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idea journal

**fictions, fantasies, and fabulations:
imagining other interior worlds**

vol. 19, no. 01

2022

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



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ISSN 2208-9217

Registered at the National Library of Australia

idea journal is published by IDEA (Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association) ACN 135 337 236; ABN 56 135 337 236. All articles are open access at time of publication on the journal website.

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this issue's provocation

While the world reels, reconfigures, and recovers from the drama and trauma of 2020, wishing to thwart the effects of grief and comprehend what was once incomprehensible, there is all good reason to turn our imagination to 'what ifs', dreams, and other speculations as an antidote to hopelessness. This issue, *Fictions, Fantasies, and Fabulations*, calls for contributions that consider the unlikely, improbable, or downright impossible in spatial design. In recent history, fictions, fantasies, and fabulations have offered productive opposition to the rampant instrumentality of pragmatism and functional planning. Their impact has instilled optimism, sparked alternative visions, and been sites of countless critiques of conformity and the status quo. Loosely defined impulses towards the unrealisable and the most illogical of things approached in the most logical of ways have led to unparalleled episodes of creativity in drawings, poems, and material production. From Piranesi, Peter Greenaway, Kurt Schwitters, Dora Maar, Hans Op de Beeck, Ursula Le Guinn, John Hejduk, to Daniel Libeskind, explorations of the impossible have led to new interpretative frontiers that move the limits of interiority and spatial practices. Lest we forget or become complacent with the contributory and often unrecognised impact of contemporary social media, advertisement, and technological surveillance that continues to shape interior worlds, experiences, and values. In many ways, there is as much focus on unpacking, making sense of, and disproving the dangerous impacts of fictions, fantasies, and fabulations as there is on setting the scene for dreams and magical realities.

This issue recognises the complex story of fictions, fantasies, and fabulations in spatial design, not as counter-productive forces, but as the necessary counter-balances that offer liberty from convention, propriety, and rational assumptions about behaviour, space, time, and material — the core elements of interior worlds. Far from retreating into solipsistic escapism, fictions, fantasies, and fabulations serve as crucial sites for speculative invention, futuring, and critical reflection. Resistant to the reductive inertia of pragmatism, these generative properties reign in that mercurial shadow world of meaning and value not directly associated with cause and effect.

This call for papers and projects is intended to frame an open examination and exploration of the fictions, fantasies, and fabulations in spatial and interior practices. It prompts us to draw, write, perform, and record the critical edge of the unrealisable in an era that has literally experienced the limits of reason. As described by poet Franny Choi, there is no more time for poetry without stakes because 'people are literally dying'. There is no more time for creative practices that don't ask questions that we 'truly don't know the answer to'.⁰¹ Choi's sentiments air a sense of urgency for relevance as much as they point to the value and agency of poetic meaning and making in artistic, spatial, and interior practices.

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01 https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLYUdgQtOLXlc7HWIc3nBH7VNNvt5hDTA&v=iwoS--CB7k8&ab_channel=PBSNewsHour

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how not to forget: the speculative interior as apparatus of memory

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abstract

Can interior design facilitate remembrance? While the aesthetic and literary genre of speculative fiction projects contemporary political, social, and econometric structures into dystopian futures, speculative history turns this fictional and factual focus to the past. It uses photographs, textual records, oral testimony, and interpretation and extrapolation to intervene in existing narratives. This process involves engaging the absences and gaps in the ephemera housed in institutional archives that work to construct official records of historic events. This text-based essay explores the potential of engaging speculative history as a form of interior design praxis. How can lost narratives, hidden voices, architectural violence, and other concealed historical traumas interwoven with the built environment be resurfaced through strategies of interior visualisation?

To address this prompt, four projects from the studio course *Such a Place as Memory* are taken as case studies to explore how the interior can be situated between public and personal forms of memory. By intervening in historical records and extrapolating familial histories, each work reveals the potential of digital or analogue tools to counter absences in the archive. Stories of communities at the margins or subject to violent political efforts are captured through representational strategies of advanced digital software, orthographic drawing, and architectural modelling. In each, speculation, interpretation, and intervention are centred as key elements informed by theorist Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory. In my reading, the speculative interior and its strategies of representation may function as an apparatus of memory that can capture and relay unseen or deliberately concealed historical narratives into the future.

cite as:

Pavka, Evan, 'How Not to Forget: the Speculative Interior as Apparatus of Memory', *idea journal*, 19, no. 01 (2022), 138–162, <https://doi.org/10.37113/ij.v19i01.472>

keywords:

memory, speculative history, archives, Canadian history, interior representation

introduction

Forgetting is always a possibility.⁰¹

— Jacques Derrida

As a critique of present material and metaphoric structures, the literary and aesthetic genre of speculative fiction functions largely to exacerbate current problems and issues into dystopic future scenarios.⁰² It is a form of storytelling that 'takes what we now believe to be true and imaginatively explores what might be the case, if conditions were different than they are.'⁰³ These narratives tend to break 'with the traditional concerns of a white, male-dominated readership and authorship to include marginalized voices and concerns.'⁰⁴ On the other hand, speculative or revisionist history revisits the past to intervene in established narratives, providing space to re-read and re-cast the stories that have become canon.⁰⁵ Speculation involves 'contemplation of a profound, far-reaching or subtle character,' that also engages 'hypothetical reasoning on subjects of a deep, abstruse or conjectural nature.'⁰⁶ When applied to historical interpretation, this approach, akin to feminist historiography, takes existing textual, photographic, and other fragments recorded in archives as well as other repositories as a premise to weave counter-narratives that imaginatively move in and beyond people, places, and things contained.⁰⁷ As writer and academic Saidiya Hartman illuminates in her reconstruction of the lives of Black women at the turn of the twentieth century, these counter-readings of the archive

are integral for telling histories of marginalised communities as a way to 'grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limit it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the authority of historical actor.'⁰⁸ Speculative history imagines alternative scenarios and attempts to summon moments of resistance, lost practices, and counter-readings from archival fragments that form larger canons and metanarratives.

In this sense, speculative history operates much like theorist Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory.' Considering the witnessing and intergenerational trauma of the Holocaust on the children of survivors, Hirsch argues that postmemory 'is not identical to memory: it is "post"; but, at the same time [...] it approximates memory in its affective force and its psychic effects.'⁰⁹ It captures a 'transactive, transferal process,' in which the 'past is internalized without being fully understood.'¹⁰ Both speculative history and postmemory attempt to grapple with the complicated transference of history through explicit forms of fact and fiction.

Fiction also reigns in the context of the academic interior design studio. Take, for instance, the selection of drawings that compose standard project submissions: plans, elevations, sections, axonometric and perspectival views. These forms of image-making present in earnest the qualities of projected, fictional, and largely speculative

space. They capture scale, spatial relations, materiality, form, function, and various atmospheric qualities. However, the places each image presents are entirely fabricated and will rarely manifest beyond the page or screen of the drawing. How can the processes of speculative history inform a critical — and speculative — design practice?

This question directed a senior studio course titled *Such a Place as Memory* taught at the School of Interior Design at Toronto Metropolitan University. Students investigated significant architectural sites across Canada that have had complicated, contested, and often traumatic histories erased along with the related material structures: the Ward in Toronto, Japanese internment camps in southern Alberta, Vancouver's Burrard Inlet, and a Scarborough apartment complex. Site-specific research into the erased or concealed narratives of these places generated the creation of an 'apparatus of memory' — a built-space space, a film, a publication, or some other form of remembrance — that would attempt to bring to the surface what had been lost. Positioning the interior somewhere between public and personal memory, in turn, positioned students in relation to collective archives in the city, their own familial records, or in dialogue with both. In doing so, they produced a series of speculative investigations of erased interiors that skirted the edge of fact and fiction, using the archive as a resource. This essay explores the factual and fictional impact from taking

the archive, its logic, and its missteps as a premise. How might a speculative interior that approximates what lies between public and private memory shape remembrance? How can the strategies of researching the interior, namely forms of spatial visualisation, work to hold, contain, and relay the past into the present? What complications and opportunities arise when such images, stories, and oral testimonies include contradictions of fact and fabrication?

public memory

Civic institutions from libraries to city archives contain a significant portion of what constitutes public or collective memory. These institutions are storage receptacles for evidence of past events in the form of newspapers, photographs, letters, and more. Historians, librarians, or other gatekeepers stitch these fragments together into larger narratives; they are arbiters of the archive. Not normally accessible to the public, archival privilege to this material also prevents its interpretation. In his seminal reflection of the archival impulse, philosopher Jacques Derrida argued, '[...] citizens who thus held and signified political power,' in turn had the privilege 'to interpret the archive.'¹¹ Photographer, filmmaker, and theorist Allan Sekula expands: 'Neither the content, nor the form, nor the many interpretations of the archive of human achievements can be assumed to be innocent.'¹² For instance, wealthy patrons, politicians, and other members of a city's elite dedicate funds

and collections to many institutions. For minority groups whose histories have been equally influential, records are rarely found within the institutions purported to serve their communities.¹³ Though this practice is not unique to Canada, the various public archives across the country contain many instances of colonial trauma, violence, racism, xenophobia, and more in the spaces between their fragments. What happens when the failings of the archive are exposed and then supplemented with speculative structures in an attempt to rectify those fissures in collective memory? How can speculative space be used to complete or fill these voids?

