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idea journal

(extra) ordinary interiors:
practising critical reflection

vol. 18, no. 01

2021

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



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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'?⁰¹ 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.'"⁰²

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.⁰³ 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.⁰⁴

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.⁰⁵ 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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extra-interior: makeshift practices and localised creative broadcasts

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abstract

This article responds to the challenges facing creative practitioners whose work engages with aspects of 'public' provoked by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The temporary physical closures of established creative infrastructures such as galleries, museums and festivals have disrupted the traditional dynamics of production and reception. This presents both challenges and opportunities for artists and designers to develop new forms of creative engagement with public audiences and spaces.

The confinement of people to a 5-kilometre radius during extended lockdowns in Melbourne, Australia in 2020 prompted a reflection on the opportunities of the 'local' as a particular context for creative practice. This restriction imposed a perimeter that brought people's day-to-day lives into an enclosed loop and produced what could be thought of as a form of interior. In this period, ordinary domestic and local spaces — for example the home office or studio — gained manifold functions for many creative practitioners, including as a space for self-initiated public presentations of their work. In several cases, windows, balconies, and doorways became thresholds for interaction with passers-by. This self-broadcasting situation provided an opportunity for practitioners to play an active role in cultivating new relations and forms of publicity from a localised setting.

In this article, these shifts in practice are investigated through a critical reflection on a series of spatial interventions within a street-facing window of a studio space in Brunswick, Melbourne — an inner-city suburb where residential streets mix with spaces of industrial and creative production. The liminal space of the window became a way to speculate on the concept of thresholds between diverse conditions, including public and private, art and the everyday, urban and local, and interior and exterior. These investigations engaged with a 'makeshift' mode of practice, leading to the production of extra-ordinary interior conditions.

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introduction

French modernist writer Georges Perec made a case for the rehabilitation of the ordinary when he asked,

the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual? ... how are we to speak of these common things, how to track them down, how to flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they are mired, how to give them meaning, to let them, finally, speak of what it is, who we are?⁰¹

Perec is responding to the heroic and spectacular events that dominate mass media and the assumption that what is noteworthy lies outside everyday lived experience. He suggests that a turn toward the ordinary detritus and backdrops of our daily lives might have more to reveal about ourselves than these grand narratives. The ordinary can be understood as what we have become habituated to and exists below the threshold of being noticed — the footpath, local neighbourhood, or our domestic interiors. Perec questions what *processes* can unleash this latent potential in the everyday and allow the ordinary to exceed its common definition to become something worthy of attention.

The ordinary was suddenly brought into focus in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic destabilised many aspects of urban public life in Melbourne, Australia, as well as in cities globally. Local footpaths and parks were negotiated in new ways, shared surfaces were

viewed as potential sites of contamination, and we became keenly aware of the fundamental action of breath circulating in and out of our lungs. During Melbourne's 86-day level 4 lockdown, a restriction was introduced that confined citizens' movement to within a 5-kilometre radius of their homes. In this period, the perimeter of my daily life became a small repeating loop between my studio and home. The loop produced by the 5-kilometre radius prompted an inward orientation towards the sites of daily life and local neighbourhoods, what Perec calls the 'endotic,' as opposed to the outward orientation toward the spectacular distractions of contemporary society he is wary of, as mentioned above.⁰²

This situation lent new centrality to local and everyday spatial environments that had previously fallen below my register of noticeability through habitual encounters.

For creative practitioners like myself, whose work contributes to the public realm, the withdrawal from collective spaces as well as temporary closure of traditional cultural infrastructure (museums, theatres, galleries, and arts festivals) posed critical challenges to the ability to engage with audiences and present work during this time. My creative practice up to this point had facilitated participatory dialogues within public spaces using soundscapes, interactive installations, and what I term relational devices. Relational devices are human-scale artefacts that amplify the effects of spatial phenomena and contain implicit ways of seeing and interacting that are performed through use. Participatory dialogues is a term I use to refer to the use of design artefacts to mediate relations between

people and their spatial context — pointing to the potential for both linguistic and material conversations between various actors (people and people, people and spaces, and people and things). Many of these projects were designed for art and design festivals or were informal interventions in urban settings. During the extended lockdown in Melbourne, without access to public environments, my practice needed to adapt to this new context. This led me to think more deeply about public space and the notion of a public, and wonder what reconfigurations were taking place in response to recent events. I began to seek out instances of ‘publics’ — various overlapping social bodies contingent on events and relations — that might have surfaced during this time.

