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# idea journal

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

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**vol. 19, no. 01**

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**2022**

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



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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'.<sup>01</sup> 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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# a design studio on fantastic space: exploring the narrative of *spirited away*

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## abstract

This essay investigates the creative approaches of how body–space relations can be enhanced in a design studio through the exploration of fantastic spaces. ‘Fantastic’ is defined as an ‘open work’ with reference to modern literature and a ‘fantastic space’ as an inventive ground that is neither real nor unreal, standing as a paraxial region. This essay analyses a first-year design studio on Fantastic Space; it considers how the content was explored by students, what they designed, and the diverse design approaches that emerged.

In the studio, students analysed the spaces and characters of Hayao Miyazaki’s animated film, *Spirited Away* (2001) and reassembled the narrative of the animation by using architectural tools to prepare two- and three-dimensional representations of their designs. Focusing on body–space relations, the studio employed a critical approach to anthropocentrism and discussed human and non-human agencies within a body–space context. In its pursuit to challenge traditional dynamics of spatial representation, the project encouraged creating experimental works inspired by the unlimited potential interpretations of Miyazaki’s fantastic world. A content analysis of the designs of 156 students using both qualitative and quantitative methods was applied to analyse students’ conceptual and spatial productions. The analysis reveals three key design strategies to categorise the students’ projects: character-based, space-based, and story-based approaches. The unique and overlapping qualities of these approaches were determined by reviewing the time–space and body–space relationships represented in the students’ projects. In this way, the imaginative, diverse re-imaginings of their designs reveal the value of using fantastic spaces to encourage high student engagement and creative studio results.

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## keywords:

fantastic space, design studio, design approach, body and space, non-human.

## introduction

This essay offers a critical analysis of an undergraduate first-year architecture and interior design course focused on the creation of fantastical spaces. The first year, first semester design studio plays an integral role in introducing students to processes of design in which students learn how to conceptualise, materialise, and present their design ideas in the context of the critical analysis of body-space relationships. The course content was organised as a sequence of four short-term projects to equip students with effective tools to question, review, and challenge different types of these relationships.

It is imperative that the first year of architectural design education provides students with a comprehensive understanding of spatial experience and an exploration of (human) body standards. The application of this knowledge in two- and three-dimensional representations is an essential step for first-year students; however, it is also critical that they recognise that human body standards typically focus on able-bodied standards. Able-bodied design bias is an issue this studio confronted and sought to change. Spatial design practice requires designers to understand body and space not as two separate entities, but as two intertwined points of reference. The overall studio approach was based on studies that accept non-human agency, meaning entities other than human beings, and question the dominant power relationship humans

establish within the world.<sup>01</sup> Accordingly, the studio was framed as four diverse practices within this perspective, as shown in Figure 01. Through the sequence of these projects, students built up their skills on how to employ an architectural design process, while identifying unique consequences of body-space relations. The first two projects aimed to deliver a comprehensive understanding of the human body, guiding students to analyse their own bodily experience and gain knowledge on the intertwined connection of a body-space. 'Body and Object' introduced bodily proportions, and 'Body in Motion' focused on the changing measurements of human bodies in act. After the initial studies on human bodies, the last two projects focused on non-human bodies as an exploration to design for any-body. During the third project, students designed and built shelters for stray dogs and/or cats by analysing their body movements and needs while being introduced to the materialistic and structural aspects of their designs. This project prepared students for the fourth project, 'Fantastic Space', to analyse and develop a design response to (fantastic) non-human bodies. The concept of non-human agency provided a critical perspective in contrast to the idealised human body and norms, and played an essential role in each student's design thinking process.



Sequence of the projects		Project content	Timeline
1	Body and Object	Exploring the relationship between a human body and a daily used object; understanding the spatial qualities of our own bodies.	2 weeks
2	Body in Motion	Focusing on (human) bodies in motion as a space that is a part of a constant transformation.	3 weeks
3	Shelter	Analysing stray dogs'/cats' behaviours; designing and building a shelter as a response to their needs while experimenting with the materialistic aspects and structural requirements.	4 weeks
4	Fantastic Space	Analysing a non-Cartesian representation of a space; creating a narrative; combining previously gained knowledge to design a space for an imaginary body.	5 weeks

**Figure 01.**

The first-semester studio was framed as four diverse practices in a sequence. This table shows the studio structure and timeline.

In the final project, students were asked to analyse and develop ideas in relation to spatial requirements of the fantastic characters in Hayao Miyazaki's well-known animated film, *Spirited Away* (2001).<sup>02</sup> By determining the fantastic space and characters as the subjects to analyse for the studio, body-space relations were re-evaluated and recreated, including the assemblage of an in-between space that integrated both the realistic and fantastic world contexts with human and non-humans with reference to Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory.<sup>03</sup> Consequently, the topic of bodily experience extended beyond anthropocentrism, and the studio works included sensory, contextual, and characteristic analyses of the fantastic bodies. The studio applied a holistic approach to body and space precepts without limiting these

aspects to (human) body measurements or idealised norms. The project, *Fantastic Space*, aimed to inspire students' imagination and built upon the knowledge gained during the previous three projects. With a focus on the fourth project, this essay enquires about the creative potentials of designing for/within the fantastic in first-year architecture education and evaluates how such a studio approach impacts students' presentation techniques and design approaches.

The following sections present how fantastic space was considered within the studio context, followed by a content analysis of the studio results. The second section, 'Fantastic Space as an Open Work', explores the varying definitions of fantastic with reference to contemporary literature, and explains how

these definitions were adjusted within the studio context. The third section of the essay provides the rationale for selecting the fantastic world of Miyazaki for the project, followed by the fourth section, which explains the scope of the studio. The final section, 'Reassembling the Narrative,' evaluates the students' final products in relation to aspects that were influential in constructing a narrative. By examining the approach and outcomes of a first-year design studio based on exploring a fantastic space, this study contributes to ongoing discussions regarding general architecture and interior architecture education relating to body-space and narrative dynamics.

### **fantastic space as an open work**

The word 'fantastic' derives from the Latin word *phantasticus*, which means 'to make visible or manifest.'<sup>04</sup> The definition of fantastic is mostly simplified as un-real or a part of negative rationality by employing negative terms such as 'im-possible, un-known, and in-visible.'<sup>05</sup> On the other hand, famous fantasy author Ursula Le Guin claims '[fantasy] isn't factual, but it is true.'<sup>06</sup> Defining the word 'fantastic' becomes a challenge as its meaning is complex; it prompts the consideration of what quality must be 'unreal' in order for a work to be fantastic. Departing from a dualistic meaning, Kathryn Hume evaluates reality as a cultural construct while defining fantastic as 'any departure from consensus reality.'<sup>07</sup> This essay and the studio project draw on the fantastic as derived by contemporary

literature. Two distinctive perspectives regarding what 'fantastic' refers to were identified: 1. fantastic as an otherness, and 2. fantastic as an open work.