On 23 May 1914, a chartered ship carrying 376 Indian nationals arrived in Vancouver from Hong Kong.¹⁴ The passengers of the *Komagata Maru* intended to immigrate to Canada, a fellow country of the British Commonwealth. However, the vessel was not met with open arms. Instead, it forcibly remained in the Burrard Inlet — a fjord separating North Vancouver and the city proper — for two months until it was escorted out to sea on 23 July of the same year by naval cruiser after a violent and tense confrontation. Only twenty passengers disembarked the ship, while the rest remained on board without adequate access to food or fresh water.

Photographs and newspaper clippings record the saga of the *Komagata Maru*, the former capturing the passengers congregating at the edges of the main deck of the 329-foot-long ship. These dramatic black and white images function largely as portraits of exclusion, in the process creating a deliberate sense of otherness. As art critic and historian Gabrielle Moser reveals, photography was a central device in staging citizenship and belonging in the British Empire.¹⁵ The inverse was also true. The photographic images of the *Komagata Maru* passengers presented a distinct image of who constituted Canadian identity at the turn of the twentieth century and who did not. Of the suite of images currently residing in the archive of the Vancouver Public Library and the City of Vancouver, curator and professor Deepali Dewan notes, 'Photographs of the *Komagata Maru* are characterized by sameness.'¹⁶ Aside from businessman Gurdit Singh, who chartered the vessel, the names of the remaining passengers are largely absent from city records as well as the metadata of archival images.¹⁷ As Dewan continues, 'The seductive nature of the photographic image, and by extension the archive — with its epistemological status connected to reality — obscures the subjects and subjectivities not recorded.'¹⁸ If photography could construct a colonial, ethnonational, and exclusionary portrait, could orthographic drawing subvert it?

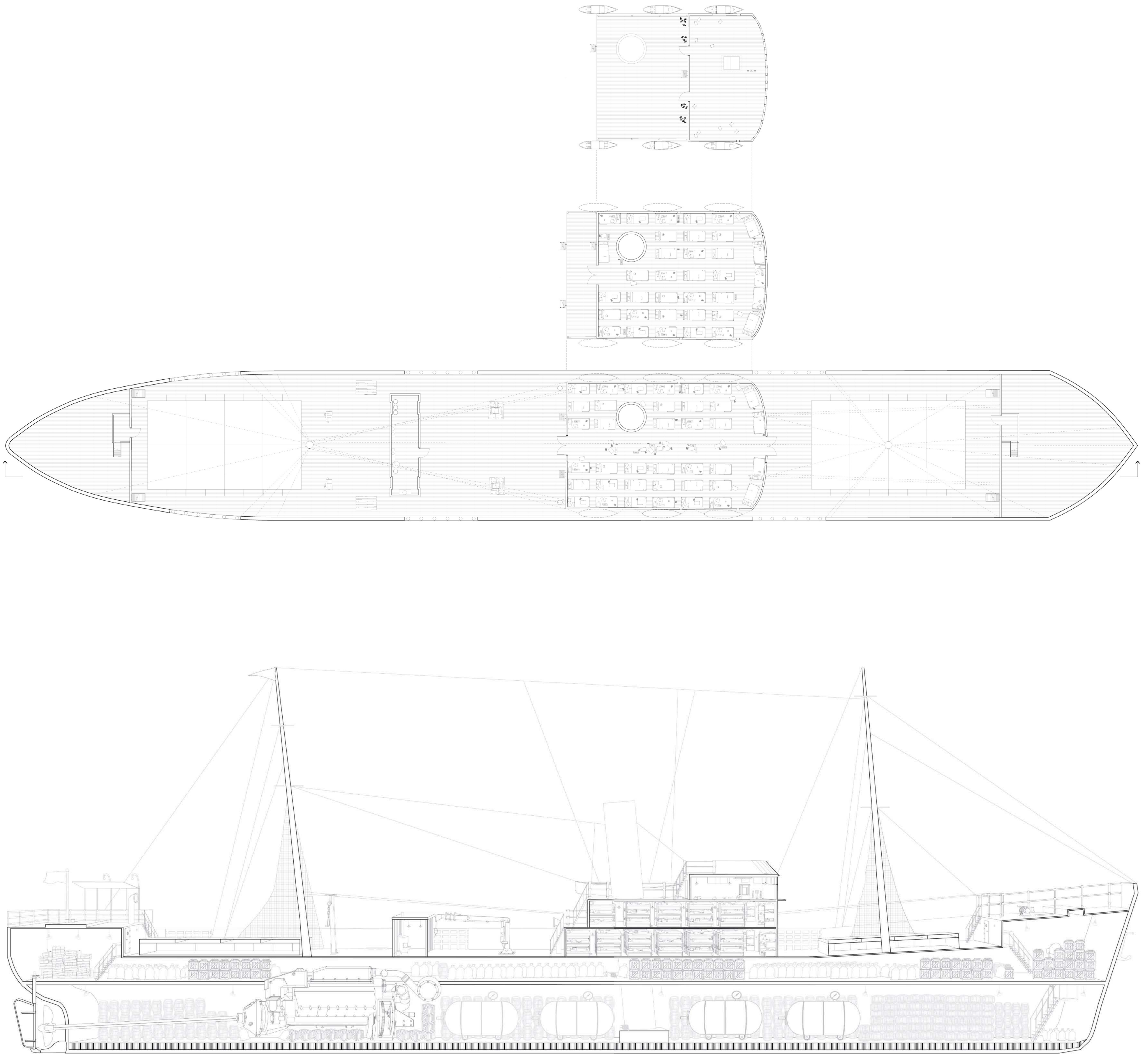
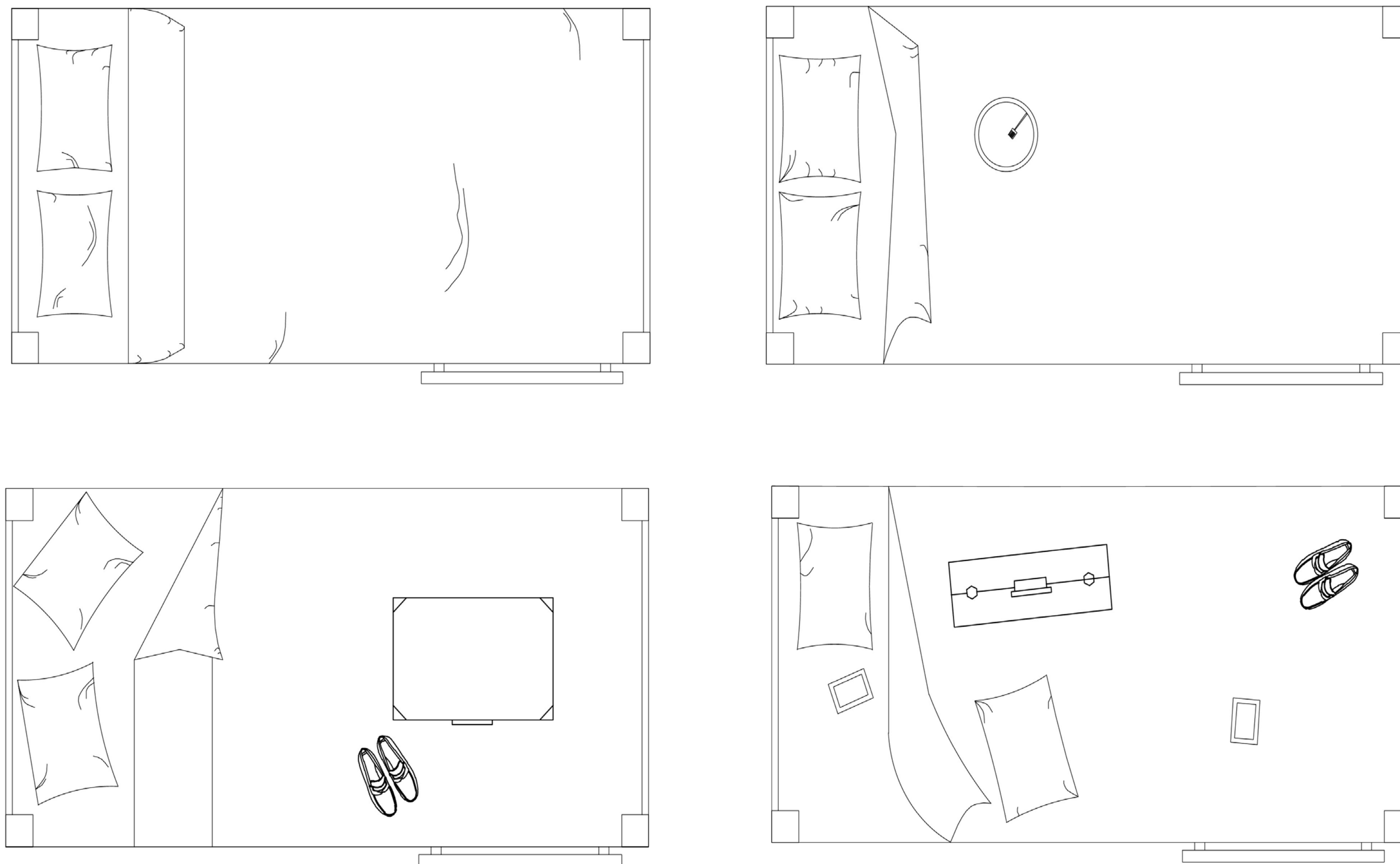


Figure 01.
Plan of the *Komagata Maru*.
Illustration by Arshdeep Boparai,
2017. Reproduced by permission
© Arshdeep Boparai.

