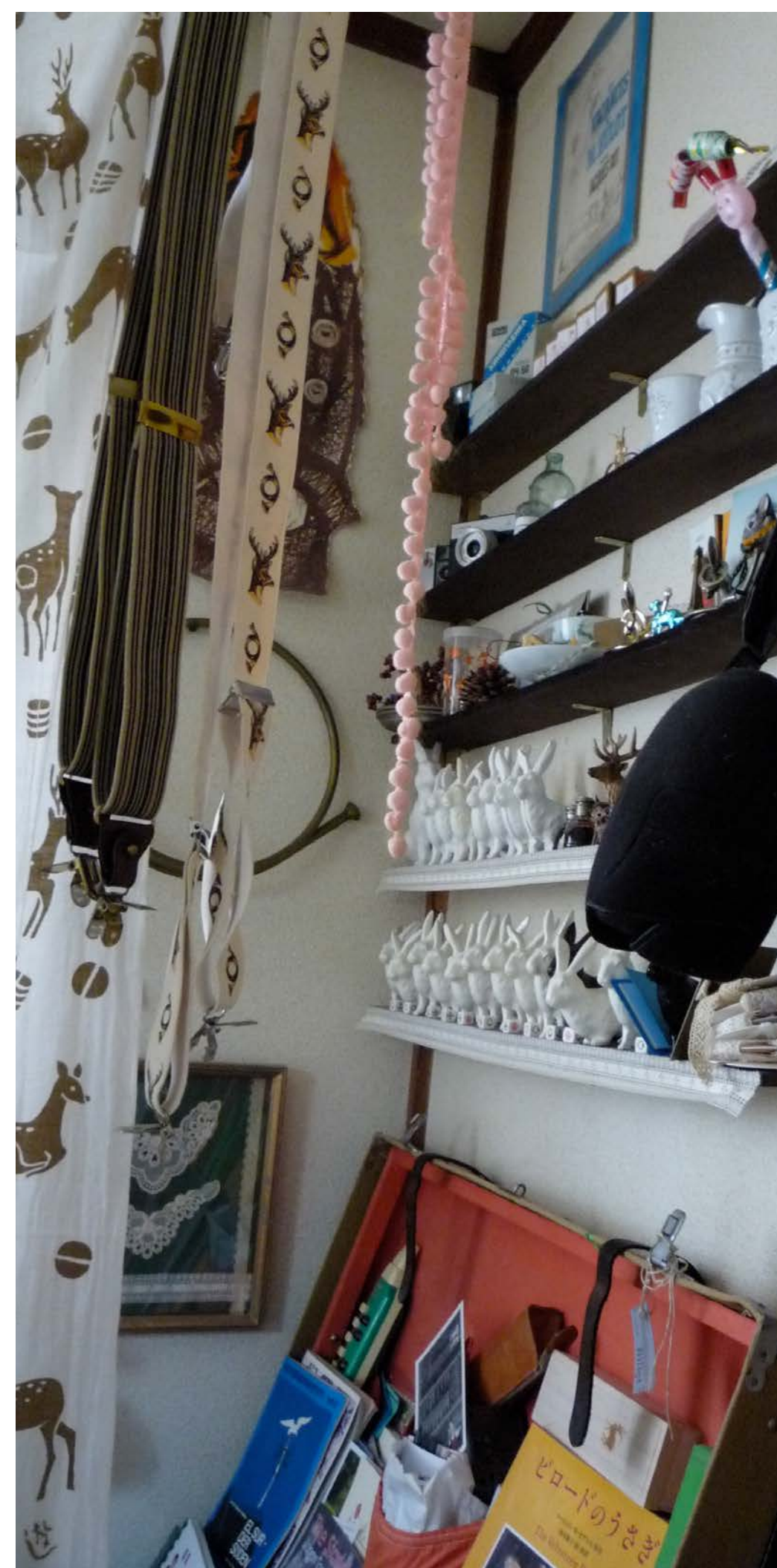
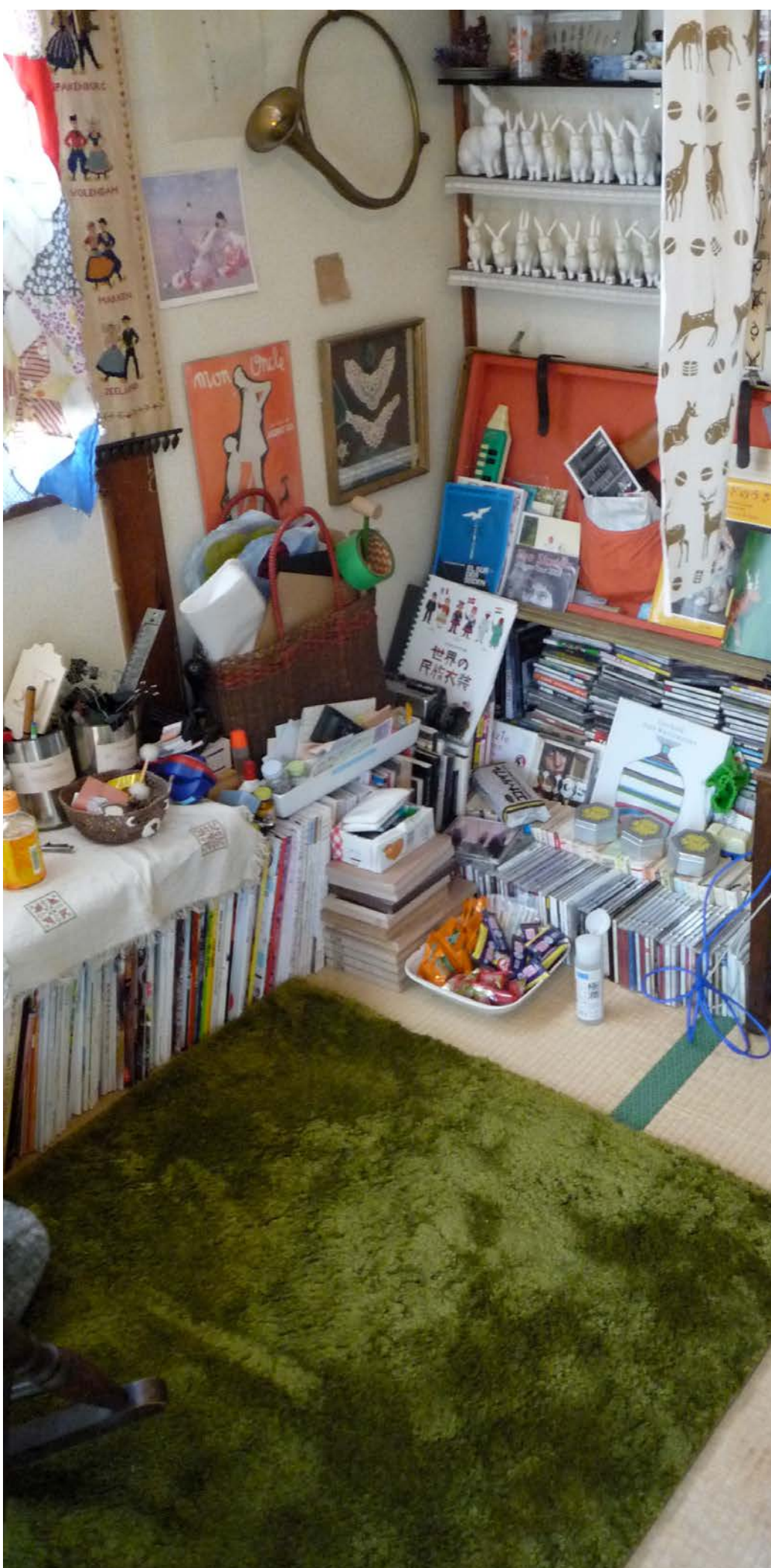
Turning from the cold light, spartan washroom  
Into the heart of your apartment  
Where to start  
My focus jumps in and out