Recognising fantastic as an otherness refers to the fantastic as a state or concept that exists in opposition to a given standard. This thought was promoted by scholars such as Rabkin, Hume, Cornwell, and Gomel.<sup>08</sup> This understanding of fantastic hinged on the unreal, an approach that assumes the fantastic is interchangeable with fantasy literature, directly contrasting with the tenets of realistic, or 'mimetic' literature.<sup>09</sup> This concept of 'otherness' as fantastic is a representation of the impossible as possible and results in characterising any presence of supernatural as fantastic, which does not define a genre.<sup>10</sup> Patricia Garcia, an academic on literature, highlights the problem by mentioning that this definition would embrace such diverse texts such as *The Odyssey* and *Dracula* under one umbrella.<sup>11</sup> She states that an opposition between realist/non-realist is not achievable to distinguish different forms of literature, as even the fantasy world derives from the factual world, also adding that reality is not a stable entity.<sup>12</sup> In fact, characterising a genre to re-group works that include any un-real and/or supernatural features is not sufficient.<sup>13</sup> This definition does not address the intricacies of the changeable, unstable, and context-dependant characteristics of 'reality.'<sup>14</sup>

The alternative definition of fantastic focuses on the interrelationships of real/unreal worlds that are part of a constant flux, as opposed to a solid understanding of reality. This understanding of the fantastic involves transformative and deformative processes in changing relationships between what might be identified as real or supernatural. Todorov identifies the flexible nature of the fantastic through three keywords, where an idea moves from supernaturalism, through to the fantastic (unnatural), towards the uncanny (natural).<sup>15</sup> According to his theory, 'fantastic' occupies the space of hesitation that occurs between events or experiences, being interpreted as natural or supernatural.<sup>16</sup> As one of the field's primary resources, Todorov's critical texts offer a structural analysis of fantastic literature. However, '[Todorov] opposes impressionistic attempts to define fantasy' and his structural criticism fails to consider the concept's cultural and social implications.<sup>17</sup> As such, the contemporary understanding of fantastic has departed from solely structural conceptualisation and now incorporates discussions of its narrative qualities and psychoanalytical perspectives.<sup>18</sup> The definition of fantastic as an 'open work' references this modern perspective of the real and unreal, 'occupying a space between a realistic and a marvellous text while being neither one nor the other.'<sup>19</sup> This essay adopts this more inclusive interpretation. Dr Rosemary Jackson, writer of non-fiction about fantasy, refers to the concept of paraxis to signify this space as 'implying an inextricable link to the main body of the real which it shades and

threatens.'<sup>20</sup> A paraxial region, which is an area wherein light rays appear to reunite at a point after refraction, represents the spectral region of the fantastic, whose imaginary world is neither entirely 'real' (object), nor entirely 'unreal' (image), but is located somewhere indeterminately between the two.<sup>21</sup> Jackson emphasises the importance of this positioning:

This paraxial positioning determines many of the structural and semantic features of fantastic narrative: its means of establishing its 'reality' are initially mimetic ('realistic', presenting an 'object' world 'objectively') but then move into another mode which would seem to be marvellous ('unrealistic', representing apparent impossibilities), were it not for its initial grounding in the 'real.'<sup>22</sup>

The fantastic itself is an open-space and occupies a paraxial region. The phrasing of 'fantastic as an open work' aims to highlight the interrelations rather than oppositions of real and unreal and is derived with reference to Umberto Eco's interpretation of openness. Eco's book, *The Open Work*, defines the quality of openness as being the potential for multiple interpretations from the reader, viewer, or listener.<sup>23</sup> An open work is characterised by an invitation from its artist to the receiver to observe it as 'a focal point within a network of limitless interrelations.'<sup>24</sup> Literature researcher Anna Hansen highlights the benefits of defining fantastic space in terms of an interrelationship with non-fantastic space:

When it intertwines with non-fantastic space, fantastic space manipulates, moulds, and redefines aspects of the non-fantastic, often highlighting certain themes or topics, and frequently recreating from non-fantastic space a safe area, clearly removed from any guise of reality by its fantastic nature, in which taboo issues or emotions can be expressed.<sup>25</sup>

A fantastic space can be constructed through manipulating or distorting any spatial domains, including physical, mental, or social.<sup>26</sup> In this regard, a fantastic space is an open work, with its unlimited range of potential readings and possibilities for interpretation, with which an audience always engages and interacts, becoming a part of the network of interrelations.<sup>27</sup> Eco draws on the notion of possibility while discarding a static, syllogistic view of order.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, an open work gives a central position to the individual 'to create future possibilities, based on personal decisions, choices and social context',<sup>29</sup> as exemplified in Miyazaki's fantastic worlds.

### **miyazaki's fantastic world: *spirited away***






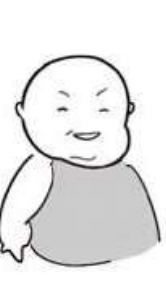




An animation is described as cinematic moving images complete with an illusory motion and an animated film refers to moving-image productions, creating an aesthetic experience through characterisation and world-building while integrating thoughts and emotions.<sup>30</sup> Fantastic worlds in animation create dynamics between sensorial perception and conceptual understanding,<sup>31</sup> to generate different possibilities as works open to

interpretation. An animation requires single-framing actions, providing a deeper insight into how separated movements interrelate to each other.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, a single animation frame provides information to analyse the individual elements of bodily movements and/or spatial changes. As such, a fantastic animation film provided an ideal subject for first-year students to explore movement and body-space relations.

Born in 1941, Miyazaki is considered to be a master of traditional art mediums and resists the art of digital animations.<sup>33</sup> Fantasy is a purposeful way for Miyazaki to 'embed the global issues within worlds of *anime* that link to our own in vital, recognisable ways.'<sup>34</sup> Miyazaki notes how our world has become an ambiguous place of mass consumption, which is the main theme of *Spirited Away*.<sup>35</sup> His films reflect his views of the world, including 'conflagrations and catastrophes, but also rebirths, new beginnings and children who say "stop"'.<sup>36</sup> In his works, Miyazaki refers to human characters and creatures 'that are by turns surprising, inventive and instructive'.<sup>37</sup> Miyazaki's personal experiences, such as his European travels and his mother's illness, had a significant role in shaping his works.<sup>38</sup> Well known for his location-hunting trips, the tension between real and fantastic versions of the places depicted are visible throughout Miyazaki's filmmaking, such as the idyllic European fantasces in *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989),<sup>39</sup> which were inspired from northern Europe.<sup>40</sup> In fact, despite Miyazaki's animations representing a fantastic world, they are still connected to human experiences, questioning the 'role a human plays in a larger interspecies world'.<sup>41</sup>

Miyazaki implements child protagonists in his fantastic stories specifically because of the pure and innocent nature of children.<sup>42</sup> *Spirited Away* recounts the story and adventures of Chihiro, a ten-year-old girl who moves to a new neighbourhood and enters the world of spirits. After her parents are transformed into pigs, Chihiro finds herself working in a bathhouse to free herself and her parents and return to their reality. The anime follows Chihiro's journey from the Clock tower, which is the liminal space and entryway into the spirit world, to the bathhouse. Like other

Miyazaki animations, *Spirited Away* involves both human and non-human characters sharing a series of events in a fantastic world. This world consists of a variety of spaces the characters interact with, including the clock tower, bathhouse, and restaurants. Figure 02 shows the main characters of *Spirited Away*, including their physical and behavioural characteristics that have been used as reference points for the students' final projects.