Figure 02.
Sectional perspective of the
Komagata Maru. Illustration
by Arshdeep Boparai, 2017.
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**Figure 03.**

Plan detail of the speculative sleeping quarters in the *Komagata Maru*. Illustration by Arshdeep Boparai, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Arshdeep Boparai.

In *History Erased*, Arshdeep Boparai mined the potential of digital drafting and modelling to imagine a more holistic view of those passengers. In contrast to countless records of the opaque exterior, a three-tiered plan (Figure 01) and sectional perspective (Figure 02) depicted the ship's interior. These detailed line drawings also captured the nuances of what life must have been like aboard the ship, using objects and interior space to portray the inner spaces and inner lives of the passengers.

As no records of the interior exist, speculation and extrapolation became key methods in which to imagine what the travellers would have required on their journey and how the vessel may have accommodated the lengthy occupation. Using fragments of existing information, a skeletal frame of the ship emerged. By addressing forms of occupation both projected into and extrapolated from historical readings, a new portrait appeared.

Below deck, two levels were fitted with crates, barrels, and bags of food for the long sojourn. They joined towers of luggage nestled around the edges of mechanical devices propelling the *Komagata Maru* through the Pacific. On the wooden upper decks, two floors of three-tiered bunks were shown crammed into small quarters to capture the nuances of life inside the ship. Atop, a small prayer room was included to support the daily rituals of the majority Sikh passengers. Further traces of speculated inhabitation appeared across the plan. In the prayer room, shoes and pillows were placed along walls and corners as if many aboard had just been worshipping. In the two cabin levels (Figure 03), a terrain of partially made beds, haphazardly placed luggage, dishes, shoes, and more were meant to evoke the textures of daily rituals and the realities of occupying such cramped quarters for months.

Here, orthographic drawing became a counter-portrait, one that may be more real than the photographs captured on the ship's deck. As opposed to the photographic records largely resulting from security protocols initiated by the Canadian state, the plan and sectional perspective materialised imagined spaces of the vessel. 'Photographs furnish evidence,' argues Susan Sontag, tracing their early documentary use as weapons of law enforcement.¹⁹ Together, both the plan and sectional perspective became seemingly official records — like photographs — that furnish evidence of individuality, resistance, and community.

While photography participated in constructing notions of nationhood and citizenship as well as the inclusion or exclusion each presents, it was also used as a record of urban transformation and the inherent politics of property. One such instance involved St John's Ward, an expansive neighbourhood in what is now downtown Toronto that was razed in the mid-1940s to make room for much of the infrastructure that encompasses the city's core. The sprawling CF Eaton Centre mall, Toronto City Hall, Nathan Phillips Square, and new roads now occupy the former site.²⁰ Aside from a select grouping of row houses and a series of paintings by Lawren Harris depicting its ruination, photographs taken as evidence of the urban blight are among all that remain from the systematic eradication of the area. They include dilapidated structures, cramped quarters, narrow alleys, and filthy streets.

Dating back to the mid-1800s, the area of St John's Ward, commonly referred to as simply 'the Ward,' was a notorious enclave that played host to Toronto's growing immigrant

population.²¹ It functioned as a de facto 'arrival city' for many newcomers to the country.²² In the late nineteenth century, Black Americans escaping slavery joined Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants fleeing famine, economic hardships, and persecution in Europe.²³ By the early twentieth century, despite the barriers erected through racist governmental policies aimed at limiting migration, Toronto's first Chinatown emerged at the Ward's southernmost segment resulting from an influx of Chinese immigrants. At the core of a largely white, Protestant, and socially conservative metropolis, the Ward was the target of growing anxieties around the explosive expansion in population between 1871 and 1911 as well as the resulting diversity of Toronto's denizens.²⁴ Many of the records found in the City of Toronto Archives stem from a 1912 survey conducted by the Department of Health to document the living conditions of the neighbourhood. These records captured interior scenes of poverty, decay, and squalor that were later used as evidence to level the area, and ultimately led to the destruction of the Ward.

How can the displacement and destruction of this vibrant and complicated 'arrival city' be recorded through the spaces that once comprised it? A series of spectral monuments formed Joshua Fajardo's response. Situated in the open space of Nathan Phillips Square immediately south of Toronto's City Hall, the structures rose from the approximate locations of the former neighbourhood. Comprised of skeletal metal frames and taunt architectural fabric, the monuments challenged the archival records by illuminating portions of the area in its previous life.

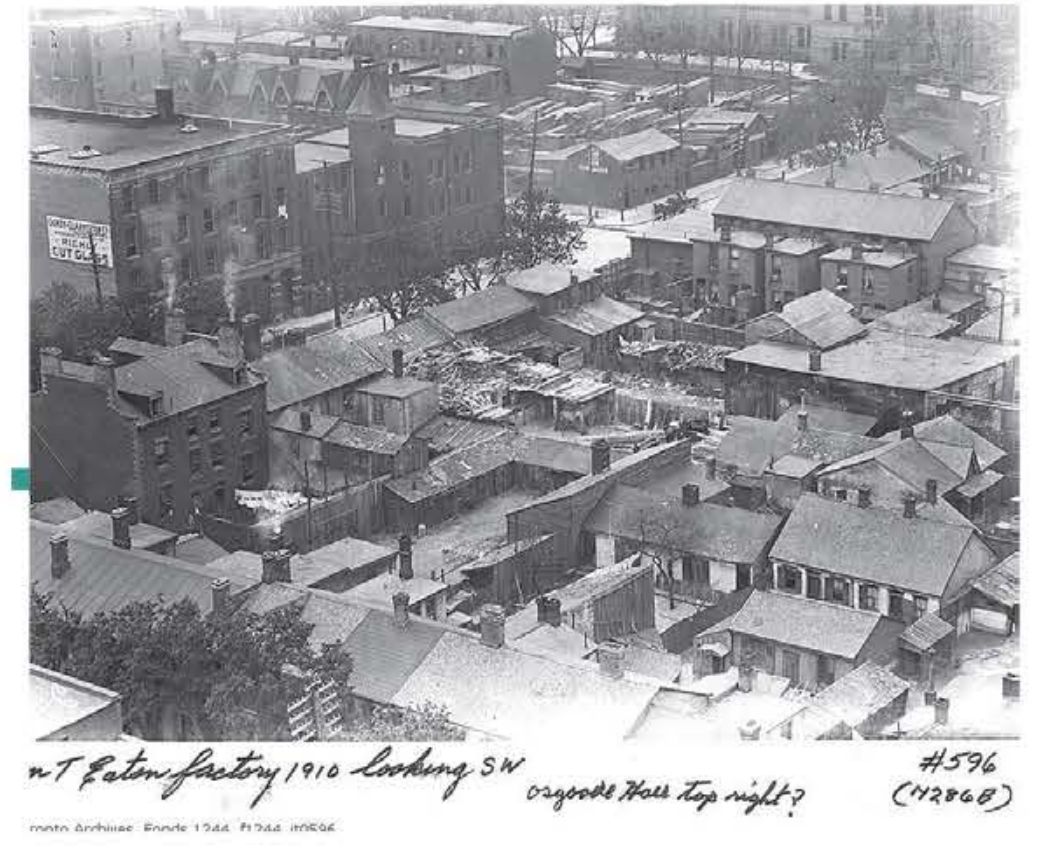
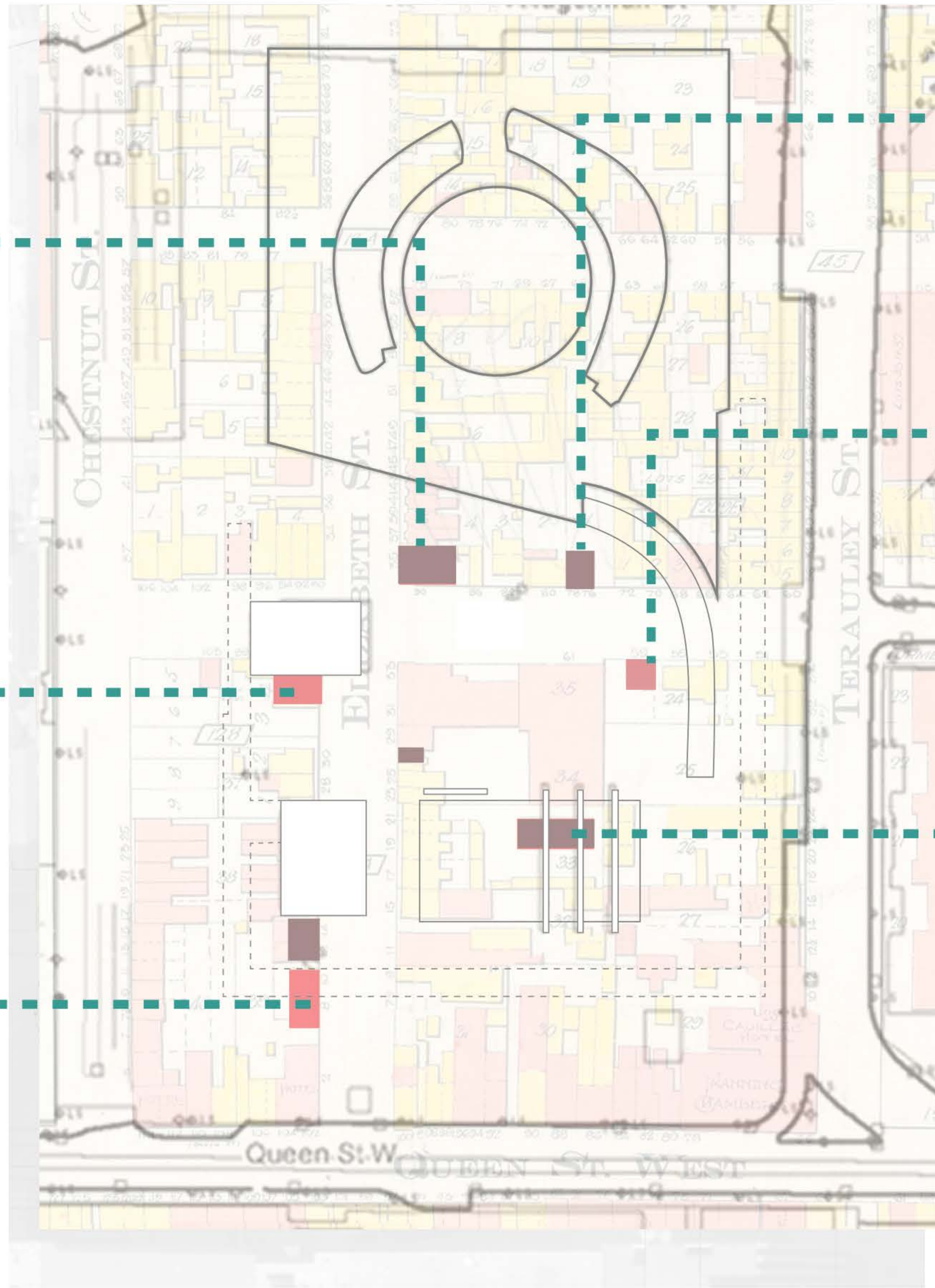