Beginning in April 2020, my studio space in Brunswick, Melbourne became a site for a series of five informal interventions. During this time, the studio took on a new centrality in my practice, becoming not only a place for the planning of projects and administrative tasks, but also a site for critical spatial practices and self-initiated public broadcasts. I use this term to describe public-facing presentations of my work that operate outside of a traditional institutional cultural framework. The broadcast projects outward from the studio’s interior and is a public transmission of practice. I selected the studio’s windows as a built detail to intervene with because they afforded a crucial point of transmission with the outside world during a time of retreat from public space. The windows, unremarkable in themselves, provided an opportunity to generate work and enabled reflection through practice and writing. The physical construct of the frame of

the windows led to an investigation of notions of thresholds between often often binary spatial and social conditions. Experiments with proximity, atmospheric phenomena, and previously unnoticed local histories highlighted these inherent social and spatial dynamics embedded in the site, making them visible and transmittable to the temporary public of the passer-by on the sidewalk. The informal interventions with the studio windows were focused on creating forms of material dialogue between inside and outside, and aimed to exaggerate these exchanges.

In the first section of this article, I establish a ‘makeshift’ mode of practice as a methodology for responding to the everyday, especially in times of great upheaval, before introducing my studio as an ordinary interior that has the potential to be reframed as extra-ordinary through a reorientation in practice. The interventions and related reflections are then divided into three sections. Section one, ‘Connections and Projections,’ introduces two experiments that investigated ideas of thresholds and frames. This informed an approach to the window as a readymade ‘relational device’ that mediates a dialogue between interior and exterior states in what I refer to as ‘extra-interior relations.’ Section two, ‘Selected Interior,’ describes a site-writing intervention that responded to the perimeter produced by the 5-kilometre radius and discusses this in relation to notions of ‘interior.’ Section three, ‘Local Transmissions,’ recounts two interventions that investigated the opportunities of the local within the framework of urban interior research and practice.

The interventions and surrounding issues discussed in this article raise several questions, including, how has the withdrawal from public space during this time changed conceptions of what it means to share public space, practice within public space, and be a member of a public? And similarly, with the urban so radically reconfigured by the pandemic, what are the opportunities of viewing this through an interior lens? Approaching these questions via contemporary discussions of the urban interior has given an indication of how interior design might be instrumental in understanding a rearranged urban context. Interior designer and scholar Suzie Attiwill articulates this:

The idea of the urban interior challenges the assumption that interior design necessarily has to take place inside a building and shifts the focus to a relational condition ... This invites other possibilities for thinking and designing interiors ... and brings the sensibilities and techniques of interior design to the urban environment.⁰³

The interventions outlined here respond to these questions concerning the effect of an interior approach to the urban, and, in the process, found value for 'makeshift' practices that offer new relations within a challenged public realm.

makeshift practices

This series of five interventions engaged a methodology founded on creative practice as a form of critical inquiry. In this case, the practice provided a way to think through the

various contingent relationships between the studio's interior and its surrounding context. Though the interventions were diverse in their subject matter, they had some key consistencies. There was an emphasis on working in provisional ways with a particular focus on testing ideas. The restrictions introduced by the extended lockdown provided a set of constraints that were, at times, productive. This included a curfew that set up specific time and duration parameters for the work. Establishing a time limit of one day to create each intervention supported a nimble and generative practice mode. In terms of the use of materials, I needed to make do with supplies I already had or could source from within the 5-kilometre radius, though this was limited, as non-essential stores were closed during this period. The idea of a 'makeshift' mode of practice emerged as the experiments gained momentum. The word 'makeshift' denotes improvised measures taken in the context of an emergency to fill an urgent need — usually done with whatever material one has to hand.⁰⁴

There were other aspects of make-shift brought about by COVID-19 restrictions that governments and organisations implemented, such as the reconfiguring of shared space to ensure the safety of the public. Acrylic shields were installed at checkout counters, adhesive decals appeared on pavements reminding people to maintain a 1.5 metre distance, and the borders between public/private and interior/exterior were inverted by small business, who extended their operations out onto the public footpath to remain open. In traditional long-form urban renewal,

reconfigurations of the spatial environment usually occur at an imperceptibly slow speed, but with these hasty amendments necessitated by COVID-19, it became clear how readily the urban spatial environment could be renegotiated when urgent need arose.

The makeshift creative and civic practices mentioned above were temporary and contingent; they called attention to ordinary spatial situations and structures and reconfigured them. This approach is also evident in avant-garde site-specific art, including the work of the Dadaists, the Situationist International (SI), the Fluxus group, the Happenings of Allan Kaprow, and the maintenance art of Mierle Laderman Ukeles.⁰⁵ Though these practices are diverse, and each generated within a specific time and context, they all found opportunities in the ordinary and provided ways to register it. In particular, the Dadaists, such as Marcel Duchamp, demonstrated how ordinary and often mundane utilitarian objects that were at hand could be appropriated and crafted into ready-mades — sculptures that elevated items beyond their intended use to pose satirical cultural critiques. The Fluxus — an international collective of diverse creative practitioners including Joseph Beuys, Yoko Ono, and Nam June Paik — used a wide range of materials and processes unified by self-initiated, democratic belief that art could be created anywhere and by anyone.⁰⁶ Ukeles used repetitive everyday actions of labour and caregiving as the basis of her maintenance art, which juxtaposed conceptual art and banal environments to critique the invisibility

of urban infrastructures and those who labour within them. The artists associated with these movements used their practices to reframe prosaic actions, objects, or sites through informal interventions.