Characters		Appearance & Behaviours	Characters		Appearance & Behaviours
	Chihiro	Ten-year-old girl, the child protagonist, is lost during the story. A brave and curious girl who wishes to rescue her parents.		Yubaba	The proprietor of the bathhouse and the main antagonist of the film. She is the mother of Boh, and twin sister of Zeniba, and can fly at high speed.
	Haku	Twelve-year-old character with a human appearance. He is a river spirit who can fly when in the form of a dragon.		Zeniba	A witch and the identical twin sister of Yubaba, and can manipulate supernatural energy and do magic.
	No-Face	A lonely spirit who doesn't have a physical body but an expressionless mask. It can eat any food or creature.		Boh	The son of Yubaba, a giant baby shown as a selfish and spoiled child.
	Kamaji	An elderly man with six long arms, enabling him to access upper cabinets. He operates the boiler room of the bathhouse.		River & Stink Spirits	River Spirit is an old spirit with a water-based body and multiple legs. When polluted, it turns into a Stink Spirit, a large, smelly creature.
	Susu-watari	Small, round, black ball-like spirits made from the scoot. They can lift objects many times their own weight.		Lin	A human-being and a strong-hearted servant in Yubaba's bathhouse. She becomes Chihiro's caretaker in the film.

**Figure 02.**  
Table identifying main characters of *Spirited Away*.<sup>43</sup>

Miyazaki's studio, Studio Ghibli, is not the only firm creating fantastic animations; the Walt Disney Studio is also famous for its creative designs of imaginary worlds.<sup>43</sup> Miyazaki criticises Disney's animations, deeming them superficial and, while they reflect realistic movement and motion, he feels they lack the depth of real human emotions.<sup>44</sup> In fact, he believes the fantastic worlds of Disney animations are less open to interpretation because the characters and stories are linear, straightforward, and offer limited access directly to what is essential to the main character's experiences. On the other hand, Miyazaki's characters and spaces are more detailed and expansive in his animations while not being fully completed — that is, viewers are not provided exposition or explanation for every detail within the film, allowing for multiple interpretations to be formed between these gaps of information. The distinction between dream and actuality is blurred in his animations.<sup>45</sup> This in-betweenness allows for many possible readings.

### **studio approach**

The first-year design studio focused on body-space relations beyond an anthropometric viewpoint, considering 'the body as the location of spatial experience and knowledge.'<sup>46</sup> Students experimented with various modes of creation and production, including collage, sketch, text, film, drawing, storyboard, and model-making throughout their first semester of learning design practices. Human and non-human bodies were interrogated as social, cultural, material,

and spatial entities, which led to architectural studio discussions on key concepts including perception, memory, atmosphere, time-space, and the built environment.

Students explored Miyazaki's fantastic worlds through the lens of an open work, recreating new spatial experiences for its characters by analysing the sequences of events in the animation. Temporality and movements within spaces took a prominent position as one of the leading studio topics, referring to architect Steven Holl's discourse on open-ended spatial experiences.<sup>47</sup> Holl describes the possibilities of changing multiple perceptions while wandering around the city through his own experience: 'For me, these "archetypal experiences" are not simply emotional encounters, nor are they strictly intellectual or academic [...] they are three- and four-dimensional pure "perceptions".'<sup>48</sup> Aligned with Holl's standpoint, architect and theorist Bernard Tschumi provides further criticism of the static-only contemplation of a body in architectural thinking.<sup>49</sup> He notes that conventional architectural drawings and models, as well as plans, sections, axonometrics, perspectives, models, and composition studies, do not adequately address the multi-sensory aspects of design.<sup>50</sup> These conventional forms of rendering architecture exclude the experience and dynamic interweaving of space-time. Instead, while considering the body primarily as an object to convey scale, Tschumi highlights the significance of understanding architecture as a dynamic entity:

My starting assumption was that architecture actually begins with movement. In other words, one enters a building, one passes through it, one climbs stairs, one goes from one space to another, and that network of routes is really what constitutes architecture. Even though architecture can be made of static spaces, the interaction between the static and the dynamic is what really constitutes it.<sup>51</sup>

Students then analysed their choice of single-frame(s) of *Spirited Away* by focusing on a space and/or a character presented in collages. A collage technique, that is, the bringing together of various visual parts in layers, could be composed with drawings and/or images. Architect Juhani Pallasmaa points out that the fragmental images of a collage from different origins provides an archaeological density and a non-linear narrative, as the medium invigorates the experience of time.<sup>52</sup> Art historian Christine Poggi also emphasises the constantly changing, unstable system of relations between surface and depth in the collage painting.<sup>53</sup> This indefinite and established system of relations revealed various possibilities of narrations in the design process, which supported students to design their own narratives.

The collage technique was invented by the Cubists in 1912. The form focused on the destruction of established modes of representation.<sup>54</sup> Collage-drawings have since become an important tool for constructing

a socio-spatial narrative in architecture, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. The avant-garde groups Archigram, Superstudio, and Situationist International (Guy Debord was leader of the group), and the architects Bernard Tschumi and Rem Koolhaas are among those associated with the collage technique and their conceptual and critical, dystopian, and utopian collages relative to the history of contemporary architecture.<sup>55</sup> In her book *Collage and Architecture*, Jennifer Shields details that collage technique facilitated a new conception of space, 'as a means of investigating the potentialities of three-dimensional space in a two-dimensional medium.'<sup>56</sup> While presenting a series of discontinued images, which implies a temporary life, the collage is a kinetic and transformative medium that offers open-ended relations between images. Architect Fred Scott also highlights the similarities between intervention and collage in the design process, emphasising the accidental and improvising use of collage to reveal the unpredictable.<sup>57</sup> The multi-layered structure of a collage technique allows both the creator and its reader to convey and produce multiple meanings.<sup>58</sup>

Utilising collage as a technique in the studio allowed students to interpret the animation and construct their narratives in a non-linear, dynamic way. Based on students' interpretations, some of the topics addressed in these studio meetings were the similarities and differences of students' representative drawings of a *Spirited Away* space within the contexts of time-space and body-space. The

multi-layered structure of a collage triggered students to simultaneously manage the site plan, section, plan, and perspective drawings while guiding them to decompose and recompose those sequences. Studio group discussions encouraged each student to observe different interpretations of the same character/space from the animation. Studio discussions were held in groups of fifteen students twice a week, and the Fantastic Space project was the subject for the last five weeks after the completion of the three small projects as shown in Figure 01. More than 80 percent of the students completed their final submissions, while 156 fulfilled all requirements by producing the following: 1) poster representation of the first analysis (space/character); 2) poster representation of the final design for the chosen *Spirited Away* character; 3) technical drawings of the design proposal; and 4) model (three-dimensional reproduction). The following section presents the content analysis of the 156 students' projects.