Figure 04.
Plan of Nathan Phillips Square
with a 1912 map of the Ward below.
Significant structures recorded in
a photographic survey of the area
the same year by the Department
of Health were connected to
show their approximate location.
Illustration by Joshua Fajardo, 2017.
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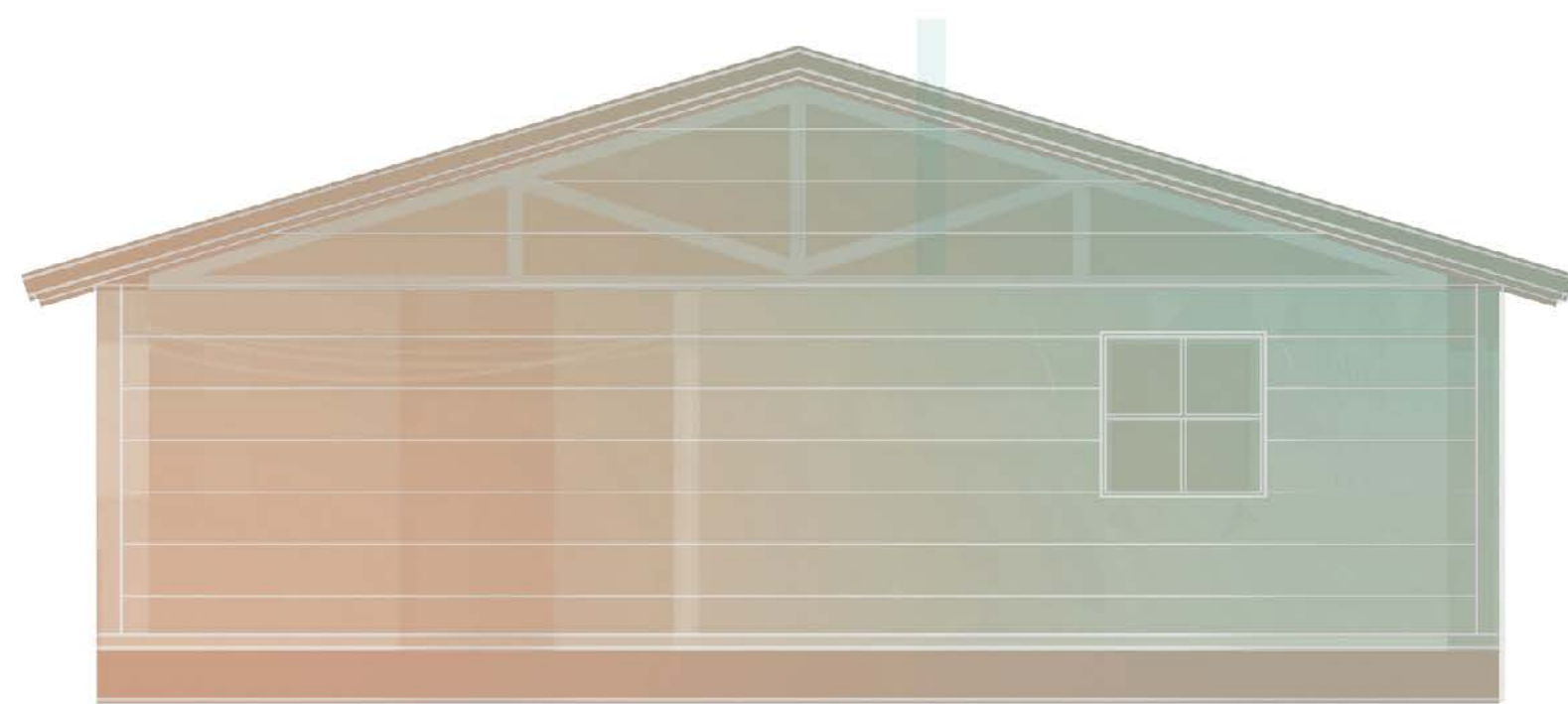
Figure 05.
Plan of speculative residence
composed of fragments of archival
images of the Ward. Illustration by
Joshua Fajardo, 2017. Reproduced
by permission © Joshua Fajardo.

To approximate the location of the demolished structures, an archival map of the Ward from 1912 was overlaid on top of a plan of Nathan Phillips Square to align the former city grid with the contemporary urban plaza (Figure 04). The result was a deliberate rift between two cities — the past and the present. What is hidden under layers of dirt and asphalt slowly surfaced through strategies of imagine-making. Further archival material sourced from the City of Toronto Archives and the Toronto Public Library yielded a portrait of urban, economic, and moral decay. Looking through these images, however, revealed shared expressions of daily life in the Ward: wood-burning stoves for heating, assortments of found furniture, laundry hung across rooms to dry, and multiple beds reflecting multi-generational, perhaps even multi-family households (Figure 05).

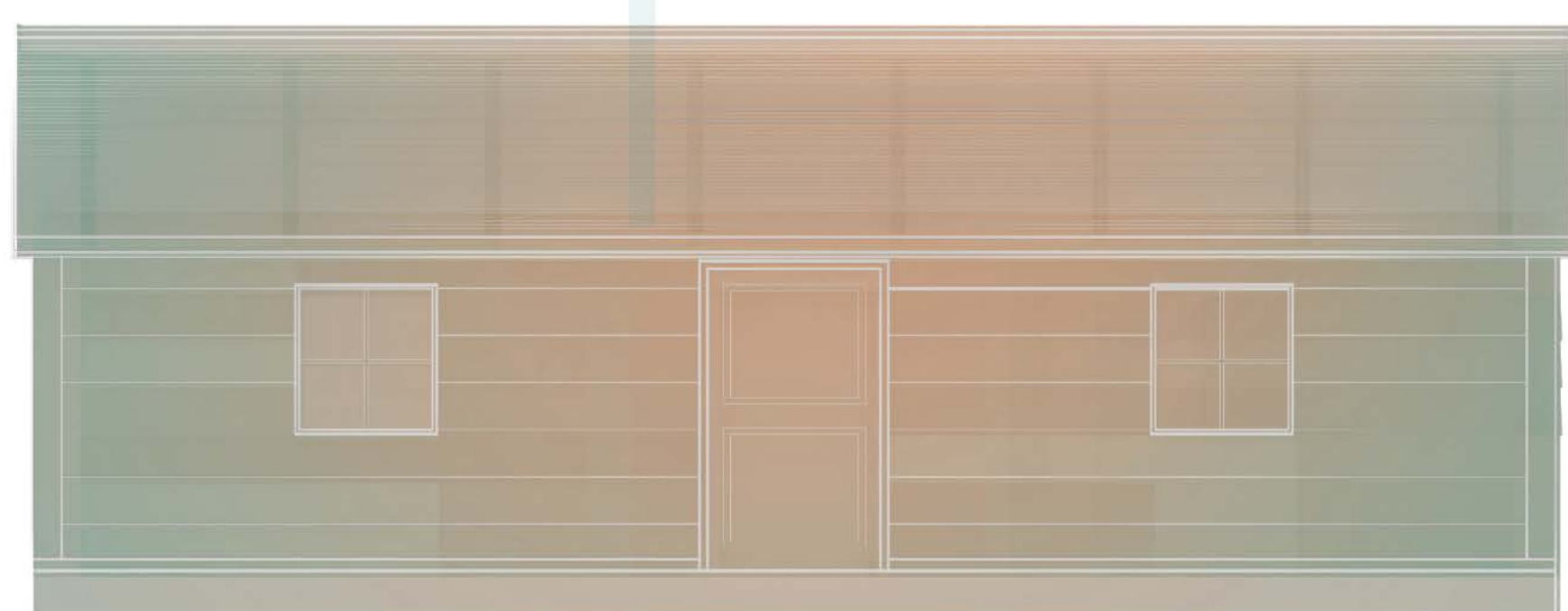
Due to the absence of any formal documentation of the architecture of the Ward beyond photographs and textual documents, a plan of a single-storey, wood-frame residence was drawn from the archival fragments (Figures 06 and 07). The amalgamated plan consisted of a centrally positioned entrance with a small living area and kitchen, with an open dining space flanking either side. At the rear of the humble home, a small sleeping area screened off by a thin curtain was located. Whether the five haphazardly-placed beds nestled close together or the assorted dining chairs, the nuances of the objects within the interior inferred the occupation of a fictional six-person family.