Each of these movements, in their own way, were also responding to upheavals in society in their respective temporal and geographic contexts. The Dadaists formed in reaction to the First World War and the heretofore unseen scale of human destruction.⁰⁷ Fluxus, the SI, and Kaprow all practised during the political and social awakening of the counterculture movement. Ukeles began to practice her maintenance art in the economic collapse of 1970s New York, a time of unparalleled urban transformation.⁰⁸ Each used their practice to draw attention to their social and spatial context and to suggest alternative ways of living. The situated nature of their art practices provided insight into how every day, ordinary, or local environments and actions might be reframed through makeshift practices.

The legacy of the practitioners and movements described above has had a continued role in establishing an expanded field of practice, situated between spatial disciplines and art, which this research operates within. In her work, architectural theorist Jane Rendell investigates the porous boundaries between disciplines. Her fascination with 'sites of contamination' extends to her term 'critical spatial practice,' which traverses the threshold between art and architecture and assists in expanding our understanding of the territories on either side.⁰⁹ This threshold between disciplines

opens architecture and interior design to performative, relational, informal, and subjective approaches more often associated with site-specific and socially engaged public art. Conversely, many of the practitioners referred to above share a fascination with spatial context and therefore play an important role in establishing a historical precedent for a hybrid approach between the artistic and the spatial, exemplified in critical spatial practice. Rendell has found that, through intersections rather than separations, these sites between things (for example, criticism and practice, art and architecture, and criticism and site) are rich grounds for producing new ways of knowing and practicing.¹⁰ Critical spatial practice also locates the spatial as a predominant concern, 'indicating the interest in exploring the specifically spatial aspects of interdisciplinary processes or practices that operate between art and architecture.'¹¹ The following interventions with the studio's windows engage with the informal and makeshift, and in doing so, seek to further expand the way interior is practised in response to ready-made situations.

the studio – an ordinary interior

My studio is one of several informal workspaces within a former textile factory warehouse in Brunswick, Melbourne — an inner-city suburb where built remnants of past industrial production are juxtaposed with residential streets and a diverse range of creative practices.¹² Today, the building is home to creative rather than industrial labour, and is occupied by a collection of artists, designers, and makers. The unremarkable, graffitied brick façade of my space overlooks a footpath.

I catch fragments of conversation, light, and colour as people and cars pass to and from the busy thoroughfare nearby. Inside the two street-facing windows hang crooked venetian blinds gathering dust. When it rains there is a leak in the ceiling and at times there are processions of ants that share the studio with us. The space is only large enough for two desks; and my studio-mate and I sit facing opposite walls. For each intervention, the furniture needed to be shifted to one side to change the studio from its usual configuration into a space for presentations.

Figure 01:

Studio frontage at 164 Victoria Street, Brunswick. Photo by Sarah Burrell, 2020.

I selected the two windows of the studio as the focus of these interventions for the opportunities they presented as a dynamic point of exchange between inside and outside. Like my previous work, where human-scale devices mediated the connection between people and environment, I approached the windows as a ready-made relational device as they posed implicit relations that could be acted out through use. The windows can be seen as a meeting point between physical states, a frame that organises the visual field, an opening that allows atmospheric elements to pass through, and as something that offers the possibility of social encounters. In other circumstances, the windows may not have occurred to me as a site for creative intervention because the studio was within my sphere of everyday life; I had stopped seeing it as more than a backdrop. However, in this period of restriction on movement, these panes of glass enabled reflections through practice and writing on wider ideas of frames, thresholds, and interstitial spaces.

interventions 1 and 2: connections and projections

The first two interventions in this series explored the threshold of the window as a diffuse boundary that revealed the contingencies between interior and exterior — what I term ‘extra-interior relations.’ Here, interior and exterior were not binary or autonomous conditions, but were instead positioned as relational entities engaged in a form of material dialogue, which was enhanced through the introduction of makeshift practices. In the first intervention, *How to Connect*, extra-interior relations posed an invitation for social connection. In the second intervention, *Interior Phenomena*, the environmental atmospheric conditions of the studio were exaggerated through analogue and digital projection techniques.

Figure 02:

Details of the window from the interior of the studio. Photo by Sarah Burrell, 2020.

Intervention 1: *How to Connect*

The first intervention responded to the COVID-19-related implementation of ground markings in the public environment that enforced social distancing. I appropriated the visual language of these prosaic organisers of space and used them as a tactic to intervene with the 'ready-made' of the studio windows. A single line of red tape created a visual and material connection between the studio and the street, as well as connected inhabitants inside and outside, and rendered the window a traversable boundary. There was an implicit invitation for two people to stand facing one another from within the red squares, one on the inside and one on the

outside. The didactic approach to 'connecting' to others through physical proximity was a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement of the conditions of isolation at the time. The people standing inside the squares were brought into an intimate and, at times, confronting relationship, while remaining on either side of the glass pane. The relations of intimacy between two people were thought of as a way of producing a kind of interiority through close connection and intersubjectivity.