I collect myself in familiar touch-points  
The things we used to talk about  
Like magazines, music and movie ephemera  
French pop stars of the 60s and 70s

But this feels so surface now

There's all this other stuff  
I'm up so close but feel the distance of years  
In a reality I can't fully orient inside

May I take a chocolate from the bowl?



I put the wrapper in my pocket  
Where to put waste is always a mystery in unfamiliar homes

Best leave no trace

# le salon



More rabbits

Hand carved from soap

When did this obsession start?

I had no idea and now it seems to be a major theme

I look around and wonder where you sit to make them

Or write the letters and compose packages for that fact

I see some tools

But the evidence of process, what's behind or underneath

It's all quite imperceptible

Impenetrable

Everything is put together with such care and complexity

It's exploding at the same time as being perfectly neat

Is that you?

The chorus of old cameras quietly observe me observing you

I learn that Smena [Cmena] means 'the act of change'

But these photographs

And the ways in which I see you, feel quite fixed

From the different creatures

To the various figurative objects and representations

There's something intriguing in being surrounded by all this 'life'

That is also completely suspended in animation

# le salon

*Pick-up sticks*



*One pm again*

*Asleep on a sunbeam*

*Wrap your troubles in dreams*

*Let's get out of this country*

*A short song to the moon*

*Walking on the dune*

*Ah! melody*

*I know the moon*

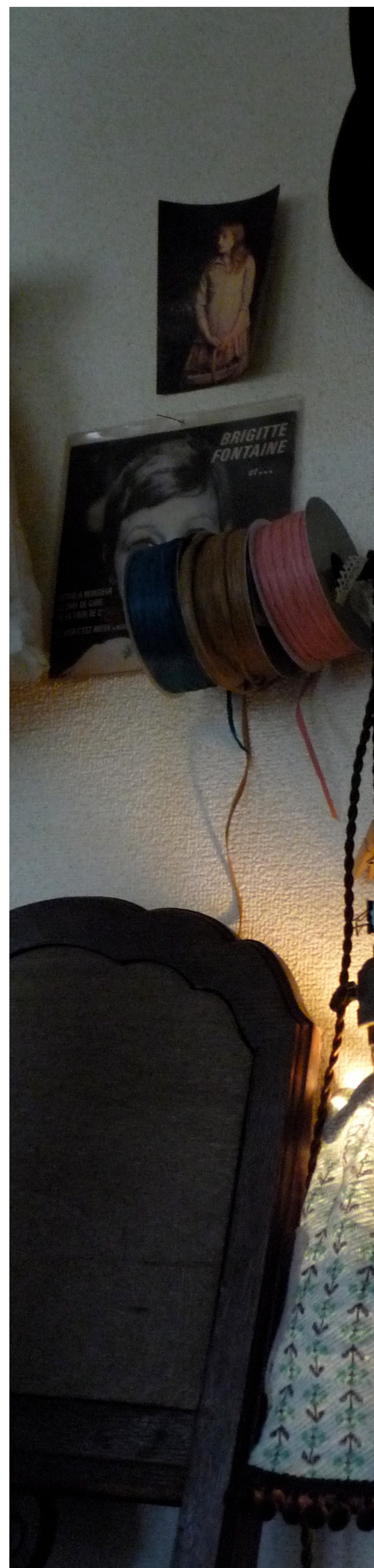
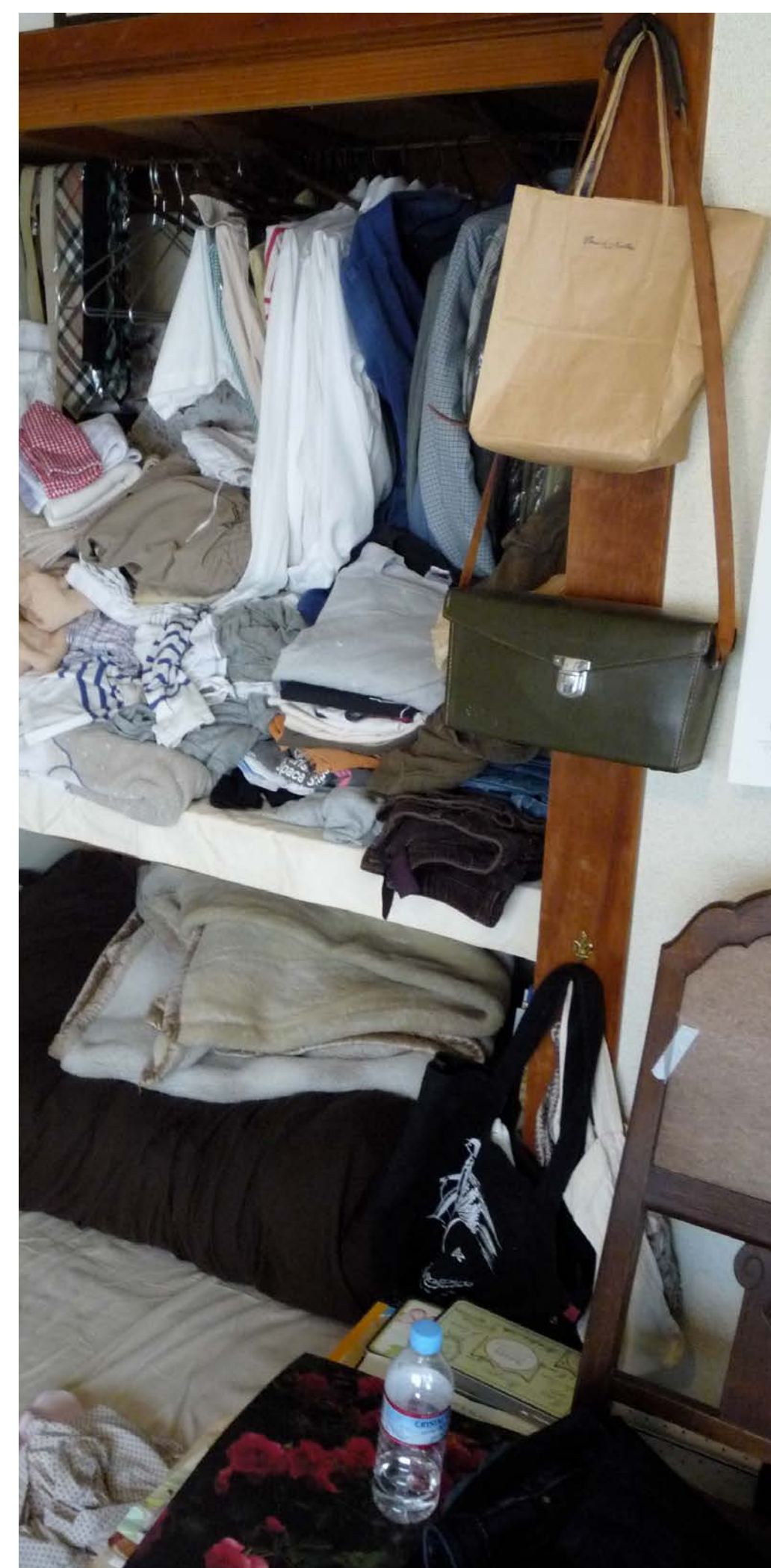
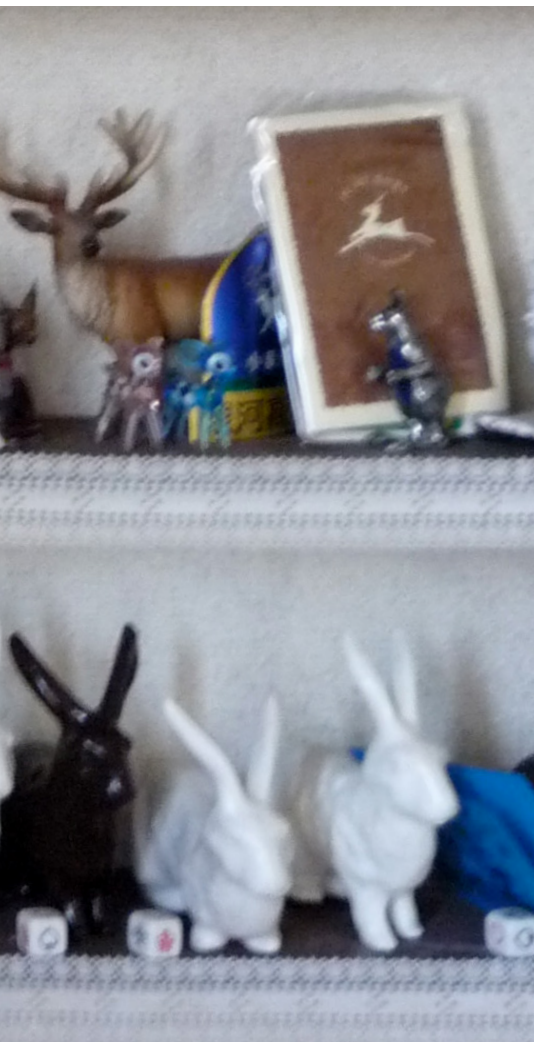