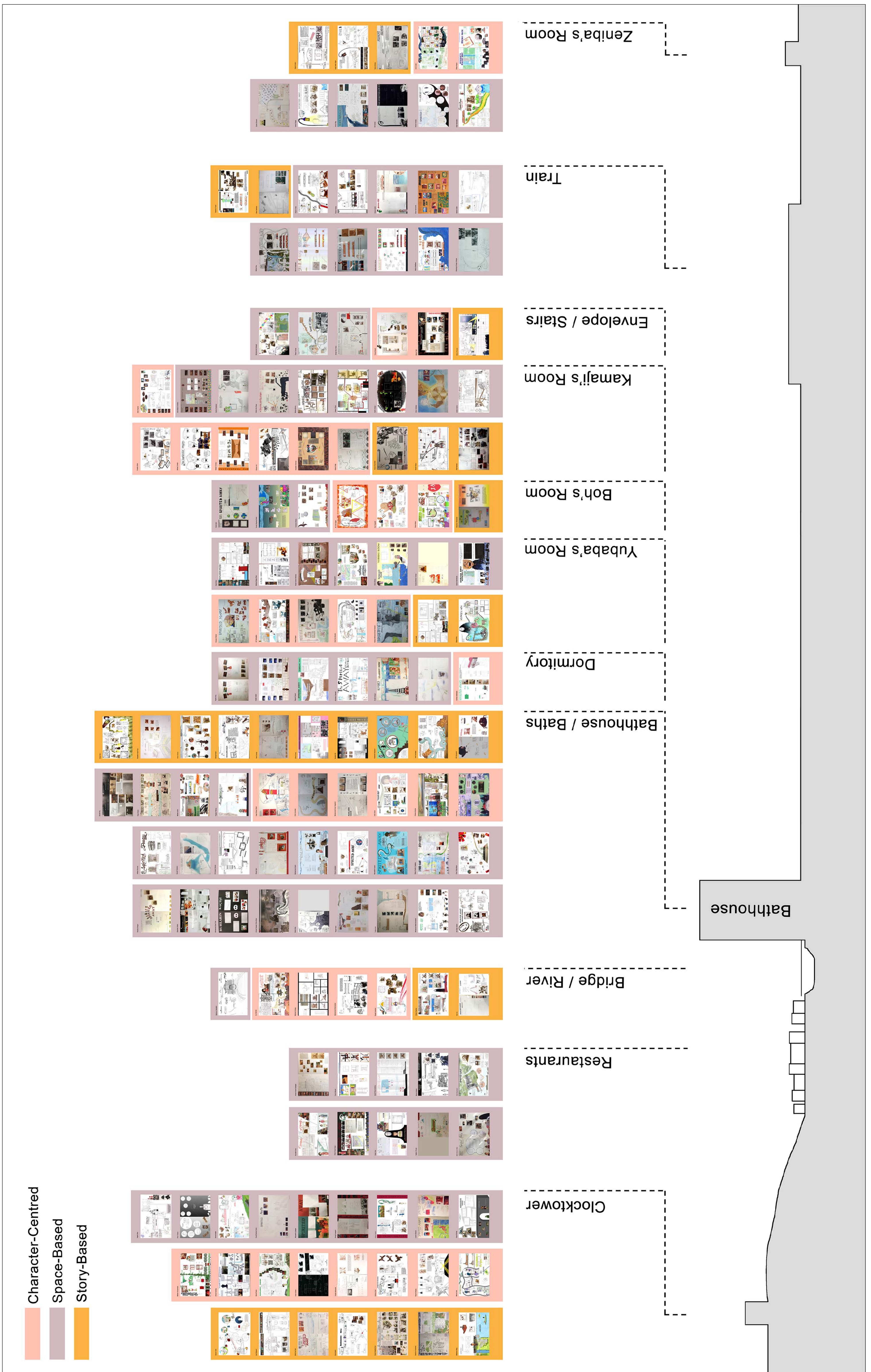
### **reassembling the narrative of *spirited away* through fantastic spaces**

This section of the essay investigates students' final designs in relation to their own fantastic spaces. Students could choose the characters and/or spaces they wished to analyse. They were also free to define which characters (as a human or non-human body) would be their target users or influential subjects for their design. As tutors, we analysed the compositions of each submission by examining the students' two- and three-dimensional spatial representations. The first

sub-section is a comprehensive analysis of the common and distinctive characteristics of students' works, and three broad categories were determined to represent students' parallel design approaches: 1. character-centred; 2. space-based; and 3. story-based. The second sub-section focuses on each category for an in-depth discussion by examining the relative frequencies of students' individual representations; and the last sub-section, Findings, offers closing remarks on the overall data analysis.

Quantitative and qualitative methods were applied for content analysis to explore how students evaluated the *Spirited Away* characters to build a narrative and the inspirational points that were influential in shaping their narration. An empirical (observational) and objective procedure was applied to quantify visual (including a written explanation of the visual) representation using defined values, referred to as 'approaches' or 'design strategies' in this essay. Each poster's common and distinctive characteristics were noted to find relative frequencies of visual representations of particular characters, events, and representation methods.<sup>59</sup> While some students focused mainly on the characters, others were more interested in Miyazaki's spaces as their inspirational departure point. There were also students who chose to restart or continue the fantastic story in their own ways. Figure 03 shows the categorisation process of students' submissions concerning the spaces displayed in the animation.





**Figure 03.**  
 Image set of 156 student project submissions categorised according to the three major design approach types: character-centred, space-based, and story-based.