Figure 03:

Intervention 1, *How to Connect*. Red tape laid in a continuous line from interior to exterior, with open squares posing an invitation for the passer-by to step inside. Photo by Sarah Burrell, 2020.

Intervention 2.1 and 2.2: *Interior Phenomena*

The next interventions questioned the autonomy of inside and outside states through the exaggeration of natural phenomena entering the studio. Interior spaces are often associated with climate control and refuge from the elements. These spatial experiments instead investigated the architectural container as a porous threshold that allowed the passage of light, air, sound, and matter.

During the creation of these works, I recalled Melbourne artist Bianca Hester's installation *Please Leave These Windows Open Overnight to Enable the Fans to Draw in Cool Air in the Early Hours of the Morning*.¹³ The lengthy title is lifted from a sign Hester found pinned near a window in the University of Melbourne architecture library. This became the basis of her exhibition, due to the 'relationship the text has to time, inhuman forces and architecture — and to the interdependence between interiors and exteriors.'¹⁴ The title of Hester's exhibition became the inspiration and brief for these two interventions; it signals the

liveliness of interiors through the atmospheric and material dynamics operating within and around them.

In *Intervention 2.1* (Figure 04), the passage of sunlight through the studio was amplified by carefully placed trays of water. The trays reflected the sunlight that entered the room off the surface of the water and projected it onto the walls and ceiling of the studio. The ceiling fan disrupted the surface of the water, interacted with the exterior force of the sunlight, and further accentuated its movement across the walls of the studio. This experiment elicited a consideration of time through the placement of the trays of water. They were laid out in a way that coincided with how the natural light entered through the window at different times of day. As the sun passed through the sky, the effect on the surfaces of the studio changed and evolved. The threshold of the window formed the aperture that allowed this to take place. Immersed in the natural light, there was the obvious presence of change, movement, and

Figure 04:

Intervention 2.1. Refraction of sunlight from outside bounces on water to create a shimmering projection on the interior surfaces of the studio as it is animated by the looping of the ceiling fan. Photo by Sarah Burrell, 2020.

the passage of time, qualities sometimes too slow and imperceptible to register in interior environments. This phenomenal affect of the intervention sought to disrupt the conception of architecture as a container or enclosure by shifting awareness to the dynamic yet subtle forces exchanged between interior and exterior that are always present, and often unnoticed.

In *Intervention 2.2* (Figure 05), I digitally projected a pre-recorded video of the tree seen from the window on the studio wall. The video recorded a strong wind that caused the branches of the tree to move hypnotically. I shifted the projection across the various objects and structures inside the studio, noticing how it took on the form of the surfaces it was projected onto, introducing dialogic relations between interior and exterior conditions and objects.

Figure 05:

Intervention 2.2. A video of the tree opposite the studio waving in a strong wind is projected onto interior surfaces. Photo by Sarah Burrell, 2020.

Extra-Interior Relations

Through these interventions, and while largely confined to the inside of my studio, I became aware of a myriad of subtle ways in which interiors were in ebb and flow with their surrounding contexts. This was felt most acutely at the threshold of the window, where interior and exterior became indeterminate. In the series of interventions described in this article, the threshold of the studio's windows became a framing device through which to investigate the ways interiors and exteriors are interdependent, which can be termed 'extra-interior' relations.

Thresholds between interior and exterior such as windows and doors are commonly understood as physical boundaries. However, it is precisely in this liminal space of windows and doors where boundary conditions lose their binary characterisation and become momentarily undefined. Melbourne-based

spatial designer and researcher Christopher Cottrell described the potentials for practice that lie in the interstices between spatial conditions, saying:

... the practice of thresholding requires working and thinking at the limits of tangible things, and suggests that productive sites for thinking and making can be found at the limit points of material, spatial and conceptual categories. At these edges things become unstable and with this instability is the possibility of knowing things anew.¹⁵

In philosopher Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological meditation on the seemingly ordinary spaces in the domestic home, *The Poetics of Space*, he expands on relations between interiority and exteriority that are revealed through thresholds. In doing so, he cautions against a dialectic of binary opposition, arguing that 'outside and inside are both intimate spaces; they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility. If there exists a borderline surface between such an inside and outside, this surface is painful on both sides.'¹⁶ Though he does not use the word threshold explicitly, his description of the borderline surface between the inside and the outside of the wall, door, or window is clearly linked to this idea. That they are 'always ready to be reversed' points to the possibility of the exterior and interior shifting positions and being renegotiated.¹⁷ In addition, the idea of a surface sensitised to the conditions on either side is significant. The 'borderline' he speaks of is the threshold; a site of exchange

and porosity between two states where the relationship between them is most keenly felt.¹⁸

The specific threshold of the windows provided a way to critically reflect on thresholds in a wider conceptual sense — between creative disciplines, interiors and exteriors, notions of publics and privacy, through a process of creative production and reception. By questioning these binary oppositions and investigating the space between them, these supposedly distinct conditions merged, and the complexity of their interrelations expanded. These ideas concentrated an understanding of the studio's windows as a threshold for dynamic dialogue between inside and outside, not simply as a static physical frame.