I wonder do the animals run amok  
When no one is home

# le chambre à coucher

*Pastorale*

*Piece for an ideal*



## le chambre à coucher



*Le plat pays  
Sous le soleil exactement*

*La vie s'envole*

*I'm a spy fascinated by the sky  
Flying over Russia  
Under the bridges of Paris*

*Let's go swimming  
Through the swells*

*Space behind me*

*The shadow garden*

*Where you've been hiding*

A pocket in the wall magically absorbs the bed, all your clothes  
And this reveal and conceal around the original state seems  
Entirely apt

I'm close  
But remain here on the outside looking in  
This distance is too great

*Are you awake?*

## imaginary ordinary

A place inhabited by the same person for a certain duration draws a portrait that resembles this person based on objects (present or absent) and the habits that they imply. The game of exclusions and preferences, the arrangement of the furniture, the choice of materials, the range of forms and colors, the light sources, the reflection of a mirror, an open book, a newspaper lying around, a racquet, ashtrays, order and disorder, visible and invisible, harmony and discord, austerity or elegance, care or negligence, the reign of convention, a few exotic touches, and even more so the manner of organising the available space, however cramped it may be, and distributing throughout the different daily functions (meals, dressing, receiving guests, cleaning, study, leisure, rest) — all of this composes a 'life narrative' before the master of the house has said the slightest word.<sup>05</sup>

A set of photographs taken by another person informally records details of a friend's apartment in his home city of Tokyo. Having known this friend in a different time and place, the photographs were as close as I could get to satisfying a curiosity, to visiting and understanding the life lived, now so far removed, in Japan. These photographs form the basis of a Lefebvrian 'critique de la vie quotidienne'<sup>06</sup> or perhaps more accurately, 'une invention du quotidien' after de Certeau<sup>07</sup> (well something French certainly).

This is an account of Apartment 203 composed in semi-fiction.