### **data analysis: three design strategies**

The final works of 156 students and their multifaceted interpretations of the animation subject were analysed regarding their design strategy, classified under three categories. The authors sought further insights in how students constructed a spatial relationship with the character and space they chose, and the influence this imparted to their two- and three-dimensional spatial representations. The first category, the character-centred approach, refers to student projects focusing on a character, including their behaviour, and physical and/or emotional attributes. In this category, the character was the main inspiration for students to initialise their designs; either the focus was on the character's role in the animation or an alternate story the student had devised for the character. The space-based approach includes students' projects where a *Spirited Away* space played the primary role in their design process. Projects analysed under this approach were straightforward interpretations of Miyazaki's spaces as physical entities to be re-produced or considered the spaces' role in shaping the events that occurred in the film. The story-based approach, the final category identified through the content analysis, includes the designs motivated by Miyazaki's fantastic story while taking the story further. Students' projects that were evaluated under this approach included an additional story to *Spirited Away*, either through expanding on the existing script or by composing a future scene of their own making to be added to the story.

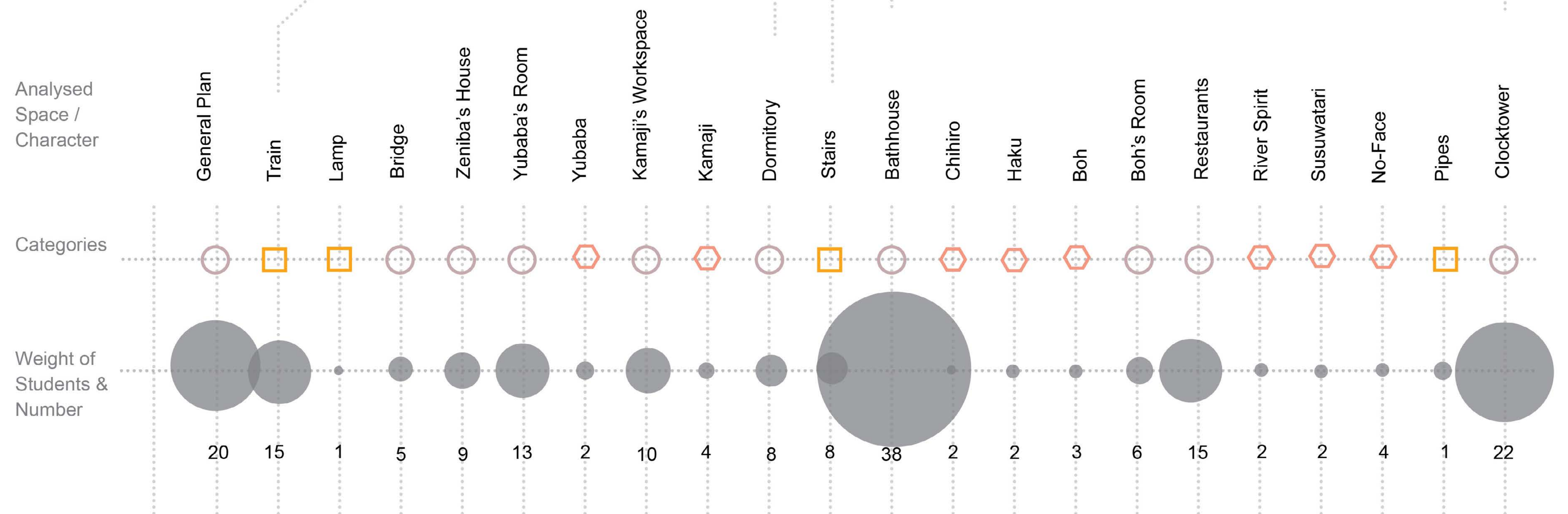
Students were shown the full movie in the first week of the semester and decided on the character or space they wanted to analyse. They were allowed to choose anything between an urban scale to an interior one, which resulted in twenty-two different topics, shown in Figure 04. Overall, thirty-eight of 156 students focused on the bathhouse, twenty-two selected the clock tower, and twenty chose to work on the general plan of the spirit world. However, the analysed spaces and characters were not always predominant in the animation; some students explored minor characters or areas such as the dormitory room or stairwells for their project. One student opted to create a narrative for non-human agency (hot water pipes) rather than selecting an existing character or space. This demonstrated students' diverse interests in a myriad of scenes that could inspire their design process and support their creative journey.

ANALYSED SPACE / CHARACTER

Students' Representations of analysed Space / Character

STUDENT NUMBERS

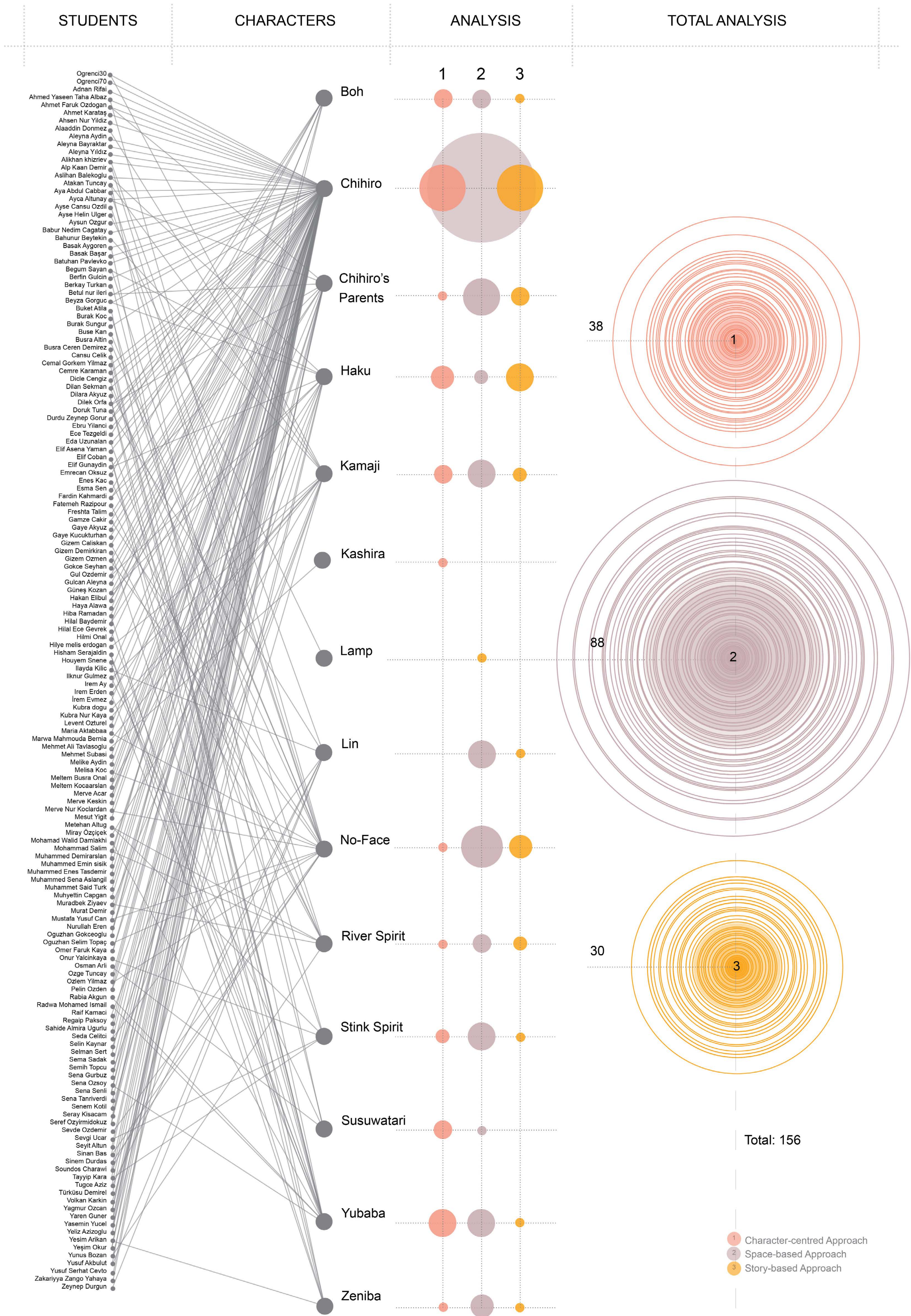
- Architectural / Urban Scaled Analysis
- Object-based Analysis
- ◇ Character-based Analysis