The experiments described above exemplify a makeshift approach. They made use of materials gleaned from the studio and past projects: red tape, metal saucers, water, a ceiling fan, a video recorded on a phone, an old digital projector. These are not rarefied materials, but when assembled, they exceeded themselves and shifted, however slightly, the extra-interior relations of the studio by extending an interior way of thinking to the environment outside the studio. Importantly, this provisional mode of practice is also responsive to the existing dynamic conditions of the space. Actions such as catching light in the tray to amplify it and drawing attention to the encounter between people on either side of the glass — these makeshift practices merely framed these inherent, unnoticed, relations and made them visible. These actions served to cultivate fascination with the ordinary conditions of everyday life.

intervention 3: selected interior

The fourth intervention made the intellectual and creative labour that usually goes unseen inside the building visible to the outside. It was a way of practising reflection through a performative process in and with the site. The words I wrote are an excerpt of prose from the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, which relate to the dialectic of inside and outside.¹⁹ Recalling Bachelard's threshold that is 'painful on both sides,' I wrote on each side of the window so the text could be deciphered whether the reader is on the inside or outside.²⁰ I pre-recorded the passage of text and played it through my headphones. However, the narration was too fast, and I struggled to hold onto the words long enough to put them down on the glass. Slippages and erasures occurred between the original text and what I was able to remember, and a form of intersubjective dialogue occurred. As I wrote on the

windowpane, I watched the words appear and intermesh with the scene beyond the glass. As people passed on the sidewalk outside, they became a part of the work for a fleeting moment before moving on.

The Rilke passage describes the parallel claustrophobia of the interior and agoraphobia of the exterior; 'and there is almost no space here; and you feel almost calm at the thought that it is impossible for anything very large to hold in this narrowness. But outside, everything is immeasurable.'²¹ The fullness of the interior is likened to the lungs filling up with air until it is almost unbearable, suggesting Rilke wished to transcend any physical state of containment whatsoever, 'This is where it rises, where it overflows from you, higher than your respiration, and, as a final resort, you take refuge, as though on the tip of your breath. Ah! Where, where next?'²² At the end of the text he wrote, 'Oh window

Figure 06:

Intervention 3, *Writing with Rilke*. A passage of text is transcribed onto the studio's windows in a performance intervention. Photo by Aubrey Bloomfield, 2020.

muffled on the outside, oh doors carefully closed [...] Oh silence in the stair-well, silence in the adjoining rooms, silence up there, on the ceiling.²³ In this passage, Rilke likened the boundedness and fullness of the interior to the human body, the lungs, which fill up with air and overflow into the outside world.

Conceiving of the respiratory system as a form of interior is eerily resonant now that we are living under threat of a virus that affects the lungs. Breathing is a largely unconscious bodily process that is its own looping system and another ebb and flow between interior and exterior. Air is drawn into the lungs and into the innermost interior of the self before it is expelled once again into common space. And air, much like space, is not inert or a void but, as we are now acutely aware, alive with material that is invisible to the human eye.

Selected Interior

Another potential interior that emerged in this time is the local area enclosed in the 5-kilometre radius that I traversed each day on my bike between home and the studio.

The territory it encloses was always there, but it took this perimeter to make it discernible. A radius, a loop, a rim, a frame...all words for an area that draws attention to what is contained within it.

Philosopher, Elizabeth Grosz describes the frame as a theoretical organising concept for human experience and a form that proliferates in the built environment.

The frame is what establishes territory from out of the chaos that is the earth. The frame is thus the first construction,

the corners, of the plane of composition. With no frame or boundary there can be no territory, and without territory there may be objects or things but not qualities that can become expressive...²⁴

Grosz describes chaos not as the absence of order but a state of undifferentiation. The philosopher Gilles Deleuze posits, 'the interior is a selected exterior, the exterior a projected interior.'²⁵ This infers an inside-outside description of relational processes rather than fixed boundaries, and in the context of this article, opens interior and exterior conditions to what Grosz calls 'subtle renegotiation and redefinition.'²⁶ During this time, I worked in response to the literal frame of the studio windows, which became a lens through which the neighbourhood's happenings were selected and brought into focus. Similarly, the implicit frame of the radius contained me within the local spatial environment and facilitated an attentiveness to it that had not previously been experienced. Frames, whether material or conceptual, have the ability to create interiors which Perec would describe as the 'infra-ordinary.'²⁷ By concentrating attention in a process of selection, frames shift the perceived 'chaos' of undifferentiated ordinary life into the realm of the extra-ordinary.²⁸