The project is a wistful, interwoven story of how I took a set of 'found' observational images, of an apartment that is at once an everyday living space and living cabinet of curiosities — an *(extra) ordinary interior* — curated and transcribed by the occupant through an imagined identity, now frozen and interpreted by this distant collector. Led by interior details and traces of life that combine in a bigger, if not complete, picture — working from the inside-out, it is, at the same time, a reading formed very much from the outside looking in.

This project is concerned with how we use that most intimate of spaces, the domestic interior, to order and navigate identities and relationships, both in and of ourselves. Historically (and already the subject of in-depth critical reflection in contemporary interior theory surveys,<sup>08</sup> this project progressed with the strict planning of rooms and management of boundaries and thresholds, both symbolic and real. The progressive movement through domestic space — to the extent that the 'outside' was invited 'in' — served as a barometer of relationships and, perhaps more precisely, a controlled reveal of the host's true self or 'primary interior' state.

Shifting focus, then, from a concern with physical manifestation to representation, and while considering Lefebvre's question 'how can everyday life be defined?'<sup>09</sup> (specifically as it pertains to the domestic everyday and its

expression within interiors), 'Apartment 203' approaches relations between the interior and image through different investigative lenses. In combination, the design stages an account that is neither completely fixed nor objective. It is purposely 'soft' in definition in order to leave space for movement through interpretation. Lived space is understood as 'a combination of external space and inner mental space, actuality and mental projection.'<sup>10</sup>

Where the use of imagery in detailing an individual's daily life or lifestyle has become commonplace — in the ubiquitous broadcasting of composed snapshots and references across social media — the idea of constructing individual 'private space' for wider social consumption continues from the historical model of domestic interiors referenced above. I suggest that what has changed, beyond matters of physicality, is the intimacy and 'intercommunication' lost in the act of sharing or discovering. Within this project, readings of the visual essay are held open as a dialogue in an approach that is a kind of layered reveal within the larger, formalising structure of the apartment. It seeks to recapture some of the suspended romance in exploring a private domestic space by plotting it around the human story and a more personal point of view. An approach that may allow us to perceive the extra within the ordinary to a greater degree. Writing on the contributions of cinema and imagery to our understanding of spaces and their inhabitation across documentary and fiction genres, Professor of Architecture and the Moving Image Francois Penz postulates:

We must turn to fiction in order to study everyday life — films make us focus on a more approachable type of reality, lived situations ..., fiction 'does it' while the documentary 'shows it' — it is the difference between narration and description, between lived space and an account of space, between being in the space or standing outside it.<sup>11</sup>

The moving image crucially 'incorporates time to space' — it allows 'time [to become] a dimension of space.'<sup>12</sup> How can the representation of interiors, in which still imagery remains the most common currency (in both speculative and completed stages of project representation), be explored to communicate a more complete spatio-temporal experience — a 'lived situation' — beyond the purely ocular?

observing systems

The genesis of such a project is located in an interior design professional practice established largely within the specialism of museum and exhibitions. Here, I have found that projects push the designer in aspects of discernment and sensitivity as they work with curators and collections to assemble projects that effectively engage and transport an audience within a sort of translation or interpretation of fact. The specialism is channelled through an inherently complex and layered process, that I suggest, is, at its core, concerned with enquiry and navigation. New modes of communication and experience are created within unique space-time frameworks — formed as they are in the

meeting of content and display arrangements that shift and unfold peripatetically around the independent visitor's movement.

Research projects are an extension of my practice as an Interior Designer; they act as a vehicle to collect and critique experience outside of familiar subjects and provide an invaluable opportunity for testing different methodologies in their re-composition. Such projects support critical reflection in encouraging renewed ways of responding to content, circumstance, and constraints, and how they are related to an audience. I am interested in the visual essay format as an opportunity to alternatively explore and represent an interior experience, such as Apartment 203, through associative ways of looking and the invocation of different voices that push the medium to communicate in-the-round across registers that are temporal, sensorial and subjective as much as spatial.

In the instance of this project and as a piece of semi-fiction (or more accurately, designed fiction), this project does not always combine these associations in neat or absolute ways. Rather, the associations open up critical and shifting points of view and, in so doing, seek more actively, authentically, to engage the audience in this interpretation of an interior.