The resulting structure was declared a monument; a pastiche of what remained. At once factual (based on documentary

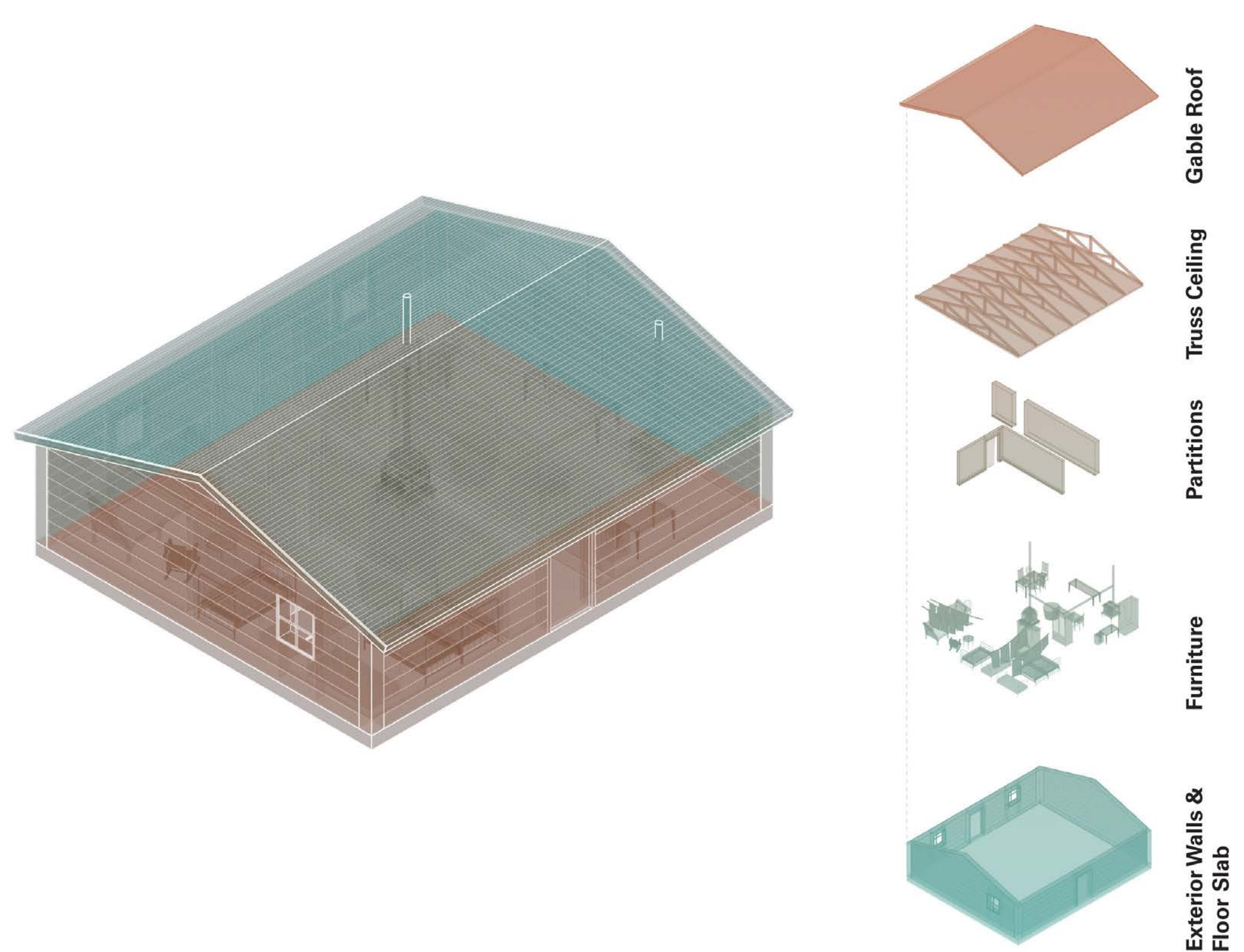
East



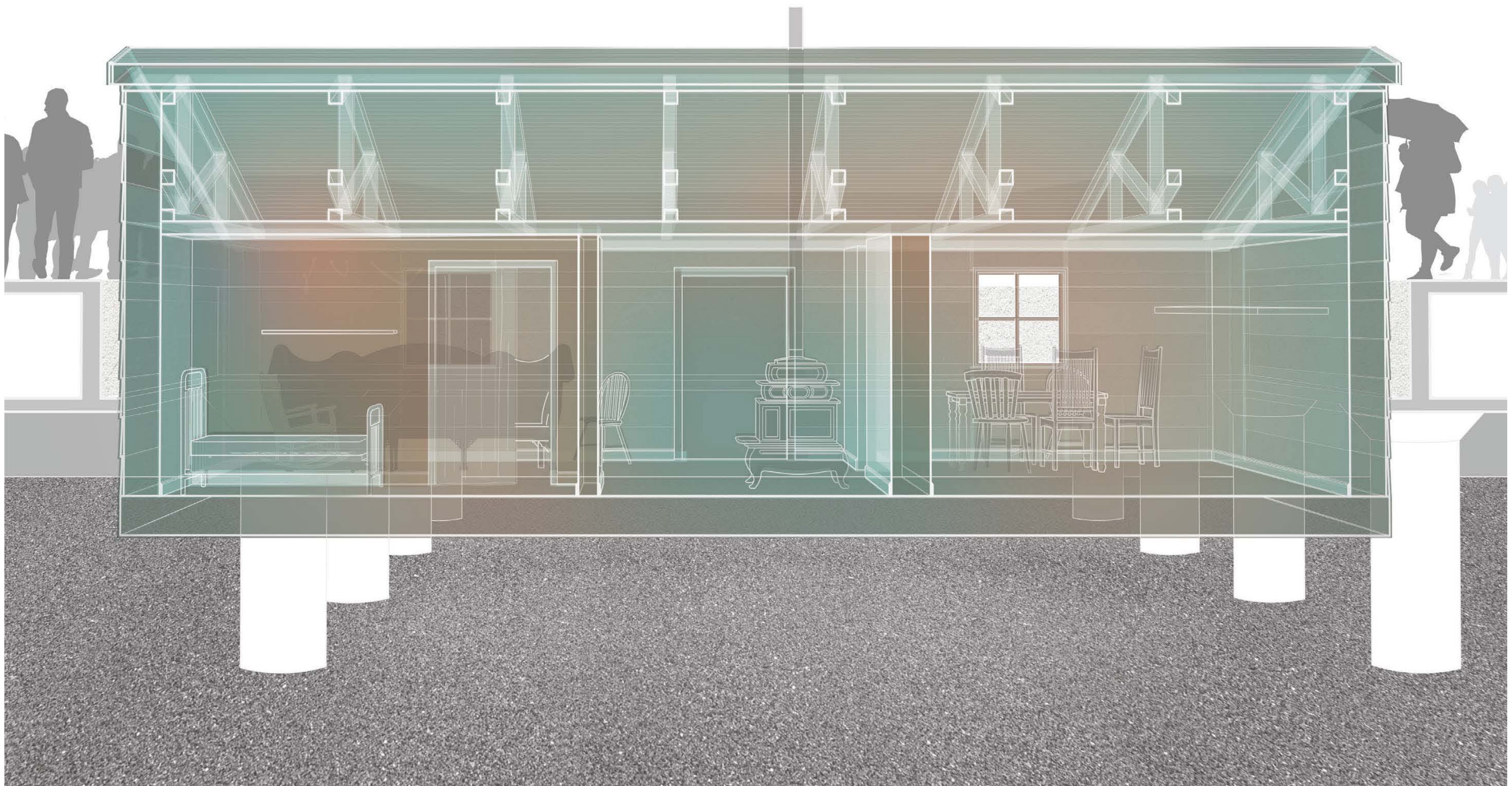
South (Front)

**Figure 06:**

Elevations of the ethereal structure modelled from fragments sourced from the City of Toronto Archives. Illustration by Joshua Fajardo, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Joshua Fajardo.

**Figure 07:**

Exploded axonometric of the ethereal structure modelled from fragments sourced from the City of Toronto Archives. Illustration by Joshua Fajardo, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Joshua Fajardo.

**Figure 08.**

Sectional perspective of the proposed full-scale monument in Nathan Phillips Square that resurfaces destroyed buildings from the Ward. Illustration by Joshua Fajardo, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Joshua Farjardo.

evidence taken of the site and its inhabitants) and fictional (an incomplete projection informed by available material), the combined interior disrupted and augmented the archival images. Appropriating visual records that were used as forms of propaganda to influence policy decisions that resulted in displacement and disenfranchisement, the monument captured the resurrection of the past as it was slowly called into the present. As if partially interrupted as it was summoned from the depths of the earth, the spectral monument straddled the public space above and parking garage below (Figure 08). Incomplete archival records yielded incomplete speculations and, therefore, incomplete structures of commemoration.