**Figure 04.**  
*Spirited Away* characters and spaces as selected by students for their design analysis, including the selection density for each option.

In the second phase, after exploring the animation, students were asked to focus on one or more characters as 'users' for their final designs. Tutors guided each student according to their chosen subject regarding their focal attributes and impressions taken from Miyazaki's fantastic world. Like the first analysis results, students held diverse interests in their choice of characters, and the total number of characters selected as users was fourteen. Figure 05 illustrates a general analysis of the students' final submissions: All 156 students have been listed on the left-hand side and linked to the characters they selected for their final project. Sixty-two students preferred to work on more than one character (such as Haku and Chihiro or Chihiro and her parents), primarily focusing on an event and/or a space shared by multiple subjects. Accordingly, Chihiro, Chihiro's parents, No-face, Yubaba, and Haku were the most preferred characters for the final design, as represented by the density of lines in the diagram. Being the lead female character experiencing ever-changing circumstances, students mostly assessed Chihiro based on her experiences in *Spirited Away* scenes (space-based approach), rather than her characteristics. Conversely, Haku was considered more often for his presence (character-centred approach) and as a subject for future stories (story-based approach). Students chose to investigate the character of Yubaba in the context of her supernatural skills (character-centred) or her spatial experience with a focus on her room (space-based).

Overall, Chihiro, Haku, and No-face tended to be the main characters chosen for projects applying a story-based approach. When examining the entire course, eighty-eight of 156 works were classified as using a space-based design approach, while the number of students following a character-based (thirty-eight) and story-based (thirty) approach were comparable. These selection results illustrate the various skills of students and their preferences in relation to storytelling or spatial reading when designing spaces. In fact, the variety of chosen approaches among the 156 students suggests Miyazaki's fantastic world provided an open environment for a first-year studio topic which influenced creative design thinking.



**Figure 05.** Selection density of subjects and design approaches as chosen by the 156 first-year students in their design studio project submission.

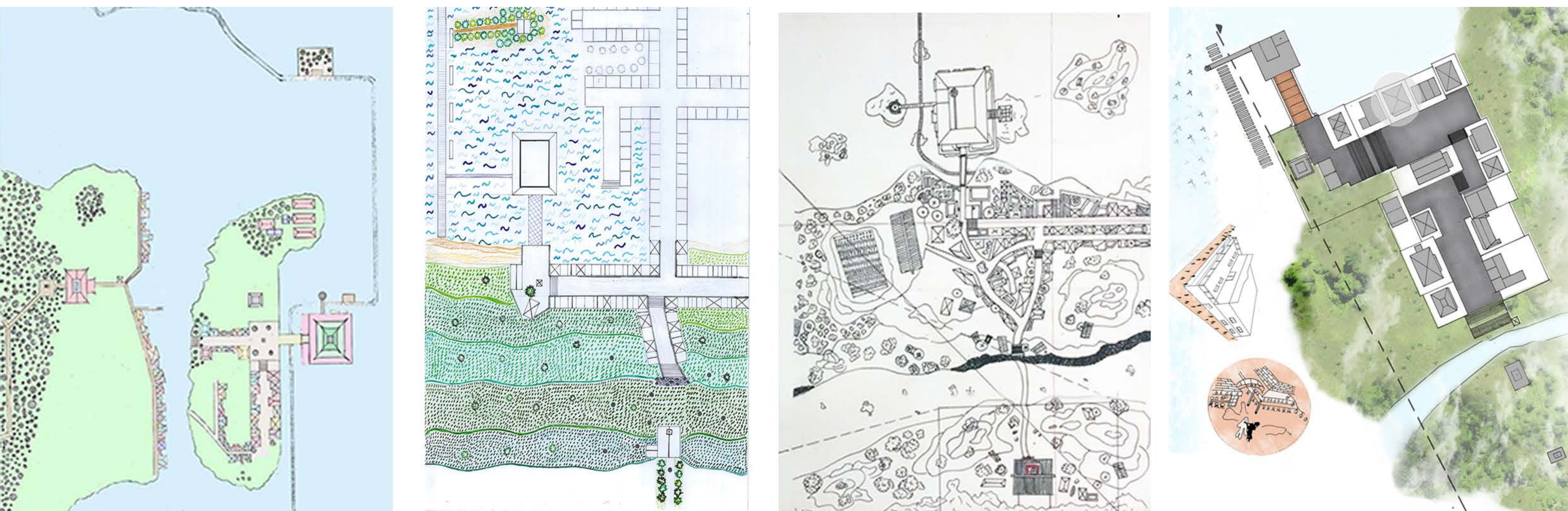
## unpacking the data

By focusing on the specific areas or characters from the animation and how they impacted students' design approaches, some sample works were evaluated in detail to conduct a comparative analysis. The bathhouse, as scrutinised in ninety projects, was the most influential space for inspiring students' imaginations. As *Spirited Away* conveys, most of its storyline and dramatic scenes occur inside the bathhouse. Students highlighted the impressive size of the building within the landscape by defining the place as a landmark, reviewing its location in a wide plain topography, and analysing its multi-layered structure. On the other hand, those students focusing on the same bathhouse scenes from the animation sought to identify different characteristics of the space, resulting in distinctive spatial readings and different design strategies.