The very concept of the interior, and specific changes in the practices of inhabitation, are produced as much in representation as they are in spatial practices. This is why representation and spatial conditions need to be considered as doubling each other,

rather than representation bearing objective and transparent witness to developments, more often than not cast as continuities, in spatial practices.<sup>13</sup>

### **the language in things**

Collections become ordered by projecting rationalising structures. In her essay, 'Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting', Mieke Bal imagines:

Collecting as a process consisting of the confrontation between objects and subjective agency informed by an attitude. Objects, subjective agency, confrontations as events: such a working definition makes for a narrative...<sup>14</sup>

The narrative of *Apartment 203* is established around the conjured personae of 'Jammes et Francis'<sup>15</sup> — fictional apartment occupants (conceived by the actual occupant) whose name plate on the entrance door becomes an oblique introductory title to this *Wunderkammer* (proto-exhibition). Throughout the apartment, though often placed with a private associative logic, are hand-written (mostly French language) labels and antique children's pictorial cards, which form their own kind of anarcho-didactic taxonomy of the interior contents. In his study on the emergence of the domestic interior and its condition as one that can be 'imagined and dreamed, and inhabited', architectural historian, Charles Rice, suggests that the interior works 'not as the space ensuring the coherence of classification, but as the space for the registering of traces, providing the



surface against which the qualities of specific objects ... might be preserved.'<sup>16</sup>

The *Wunderkammer* served as an interpretative recreation (interiorisation of sorts) of the world at large and functioned to establish a new coherent context and origin story for collected objects. 'The collection is not constructed by its elements; rather it comes to exist by means of its principle of organisation.'<sup>17</sup> Here the collector, 'Jammes et Francis,' operates with a curatorial strategy based on subject-object relations. And through this organisation, one refers to the collection as finished: 'the subjectivity constructed through it looking back retrospectively at the narrative of the self built through and into the collection's organisation.'<sup>18</sup>

Thematics such as textile hangings of the world; material culture compositions of antique vessels, keys, and musical instruments; mass displays of hand-carved rabbit statues; and comparative surveys of deer and donkeys, in addition to what appear as character props of suitcases, umbrellas, and various other ephemera and curios, are presented alongside the necessary objects of the day-to-day. Art and artefacts *de la vie quotidienne* become directly mixed in this one-room apartment as cabinet of curiosity, as living installation, as organisation of the relationship with self and the world.

Through the act of enclosing space and making rooms, we remake ourselves ... 'Remake' because the rooms in which we dwell offer us the crucial chance to honour, or to defy ... conditions that we otherwise cannot control ... Images of domestic spaces reflect back to us the attitudes and material and bodily arrangements we call interiority.'<sup>19</sup>

We might also consider the mechanisms of mediation through which this 'interiority' is established regarding ideas of control and order. Beyond the curatorial layers inherent to the apartment and its décor — the conjured personae and their collections, extended through the conscious configuration of the everyday as display — photography evidences the interior and life therein. Diana Fuss, Professor of Literature and Film Studies (with a noted proclivity towards 'writers and the rooms that shaped them') has written of 'the porous boundary between the two-dimensional space of photography, and the three-dimensional space of architecture' concluding that the boundary is 'more like a yawning gap.'<sup>20</sup> In 'Apartment 203,' this gap is the space in which I mediate; the project exists in my framing of others' material and views and it provides the necessary critical distance for reflection upon this particular interior and how it is formed.

## arrangements of shape and space

The room plan for the small domestic house or apartment is such a basic fundamental structuring principle in the ordering of private life. Rooms are the unit of space we think in, and dream in.<sup>21</sup>

Just as the personae were adopted by the occupant as a voice through which to narrate contents, so I looked to external organisational devices to frame and navigate the journey through this collection of interior photographs. The two-by-one tatami module — the mat that traditionally informs Japanese domestic floor plans and can be glimpsed within the photographs here — was taken as the basis of a grid in the visual essay, with the plan held as a 'primary conceptual tool [of] interior design.'<sup>22</sup> I approached the imagery through a cartographic projection of spatial and programmatic standards in domestic living in order to locate myself within the unfamiliar space — *la porte; l'entrée; la cuisine; l'antichambre; le cabinet de toilette; le salon; le chambre à coucher* — establishing zoning and sequencing according to the activity and customs interpreted within the imagery. That this apartment exists only as a small, singular space (with partitioned WC) of necessarily soft boundaries is both beside and precisely the point. This was an exercise in speculative inhabitation, with the formal plan as 'an apparatus of imagining.'<sup>23</sup>

Resembling domino/'matching pairs' games, the tatami image layout responds playfully to the nature of content on show within the apartment. It might further suggest the

interior experience as an intuitive exploration, with excited shifts and turns in depth and focus more than a steady, linear journey. In the use of gutters and creation of spaces between (as in the junction detail of tatami mats) there is an allowance for transitions — in time, space, rhythm, and detail — and an embrace of the visible and invisible that actively engages the reader in the construction of the narrative. As the 'phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole'<sup>24</sup> closure allows us to read across these spaces or 'gaps,' and to mentally construct our own interpretation of the presented reality.