In both projects, strategies of visualisation native to interior design and architecture were used to counter the narratives constructed through photographic archival records. Individual and urban colonial portraits gave way to speculation on the lives of those recorded through plans, sectional perspectives, and entire three-dimensional models that embrace both fact and fiction. Insufficient and biased records were met with new records that were purposefully subjective and incomplete. However, their approximation of factual historical evidence bore dissident stories that run against established accounts. In the process, counter-narratives of resistance and existence emerged in the subtle traces of the occupation and inhabitation of interior space.

personal memory

Records filling institutional archives are central to forging larger metanarratives or canons. As evidenced by the *Komagata Maru* incident and erasure of the Ward, these items are fraught with gaps, holes, and incomplete contexts. Oral histories, personal memory, and familial records serve to expand on those absences.²⁵ As opposed to an objective facade, personal records embrace subjective experiences, particularly those of communities at the margins who are rarely extended archival privilege or have ephemeral records that are difficult to preserve.²⁶ How can the tools of interior representation borrow from personal histories drawn out of family photographs and oral testimonies to render visible what is absent from those archives?

For nearly twenty-six years, the Sri Lankan civil war threw the small South Asian country into violent turmoil. The consequence of conflicts between Sinhalese and Tamil nationals, the bloody altercations between parties brought with it significant civilian casualties, displacement, and destruction.²⁷ In 1956, Sinhala was introduced as the country's official language and was followed by clashes between the Sinhalese and Tamil groups. Two years later, anti-Tamil riots broke out because of the increasingly hegemonic cultural rule. 'At that time we had our own land and property rights,' recalls Indirani Shivanandan, a Tamil woman who spent much of her adult life in Sri Lanka during the war.²⁸ Almost three decades later, the violence continued. Shivanandan

remembers additional attacks during the 1983 uprisings, where 'they [Sinhalese Forces] started breaking the houses, killing people, stealing the jewellery.'²⁹ The Tamil Tigers, a para-military group based in the country's North and Northeastern territories, led attacks against the government, intending to secure dedicated space for Tamils. The fighting would continue for the next three decades, eventually ending in 2009 following the death of its leader. With an architectural reference, Indirani recalls the senselessness of the conflict that killed nearly 100,000 Sri Lankans: 'Every house has a well. Every house has walls [...] Why is this happening here?'³⁰ The result was a mass diaspora or scattering of Tamil from their homeland to urban centres in Canada, Germany, and more.³¹

Though the architecture of the home was an apt metaphor for cultural stability and instability, it was also the site of violence and erasure. Like many Tamils, Shivanandan and her family were forced to flee Sri Lanka, eventually and unwillingly immigrating to Toronto, Canada. Yet, the immaterial remains of the family's destroyed home are recorded in tender, cherished family photographs and in objects taken from the site prior to relocation. Images like this represent 'a neat slice of time,' and a 'privileged moment, turned into a slim object,' according to Sontag.³² They also represent fragments of a material and metaphoric architectural whole, further ruptured by the dislocation of time, space, and place inherent in forced migration.

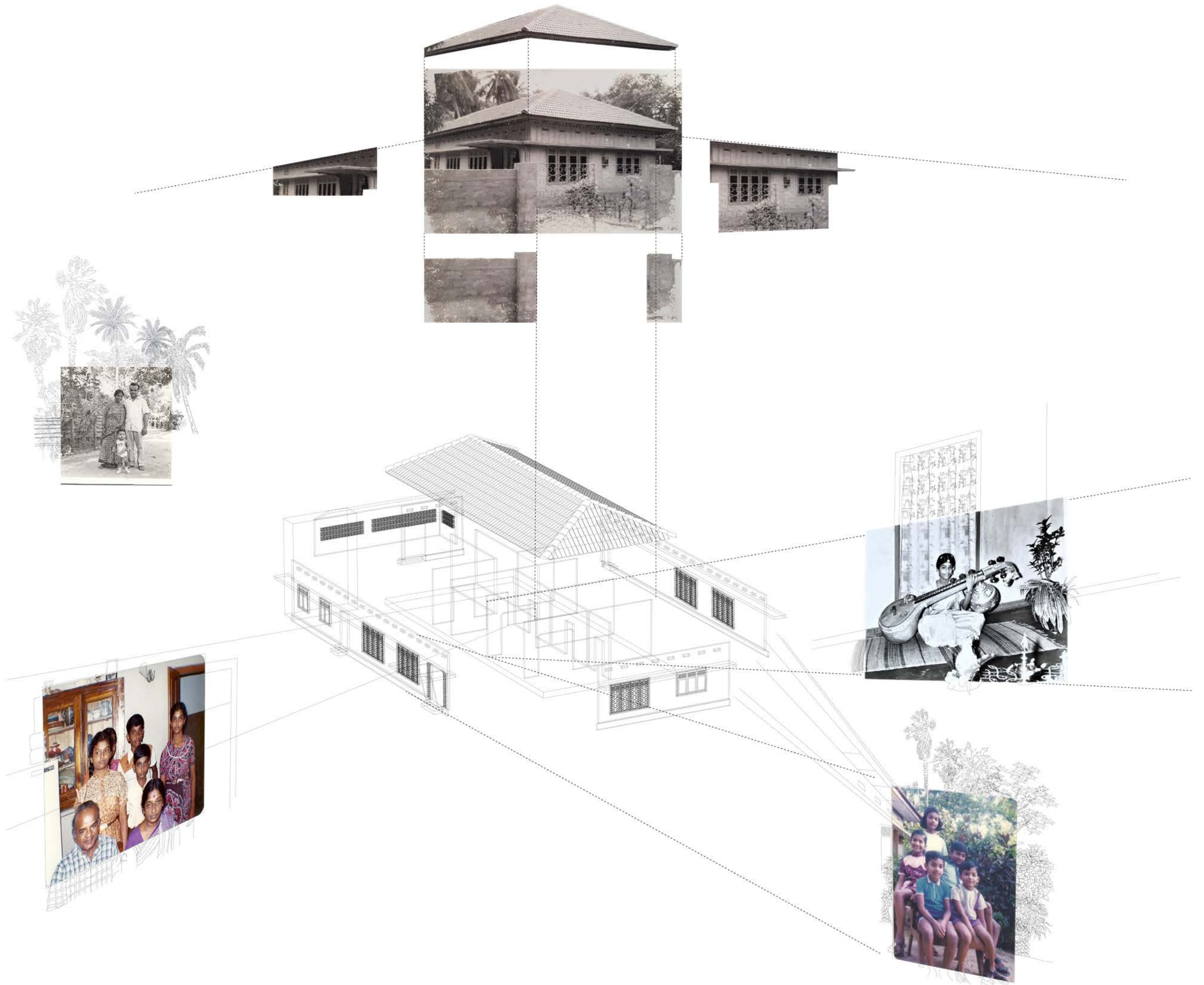


Figure 09.
Exploded axonometric of the
destroyed Shivanandan family
home in Sri Lanka showing
surrounding details extrapolated
from family photographs. Illustration
by Brenda Shivanandan, 2017.
Reproduced by permission
© Brenda Shivanandan.

In *Diaspora Within the Interior Space*, Brenda Shivanandan merged interviews taken with her Amamma (grandmother) Indirani with family photographs and advanced digital modelling to reconstruct the destroyed home in Northern Sri Lanka. To visualise the structure, Shivanandan extrapolated the architectural traces, fragments, and elements found in family photos: the edge of a roofline encroaching the upper left corner of a scene of five children smiling, and elements of a small kitchen drawn from an image of Indirani and her husband flanked by their kin. In each reclaimed image, thin lines extended from the photographs to complete the interior and exterior scenes, embracing their frail connection to projected memory. Paired with found records of the exterior, these images were then compiled to form a reconstructed exploded axonometric view of the home using the modelling software Rhino (Figure 09).

Rather than an opaque volume, the home was rendered in wireframe view with walls, floor, and ceiling presented as transparent. Two entrances along with a foyer, kitchen, dining and living area, and three bedrooms appeared in the centre of the composition. Paired with the familial photographs taken in and around the site, the model approximated the destroyed home. It was a haunting spectre of a lost architecture and the cultural and familial memories it contained.

Additional assemblages of scanned family photographs turned such 'slim objects' into material records of more intimate elements of the residence. However, each scene was purposefully incomplete. When the personal and the institutional archive fails, the gaps were filled by other events, rituals, and historic moments. In one such recreation, a model of the kitchen was animated by collages of images taken during Indirani's wedding ceremony (Figure 10). The figure of the bride appeared in situ. Subtle changes in the opacity of each image visually evoked the saturation of memories, whether clear or slowly fading. To animate other surfaces, images of the objects from Indirani's home in Toronto were overlaid back into the ghostly structure where they once were placed. A dashed line revealed the hidden aspects of the rooms, objects, and enclosures beyond. In another sectional recreation of a bedroom, additional family photos of Indirani with her young children animated the interior (Figure 11). When personal records lapsed, open-source digital archives were used to source images of flora and fauna native to the area to complete an exterior scene (Figure 12).