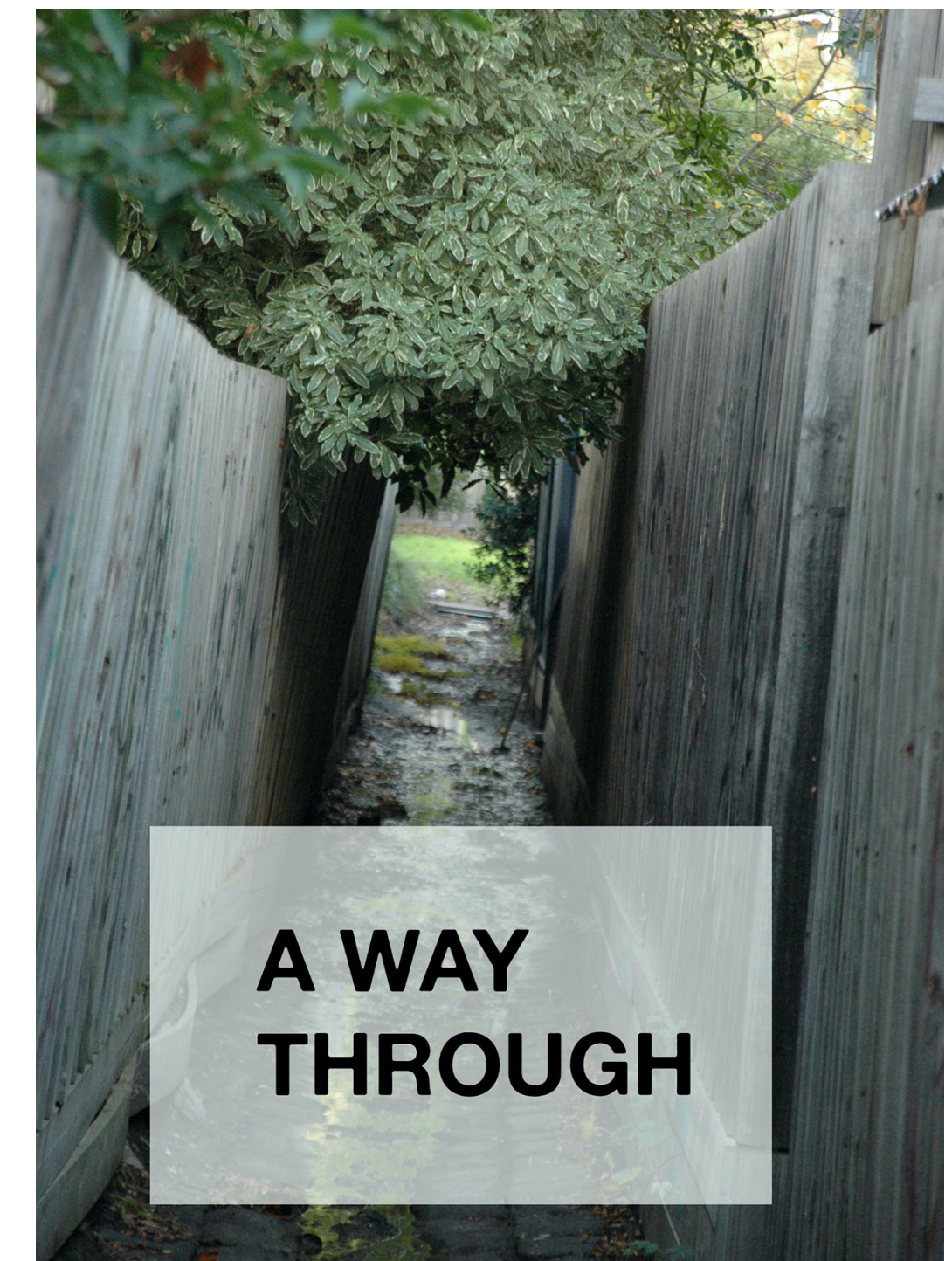
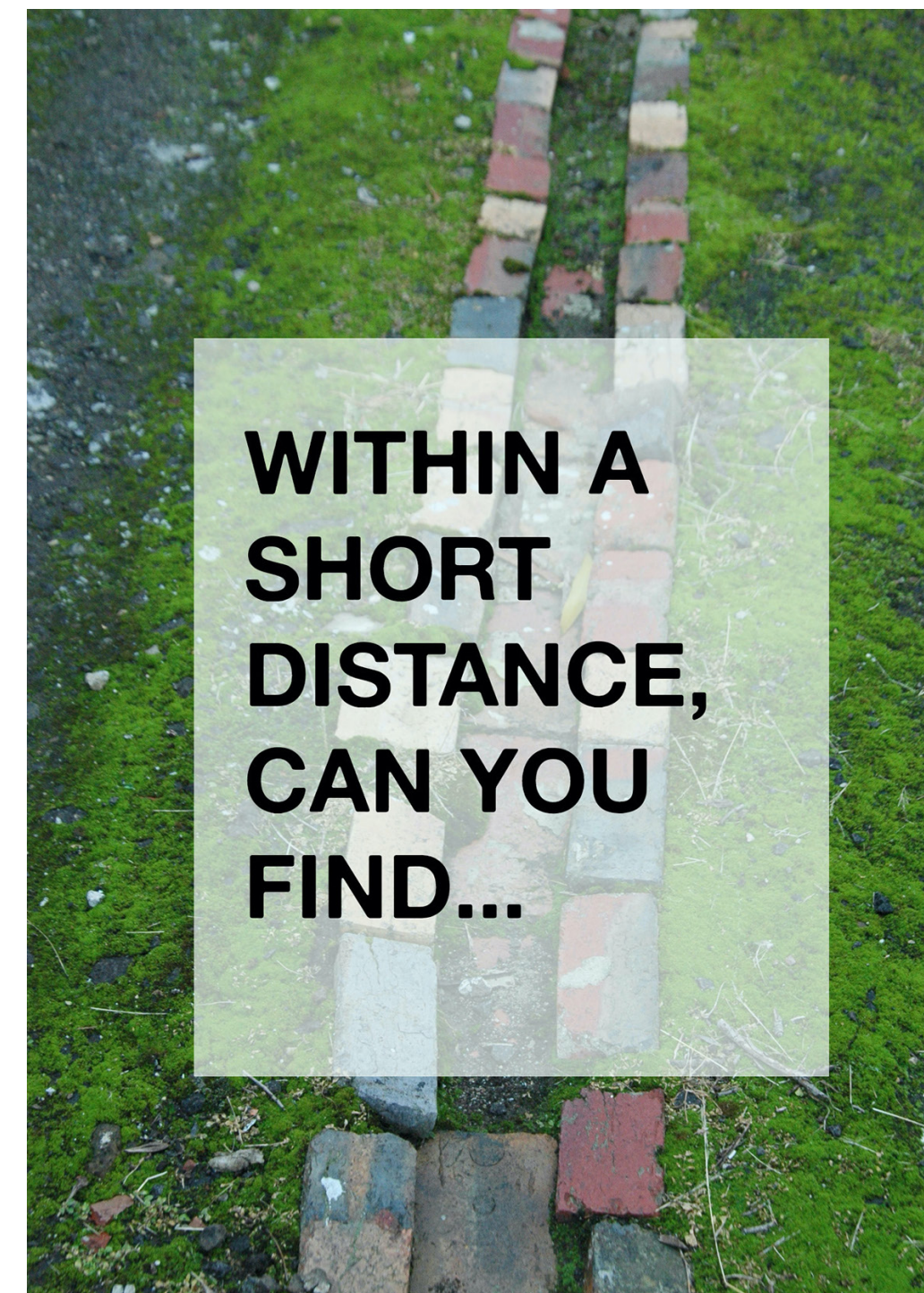