The space of our life is neither continuous, nor infinite, neither homogenous, nor isotropic. But do we really know where it shatters, where it curves, and where it assembles itself? ... We rarely try to know more about it and more often than not go from one place to another, from one space to another without trying to measure, to grasp, to consider these gaps in space.<sup>25</sup>

The idea of presence carries through the project, with the occupant's absence from the photographic material (figuratively at least) giving space to the possibility of 'Jammes et Francis's' existence. The true reality of the occupant of Apartment 203, never possible to fully capture at a remove or in a still image (and, even less so, I would argue, in a more 'seamless' moving image) is, perhaps, most effectively realised in such gaps as Perec describes as this imagined between space of semi-fiction.

## the last shapes of never

The boundaries of 'Apartment 203' are soft, but not for a lack of rigour or resolve. In approaching critical relations between the interior and image, and reporting on a self-contained world of which only partial information was available, ambiguity became a formative element, wherein the image (as given) became the start-point for 'a mode of investigation of the everyday.'<sup>26</sup>

With an interest in the human story that inhabits and defines interiors and returning to the opening question of 'how can everyday life be defined?'<sup>27</sup> the project is staged around the established semi-fictional characters 'Jammes et Francis' through whom the subject lives. The reader is invited to become a part of the narrative unfolding around them through a necessity of closure. Extending the film and moving image reference — if we accept the evidence put forward here as a series of stills or scenes from a life — consideration may be given to contrasting standards of transition, particularly continuity editing (a spatially and temporally coherent sequence of events and actions) and montage (expressed cuts). "The cuts are where the magic of cinema resides, where poetry penetrates between the cracks.' And it is in the crack between two adjacent frames that the invisible body is travelling, in the in-betweenness."<sup>28</sup>

The real friendship at the core of this story grew in a kind of 'call and response' wherein cultural references and materials were collected, curated, and shared — in person and then later at distance — in elaborate postal packages, and emails that

harked back to the postcard in their self-contained, staccato form of dialogue that was nevertheless charming. Perhaps it was always a dynamic based on speculation and projection. In the era of online and social media that has succeeded it, where everything is (seemingly) available and possible, except mix CDs which are now redundant, our communications have come to a natural stop or gap in space. And I realise I knew a lot, and yet, at the same time, I missed much of the cohering detail about my friend and his life. In its own way, this project continues the correspondence. Or, at the very least, it defines a place in which to hold on to the memory of the friendship, and a space to reconsider my Interior Design practice. Four corners.

## acknowledgements

We are grateful to *idea journal* for encouraging experimentation within the visual essay format, and for our collaboration in being equally open and bringing another level of interpretation (and media expertise) to the project. Thank you to Professor Alex Milton and Suzanne Martin for conversations around the development of the article and finally, appreciation to Yoshi for inspiring this reflection upon how we inhabit interiors, and how we can realise the extra ordinary within our every day.

## author biographies

*Louise Martin* is a designer whose experience working with studios that lead enquiry into the interior, in all its myriad forms, includes Ben Kelly Design, Ab Rogers Design, Casson Mann and Pentagram. Exposure to a range of disciplinary expertise, approaches and influences has led to the development of an interiors-based creative practice that is cross-sectoral and advanced within the area of exhibitions and the design of content experiences. These areas of expertise are expanded through associated creative research activities and in her role as Visiting Lecturer in Interior Design at The Glasgow School of Art.

*Dominic Robson* is an established creative technology and interaction designer. His studio, Harmonic Kinetic, develops interpretative experiences that bring together interactive technologies and audio-visual media within physical environments. His broad research interests include the use of media technologies within narrative and interactive spaces, the development of innovative transdisciplinary creative education, as well as the history of social housing in South London. He has lectured in Interaction Design and Interior Design at the Royal College of Art, and presently Media Design and Espace & Communication at the Haut Ecole d'Art et Design (HEAD), Geneva, and Design at Goldsmiths, London.

## discography

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BockelSound, Kochen - Espresso auf Herdplatte, Freesound audio database, n.d., <https://freesound.org/people/BockelSound/sounds/488649/>, Wave. Licensed under CC BY 3.0.

Brunoboselli, Kids Playing, Freesound audio database, n.d., <https://freesound.org/people/brunoboselli/sounds/469613/>, Wave. Licensed under CC0 1.0.

Ignat, GORZAD\_0045\_ebaramachi\_playground, Freesound audio database, n.d., <https://freesound.org/people/Ignat/sounds/180157/>, Wave. Licensed under CC BY-NC 3.0.

InspectorJ, Bird Whistling, Robin, Single 13, Freesound audio database, n.d., <https://freesound.org/people/InspectorJ/sounds/456440/>, Wave. Licensed under CC BY 3.0.

Joepayne, Clean and Pompous Fanfare Trumpet, Freesound audio database, n.d., <https://freesound.org/people/joepayne/sounds/413203/>, Mp3. Licensed under CC0 1.0.