**Figure 10.**

Composite bedroom sectional perspective extrapolated from family photographs. Illustration by Brenda Shivanandan, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Brenda Shivanandan.

**Figure 11.**

Composite kitchen sectional perspective extrapolated from family photographs. Illustration by Brenda Shivanandan, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Brenda Shivanandan.

**Figure 12.**

Composite exterior elevation of the Shivanandan family residence in Sri Lanka comprised of the Rhino model animated by family photographs and sourced images. Illustration by Brenda Shivanandan, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Brenda Shivanandan.

Moreover, the exploded axonometric, elevations, and perspectival sections reassembled a destroyed interior as a metaphor for rebuilding a fractured cultural self. In his analysis of historic forms of migration and displacement, sociologist Stephane Dufoix asserts that the condition of diaspora can be thought of as a 'state of incompleteness.'³³ Through the lens of restoring the family home, the images worked to complete what political violence left fractured and incomplete. Strategies of interior representation joined images and objects that contain fragmented memories of Indirani's past life in Sri Lanka. Speculative 3D modelling extrapolated from the elements present in family photographs and memories approximated the architectural features of the home. Interpretation and hypothetical formal analysis worked with factual records to materialise a space deeply connected to moments of trauma and resistance. The drawings articulated an architectural foundation for the family, 'a place of origins, a point of departure and a reference,' that, according to Dufoix, is similarly displaced.³⁴ In doing so, these images and processes of *Diaspora within the Interior Space* attempted to preserve cultural identity through resurfacing a lost architectural form that once sheltered it.

between the public and the personal

As demonstrated previously, techniques of interior representation such as orthographic drawing and advanced three-dimensional modelling were paired with material sourced from public archives as well as personal or familial histories. These applications leveraged the inherent instability of both historic fact and the slippage, transmutation, and transformation of oral records across time. Yet, how might these strategies — merging the fictitious and factual nature of history — be paired together to materialise difficult familial histories of colonial trauma enmeshed with the built environment?

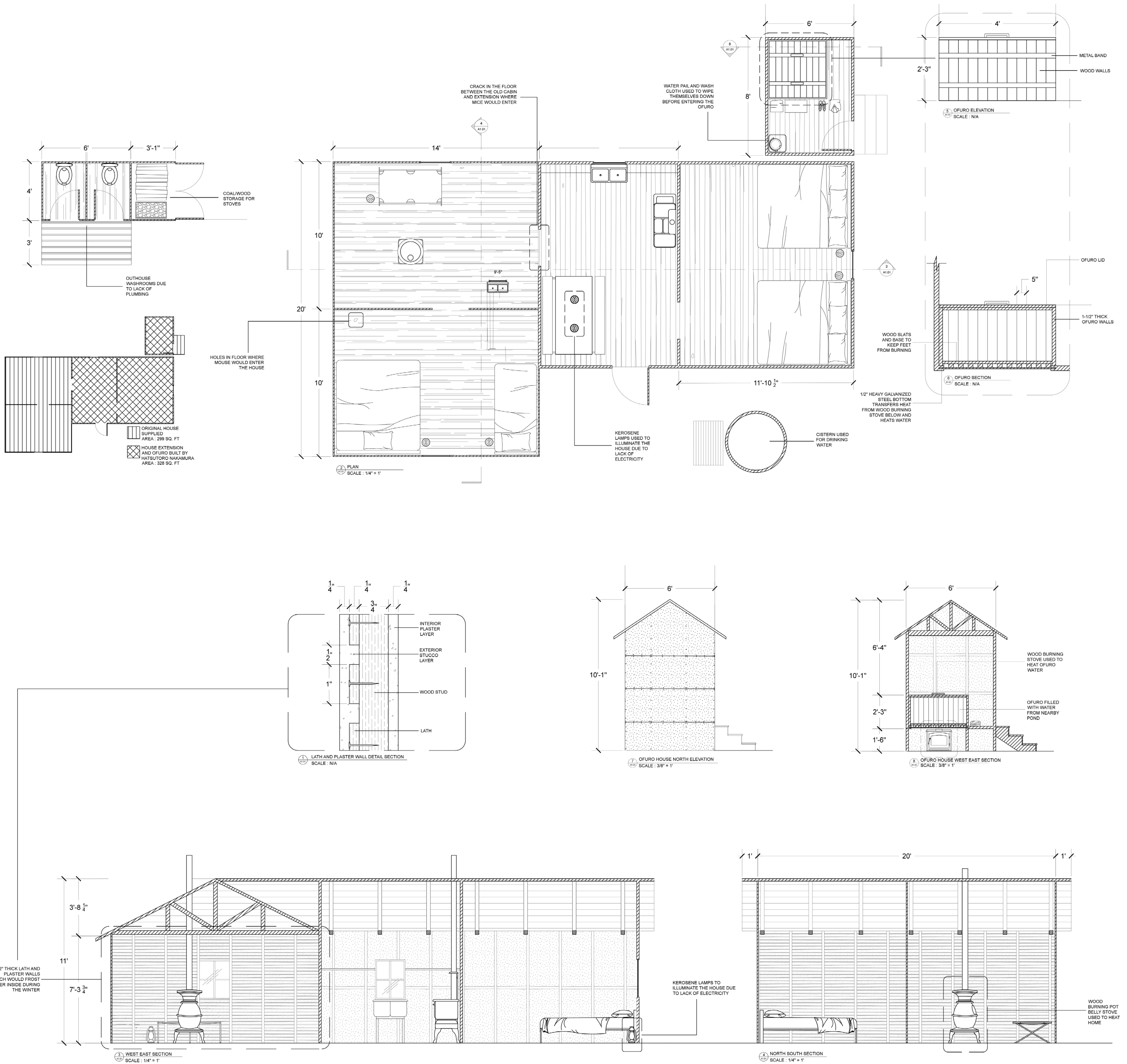
During World War I and II, Canadian civilians deemed 'enemy aliens' were subject to forced relocation and internment in labour camps at the hands of the Canadian government.³⁵ While the most infamous of these camps were those designated for over 21,000 Japanese Canadians in the interior of British Columbia, a province bordering the Pacific Ocean, a significant number of citizens were dispossessed of their property and interred at sugar beet farms in the south of the neighbouring province Alberta.³⁶

Unlike the photographic records and documentation of sites throughout the interior of British Columbia, little if anything remains of those buildings constructed in southern Alberta.³⁷ Long since destroyed, only partial traces and fragments of the structures populating the camps and farms can be found in ephemera filling national archives. Of the approximately 4000 evacuees sent to these farms were eight ancestors — three adults and five children — of Claire Shimbashi Hougan.³⁸ In *The Erasure of History*, Hougan materialised the destroyed structures on the Valgardson Farm in Taber, Alberta, where her family was interned after being dispossessed of their farm in Surrey, British Columbia.³⁹ A series of interviews with her grandmother Keiko and great uncle Charles provided the foundation of a set of collaborative architectural drawings that articulated the lost structures, as well as the resilience of the family, embodied in those now absent spaces.

The first set of drawings documented the existing two-room structure on the farm, a small outhouse, a purpose-built addition, and a separate bathing facility (Figure 13). According to *The New Canadian*, a publication concerned with the plights of second-generation citizens, each forcibly relocated family was to be 'provided with [an] individual cottage and small plots of land for their own use and cultivation in addition to the sugar beet farms on which they will work on the basis of five members to a family.'⁴⁰ These cramped quarters, consisting of one bedroom

and a small living room, could not adequately accommodate a family of eight when they arrived in 1942.⁴¹ Thus the drawings also revealed the two-room gable-roof addition constructed by Hougan's great-grandfather that provided sleeping quarters for the girls and parents, as well as modest kitchen space (Figure 14). Thin dashed lines connected the edges of each orthographic view as if suturing the deliberately fractured memories back together.

Technical notes denoted materials and construction methods and even memories connected to the site. Recollections of the architectural environment joined details of the slim lath and plaster construction, adding that, due to the lack of insulation, walls would freeze over during the winter. In other instances, the notes commonly used as descriptive additions in construction sets enmeshed the orthographic drawings with familial memories. Small holes in the floor were annotated with text to capture 'where mice would enter the house', while the careful placement of kerosine lamps 'used to illuminate the house due to lack of electricity' are further described through both drawing and notation.⁴² Other quotidian elements, such as the placement of cots, the potbelly wood-burning stove, and small sink, taken from interviews, completed the interior.



Above, Figure 13. Plan of the destroyed outhouse, existing shack, addition, and Ofuro on the Valgardson farm outside Taber, Alberta. Illustration by Claire Shimbashi Hougan, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Claire Shimbashi Hougan.

Below, Figure 14. Sections of the house and addition as well as elevation and section of the Ofuro built on the Valgardson farm outside Taber, Alberta. Illustration by Claire Shimbashi Hougan, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Claire Shimbashi Hougan.

Evolving over the semester, Hougan traded early base drawings with her grandmother and great uncle to recreate the spaces. Each family member contributed fragments of memory by marking up the initial schematic drawings to their more complete form. The final set of plans, sections, elevations, and wall details was therefore an articulation of experiences and recollections transferred across time, remedying the memories that had been fractured and 'lost for a generation' by institutional silences as well as the Japanese culture of *shikata ga nai* (meaning 'it cannot be helped').⁴³

Another integral structure documented in the drawing set was an Ofuro built by Hougan's great grandfather. The traditional Japanese bath, as Charles noted, consisted of 'a wood-burning stove beneath the bathtub to heat the water.'⁴⁴ This separate structure just north of the main house not only enabled the family to engage in traditional practices in a space of deliberate cultural assimilation but also provided practical access to washing, as 'it was hard to maintain personal hygiene and bathe regularly.'⁴⁵ In addition to manifesting the architecture of racist government policy, the inclusion of the Ofuro revealed how the production of space, particularly interior space, worked to counter the impact of oppressive political conditions.