Figure 06 shows different representations of the bathhouse from an aerial view, in which students rendered diverse spatial readings based on its urban context. Even the physical characteristics of the bathhouse influenced the majority of students; some students focused on the events or future stories the space might host. Forty-nine students examined the bathhouse in relation to its physical properties (space-centred approach), whereas twenty-four students analysed the building with a focus on a character's experience (character-based approach). A further seventeen students chose to use the bathhouse as a starting point to expand into their own design ideas (story-based approach).

**Figure 06.**

Student representations of the bathhouse from an aerial view. With permission from Doruk Tuna, Gizem Demirkiran, Batuhan Pavlenko, and Hilal Baydemir.

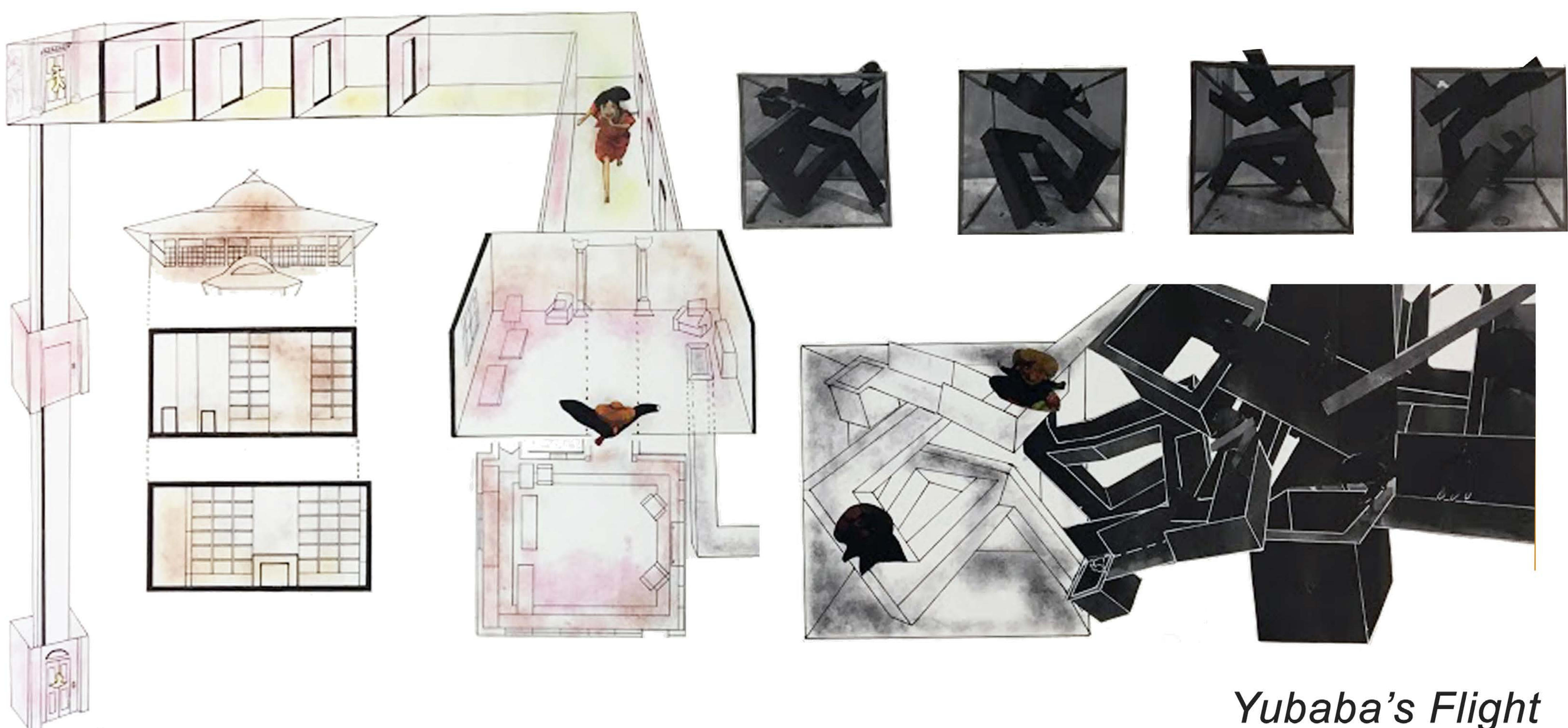


The character-centred approach refers to projects focusing on a character's physical or emotional characteristics, or a character's experience from a *Spirited Away* scene. Student Selman Sert designed a library for Chihiro based on the character's curiosity and interest in learning. Another student, Osman Arli, focused on the Susuwatari character and evaluated its salient physical features and movements. The drawers of the boiler room, where this character was mostly seen in the film, were analysed as compositional references for his final design. Some of the character-based projects included a time-space representation. For example, Rabia Akgun explored this aspect in her collage representation of Yubaba's flight from her bedroom window and Chihiro's long run through the bathhouse corridor, in which time and space were intertwined.

She analysed the movement of the characters by inspecting single frames from the animation, and the space associated with the movement was represented as a collage (Figure 07). Analysing 'moving images' in Miyazaki's world provided students with a broader understanding of the space-movement association: sixty-eight students included events and dramatic scenes of the animation as a part of their visual narrations. For example, students explored the time elapsing between each colour change in the Stink Spirit's body during its cleansing process. An illustration of the body was centralised in the poster space as a focal point and represented with its changing colours.