Figure 07:

Intervention 4, *Hello Wanderer*. A series of texts are projected from the interior of the studio onto the windows' surfaces, offering instructions for action to passers-by. Photo and graphics by Sarah Burrell, 2020.

interventions 4 and 5: local transmissions

The final two interventions were focused on using the window as an outward-facing projection surface for public transmissions. These works investigate forms of local knowledge and are attentive to the minor histories and specificities of place. These are the most extroverted interventions as they acted as localised self-initiated public broadcasts and sought to facilitate a dialogue between the studio and the surrounding neighbourhood.

Intervention 4: Hello Wanderer

Hello Wanderer (Figure 07) was a series of provocations or 'scores' for action, back-projected in the window of the studio. The term 'scores' is used here to describe an instruction for action that can be performed by a participant, and is drawn from Lawrence and Anna Halprin's RSVP cycles methodology.²⁹ They asked passers-by to find and photograph different elements in the surrounding area and submit them to a growing archive of images. The lens of the camera acted as a frame that is placed over multivalent everyday situations in order to lend them heightened

performativity and significance. Participants were invited to step into the role of the tourist or what urban sociologist Richard Sennett calls 'observational cruising,' dropping their habitual patterns of moving through the streets and allowing themselves to be drawn by chance encounters.³⁰ This bears similarity to the Situationists' practices of the *dérive* and *détournement*, which brings the subjective into dialogue with the ready-made situation of the street. Throughout *Hello Wanderer*, the participants were asked to locate elements that evoked other places, times, or characters, using the frame of the event to heighten their ordinary surroundings.

Intervention 5: Kortex Sweatshop Strike 1981

Intervention 5 represented a shift in focus from phenomenal experiences to a historic and political interpretation of the neighbourhood surrounding the studio. By using design practices to frame local narratives, it posed questions about which histories are privileged within the built environment and which go unseen.

Many of the streets surrounding the studio are named after colonial landowners and so, led by an existing interest in counter-monumental practices, I looked instead toward more minor histories that might relate to the studio's former use as a textile factory.