To further manifest the erased internment architectures of the sugar beet farm, the drawings were laser cut onto plywood panels and used to create sectional models of the main house (Figure 15) and Ofuro (Figure 16). Employing wood, the same material used to construct the addition and bath, the models added physical depth to the historic records. At the same time, the models and drawings were not the architectures and interiors they presented. More akin to echoes, the scale representations acted in a similar sense as construction drawings. While functioning as evidence of existing structures, they pointed to the gap in translating representations to physical spaces. The models also gestured toward the absences in archival records that were used to translate historical moments into narratives. Paired with the audio interviews with Keiko, they became haunting vessels that contained fractured moments, memories, and fragments of historical trauma.

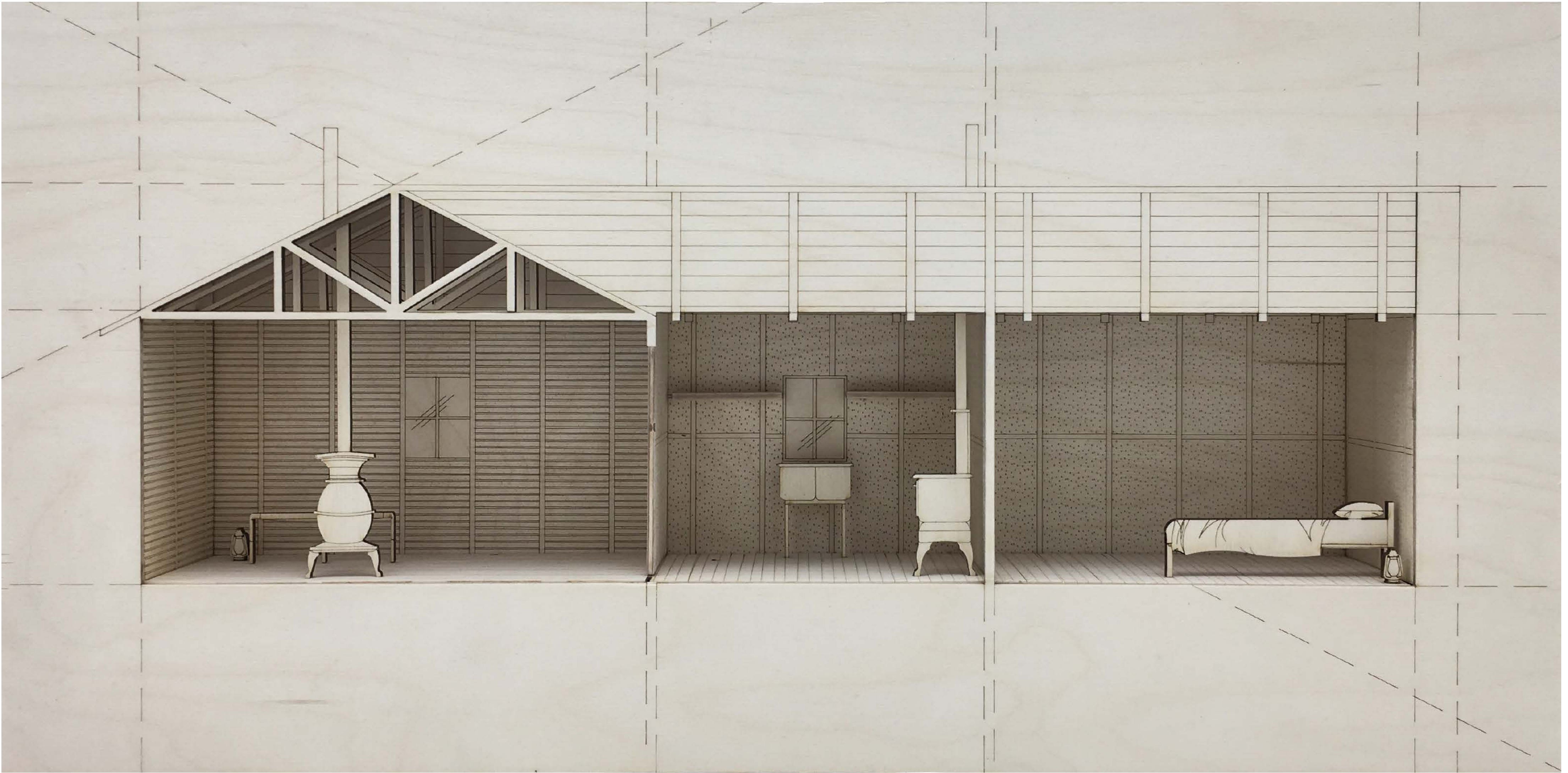


Figure 15.

Laser-cut sectional model of the of the main house and addition built on the Valgardson farm outside Taber, Alberta. Photo by Claire Shimbashi Hougan, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Claire Shimbashi Hougan.



Figure 16.

Laser-cut sectional model of the Ofuro constructed on the Valgardson farm outside Taber, Alberta. Photo by Claire Shimbashi Hougan, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Claire Shimbashi Hougan.

The Erasure of History merged public and personal memory to create a counter-forensic, subjective reimaging of a destroyed site. Though it only approximated the structure, a translation of fading memories into abstract drawings and models, it nonetheless formed a material record of situated political violence interwoven with the built environment. What was visualised was not a forensically accurate place, but a materialising of one previously ephemeral point in the telling and retelling of a past preserved in oral records alone. The speculative interior became a vessel for, and testimony of, a history of violence and displacement embedded in the built environment.

towards an apparatus of memory

What do we do when the archive fails? How can the inevitable lapses in public and personal memory be rectified? How can the memories interwoven with the built environment, but often erased by those same structures, be preserved? What I have attempted to outline using the studio projects by Boparai, Fajardo, Shivandan, and Hougan is the manifold ways in which design drawings can be leveraged to commemorate stories left out of official narratives as well as to counter them entirely if needed. 'A memory needs to be held to keep it from fading,' argues media theorist Wendy Hui Kyong Chun; it is 'an active process, not static.'⁴⁶ This also recalls museum studies scholar Laurajane Smith's assertion that heritage 'is not a thing, a place or monument, but rather a "discourse".'⁴⁷ Through

orthographic drawing as well as digital and physical modelling, the speculative interior can act as a medium or apparatus that intervenes in the factual and fictional discourses of the past as part of this 'active process.'

Returning to the concept of postmemory allows us to further grapple with the potentials of interior representation and speculative history as a form of interior design praxis. According to Hirsch, the practices of postmemory strive to 'reactivate and re-embody more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression.'⁴⁸ The representation tools of the interior can be seen as one form of this aesthetic expression. In concert with individual and familial forms of recollection such as photographic records or oral testimony, plans, sections, elevations, and axonometric- and born-digital models visualise and relay distant traumas of the past by imbuing them with the specificities of personal memory. This process, according to Hartman, 'elaborates, augments, transposes and breaks open archival documents so they might yield a richer picture.'⁴⁹ The four case studies presented imbued biased or misleading archival information with specificity, personal memory, and forms of speculation that oscillate between fact and fiction.

With these techniques of visualisation, the speculative interior — captured through disciplinary drawing and modelling techniques — may function as an apparatus of memory. For philosopher Giorgio Agamben, an apparatus 'appears at the intersection of power relations and relations of knowledge,' and is always located amid these relations.⁵⁰ In his analysis of the photographic apparatus, philosopher and media theorist Vilém Flusser traces the etymology of the term to its Latin roots to suggest that it is 'a thing that lies in wait or in readiness for something,' and is an object that is 'pro-duced (brought forward).'⁵¹ In my reading, the speculative interior and its representational strategies become an apparatus that can bring forward, visualise, and record fragments, traces, and echoes of the past deliberately concealed.

In this way, tools of interior representation can act as vessels and vehicles of collective as well as individual recollection — a memory apparatus or 'carrier of information' that contains alternative narratives, historical outliers, and moments of resistance.⁵²

These forms of image-making insert themselves within existing systems of power, not only within the discipline but within the power-knowledge structures that continue to organise, orient, and control the flow of memory. They throw into question official records by adopting many of the strategies used to furnish evidence of the past. They surface lost histories, centre hidden voices, and illuminate architectural violence and trauma that fold into Canada's colonial imaginary. Ultimately, speculation through forms of drawing and modelling in various strategic combinations with archival research, oral histories, and familial ephemera may provide a way to visually reclaim, resurface, and reimagine space from which many communities and individuals have been systematically dispossessed.

acknowledgements

A sincere thank you to all the students who participated in the 2017 studio *Such a Place as Memory*, only some of whom have designs shown here, for their thoughtful inquiries into the possibilities of the interior. Thank you as well to the guest critics who provided insight and commentary during the development of the projects: Billy Chung, Jana Macalik, Lucinda McGroarty, Naomi Tallin, Deborah Wang, and Lois Weinthal. This essay benefitted greatly from the comments of two anonymous reviewers as well as the incisive edits of Julieanna Preston.

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notes

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