Kyles, airplane jet passby overhead high altitude roar2, Freesound audio database, n.d., <https://freesound.org/people/kyles/sounds/451953/>, Flac. Licensed under CC0 1.0.

letsmakemuffins, footsteps echo hall, Freesound audio database, n.d., <https://freesound.org/people/letsmakemuffins/sounds/536290/>, Wave. Licensed under CC0 1.0.

Martin, Louise, Biocycle Hum, Dripping 02, recorded 2021, Wave.

Martin, Louise, Drain 04, recorded 2021, Wave.

Martin, Louise, Footsteps Overhead, Wood, recorded 2021, Wave.

Martin, Louise, Freezer, Internal, recorded 2021, Wave.

Martin, Louise, Oil Boiler, Clicking Down, recorded 2021, Wave.

Martin, Louise, Record Playing, Close to Stylus, recorded 2021, Wave.

Martin, Louise, Small Fridge, recorded 2021, Wave.

Martin, Louise, Tap Dripping, recorded 2021, Wave.

Martin, Louise, Ticking Clock in Hall, recorded 2021, Wave.

Martin, Louise, WC Flush, Upstairs, Distant, recorded 2021, Wave.

Martin, Louise, WC Cistern Drip, Closer, recorded 2021, Wave.

Martin, Louise, Wind Through Interior Vent, recorded 2021, Wave.

Musicradiocreative, Bird Song, Freesound audio database, n.d., <https://freesound.org/people/musicradiocreative/sounds/197104/>, Wave. Licensed under CC0 1.0.

PhonosUPF, french horn staccato 2, Freesound audio database, n.d., <https://freesound.org/people/PhonosUPF/sounds/490235/>, Wave. Licensed under CC0 1.0.

Risto\_alcinov, Neighbour walla staircase, Freesound audio database, n.d., [https://freesound.org/people/risto\\_alcinov/sounds/371255/](https://freesound.org/people/risto_alcinov/sounds/371255/), Wave. Licensed under CC0 1.0.

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Robson, Dominic, Bird Chorus, recorded 2020, Wave.

Robson, Dominic, Screen Slide, Open Faucet, recorded 2021, Wave.

Robson, Dominic, String Ambience, recorded 2021, Wave.

Sonicquinn, Steam-Crackle\_Water-Drips-On-Hotplate\_Mono\_48000, Freesound audio database, n.d., <https://freesound.org/people/Sonicquinn/sounds/435832/>, Wave. Licensed under CC0 1.0.

Unknown, French Intro, n.d., Mp3.

Unknown, Here Comes a Bluebird, n.d., Mp3.

Urupin, Song thrush (pevchiy drozd), Freesound audio database, n.d., <https://freesound.org/people/urupin/sounds/122616/>, Mp3. Licensed under CC BY-NC 3.0.

### audio files included with this essay

Page 178: 'la porte part 1' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/178.mp3>

Page 179: 'la porte part 2' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/179.mp3>

Page 180: 'l'entrée part 1' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/180.mp3>

page 181: 'l'entrée part 2' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/181.mp3>

Page 181: 'l'entrée part 3' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/182.mp3>

Page 182: 'l'entrée part 4' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/183.mp3>

Page 183: 'la cuisine part 1' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/184.mp3>

Page 184: 'la cuisine part 1' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/184.mp3>

Page 185: 'la cuisine part 2' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/185.mp3>

Page 186: 'l'antichambre part 1' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/186.mp3>

Page 187: 'l'antichambre part 2' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/187.mp3>

Page 188: 'le cabinet part 1' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/188.mp3>

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Page 190: 'le salon part 1' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/190.mp3>

Page 191: 'le salon part 2' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/191.mp3>

Page 192: 'le salon part 3' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/192.mp3>

Page 193: 'le salon part 4' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/193.mp3>

Page 194: 'le chambre part 1' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/194.mp3>

Page 195: 'le chambre part 2' available at <https://idea-edu.com/media/2021/Martin/195.mp3>

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Photography by Suzanne Martin.

## notes

- 01 Mario Praz, *An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration from Pompeii to Art Nouveau* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1964).
- 02 Charles Rice, ed., *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 22.
- 03 In use a map contextualises where you've come from, where you are, and where you are (or could be) going. But with reference only to predetermined pathways and that which is established and legible. It is a static representation of a succession of formative acts and states. The world literally flattened. Charts are a type of map, but recognised more as a working document. Most typically used for navigation through a body of water the chart plots a unique course responding to fixed references such as coast line and physical parameters of the moving vessel, alongside dynamic factors such as tidal levels and water forms. In these respects it could be said to deal primarily with what is imperceptible below the surface, with 'solid' landmasses a mere reference.
- 04 Georges Perec, *L'infra-ordinaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), 11.
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- 18 Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior*, 13.
- 19 Downey, *Domestic Interiors*, 4.
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