Figure 08:

Intervention 5. A photograph of the 1981 Kortex sweatshop strike is projected on the surface of the window, engaging with ideas of celebrating unseen local history, 'excavating' the former use of the studio building, and using creative practice to engage with alternative forms of public memory. Photo: Sarah Burrell, 2020.

Through research, I became aware of Brunswick's unique cultural identity and established reputation as a site of civil disobedience and free speech. One event that stood out was the 1981 Kortex sweatshop strike. 2021 marked the forty-year anniversary of this illicit action. It involved a ten-day strike by 300 women from migrant backgrounds, the majority of whom did not speak fluent English, and who successfully fought against violence and intimidation from police and members of their own union in the struggle for better working conditions; they dismantled numerous sexist and racist stereotypes in the process.³¹

I used the surface of the windows once more as a projection screen to create an ephemeral monument to this unacknowledged local history. The projection facilitated a turning out of the warehouse's interior toward the street and displayed its industrial past using text and archival imagery. This intervention intended to act as a provocation to the passing public and aimed to engender curiosity about the event of the strike — asking passers to pause, consider, and reflect on the spatial and social context of the local neighbourhood. This kind of dialogic intervention has the potential to generate thinking and discussion that can counter generalisations of urban spaces and promote an appreciation for the specificity of place-based actions.

Local Urban Interior

One of the key considerations of this work was the impact of the pandemic on public space. During this period of restriction, access to exterior environments beyond

the one-hour-a-day limit made carrying out informal interventions in public spaces near to impossible. Furthermore, the withdrawal from an urban life clustered around a central city business district towards an individual's local radius shifted public space beyond definitions of interior and exterior, public and private. The concept of the urban interior assisted in formulating ideas of how to respond to these changed conditions through practice. In a recent paper on the urban interior in the 'pandemicine,' Rochus Urban Hinkel suggests the urban interior is active in 'those spaces and times that challenge any neat distinction between private and public modes of existence. Importantly, the project of the urban interior is one that is left open-ended, available to reinterpretation depending on the circumstances that confront us.'³² This shift toward the sites of local and daily life might represent a turning point for urban interior research and practice, and provide new subjects, issues, and relations that generate new work and thinking.

The urban interior has established precedents for interior practice to move beyond the fixity of architecture and address urban conditions through attentiveness to the relations between people and their spatial surroundings. Attiwill characterises the urban interior, saying,

With an emphasis on the relational, interior design is no longer necessarily defined in advance by the condition of enclosure. This invites other possibilities for thinking and designing interiors ... and enables the sensibility and techniques of interior design to

extend into the urban environment as a practice of designing 'interior.'³³

By implementing practices that attend to patterns of inhabitation, interior designers might contribute to understanding shifting relations between people and environment in a reconfigured urban context.

In the extended lockdown following Melbourne's second wave, people were largely confined to domestic interiors and local areas. The terms 'hyper-localism' and the 'ultra-local' have emerged in design practice to describe an approach to designing that embraces prosaic environments and resists the homogeneity of urban space caused by globalisation and neoliberalism. Kathy Waghorn, a researcher and member of the architecture and urbanism collective HOOPLA, describes an ultra-local approach:

To get to know a place as an ultra-local then is to know a place's interiority, its material, spatial, temporal and social components, and its exteriority, its linking and overlapping with multiple locales beyond. Ultra-local knowledge comes from noticing a place at scales between the micro, (the minutiae of the everyday) and the macro, (how the place is connected to a myriad of other places).³⁴

The events of the pandemic turned our attention to the local, separating us from the large-scale urban and global networks we have come to rely on, now largely confined to walkable distances in our immediate

neighbourhoods. My own restriction to my local area and the studio as a site for practice spurred an investigation into previously unnoticed embedded histories and provided new ways of understanding and designing within an interior I had become habituated to.

conclusion

During 2020 there were critical shifts in how art and design is presented and engaged with. Part of this was a rise in creative intervention into unconventional domestic and local sites that resulted in a conflation of creative practice and everyday life. This allowed a new set of relations to emerge between practitioners and publics. The withdrawal from central urban spaces during this period presented the opportunity to develop alternative forms of engagement with my studio space and its two windows, which became a device for self-initiated broadcasts to the passers-by on the sidewalk outside. The ordinary windows became a device that reflected the cultural happenings of the neighbourhood and allowed for a different set of relationships, histories, and actions to emerge. Practising in response to the material threshold of the windows spurred reflections on a series of immaterial relations between conditions, including public and private, interior and exterior, and the urban and the local. This produced an understanding that there are near inexhaustible potentials for practice embedded within even the most quotidian space.

In the past year, conceptions of what forms public space might take and what constitutes a public have shifted. How we gather, interact, and navigate shared spaces has undergone radical change and will likely continue to do so. The destabilisation of shared space has aided an understanding of a more dynamic and temporal sense of publicity and publics. It is my belief that interior practitioners, with their particular attentiveness to the relations between people and their spatial environments, will be instrumental in developing understanding of these shifts as they continue to unfold in the future.

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author biography

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