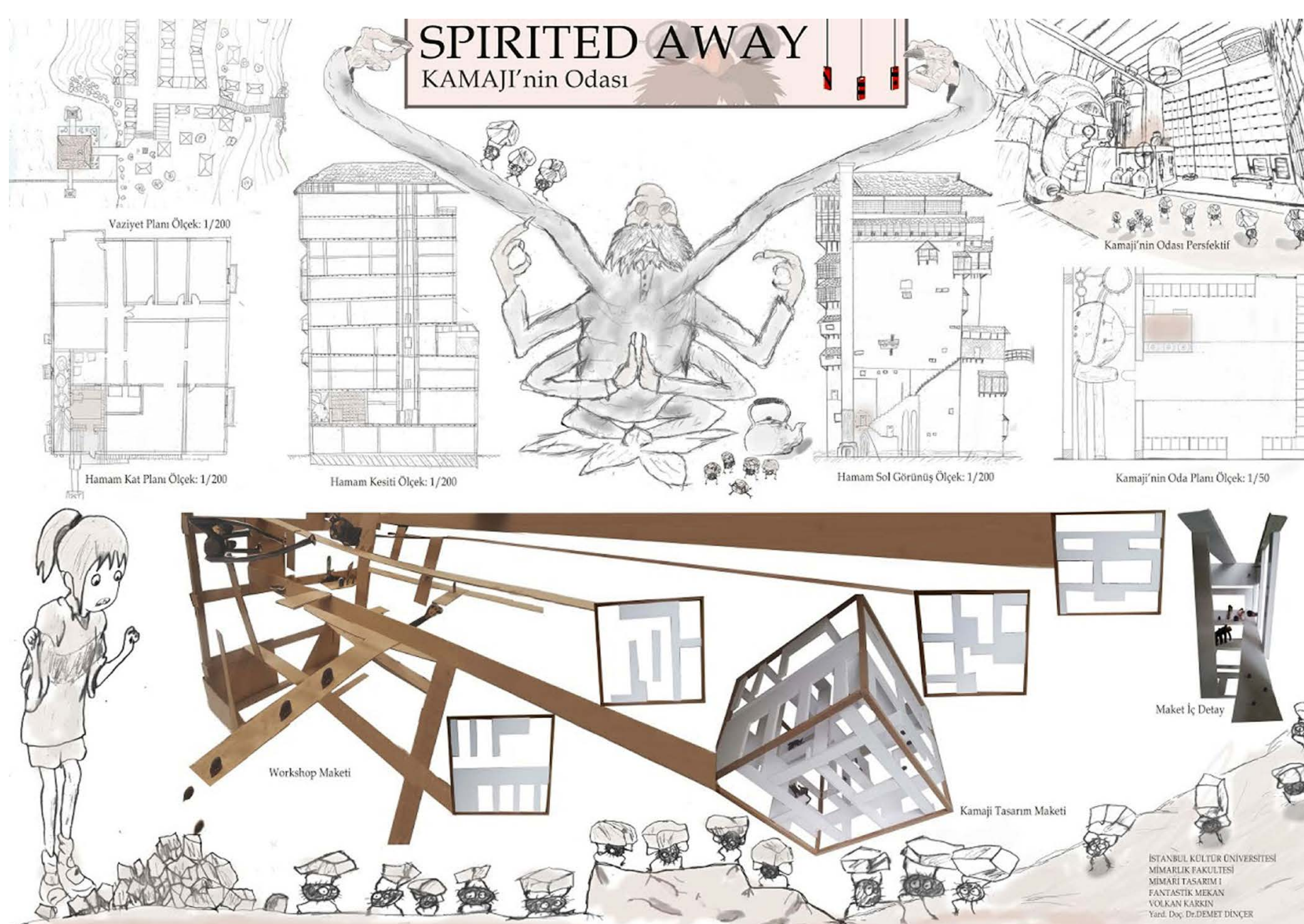
**Figure 07.**

Rabia Akgun's poster representing Yubaba's flight and Chihiro's run through the bathhouse corridors.



Another commonly featured character in the spatial representations was the multi-armed Kamaji, who works in the boiler room. Kamaji uses his six long arms to operate the boiler handle as well as to reach drawers covering the walls of the room. Kamaji's long arms were decisively prominent in the re-assembly of the student Volkan Karkin's drawings; they became a factor in the stretched spatial design he created (Figure 08). The examples below portray that students were also assessing their poster canvases as architectural spaces beyond mere vehicles to display their designs.

The bodies of human/non-human characters were represented as spaces that interacted and influenced the posters' images and transformed them into transitional multi-scale representations. Kamaji operated the collage pieces in Volkan's poster, while Onur centralised the bathtub in his poster, surrounded by soap bubbles of bathhouse drawings (Figure 08).



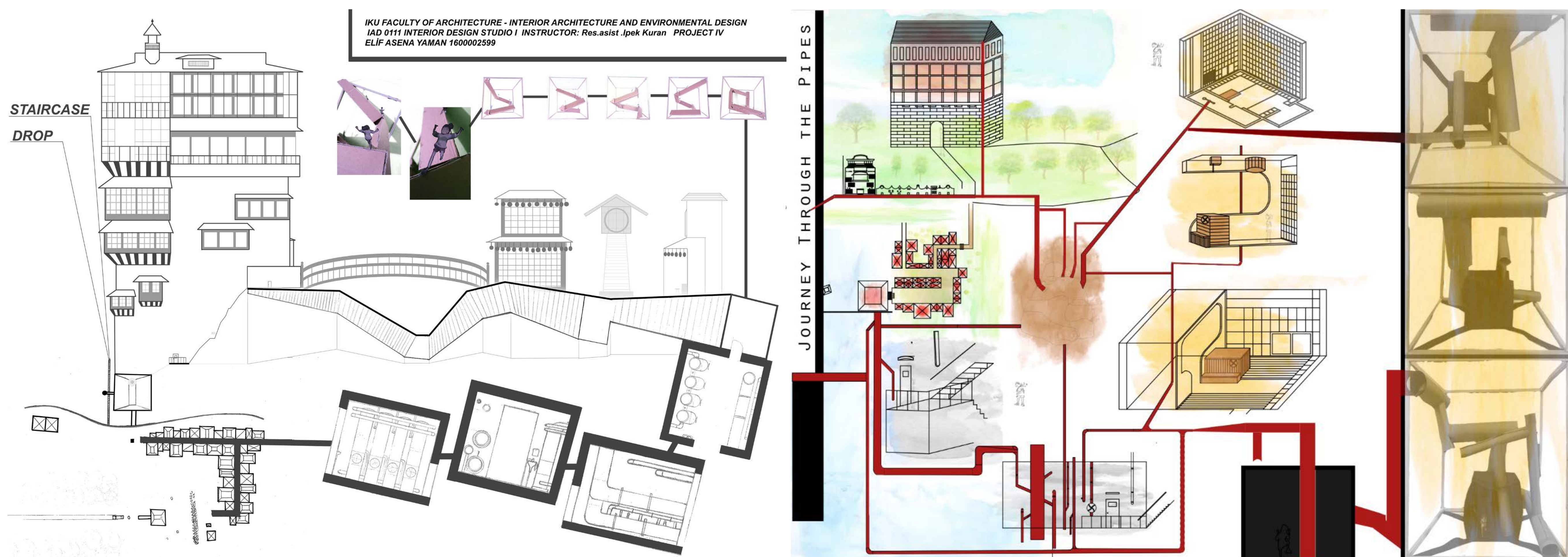
**Figure 08.**

*Right*, Volkan Karkin's poster exploring spatial representation through Kamaji's character; *Left*, Onur Yalcinkaya's poster focusing on the bathhouse.



Some students applied creative rendering techniques to enhance the spatial and visual connections between their design elements (Figure 09). Focusing on a journey from the animation, Elif Asena Yaman depicted the scene of Chihiro running down the ladder, which was placed at the exterior wall of the bathhouse. The drawings of the stairs resemble Chihiro's experience, running down the stairs in fear. The distortion of orthographic projection techniques was applied in the poster to persist with this impression. Rather than showing the interior-exterior relations of

the building or the conventional architectural representation of the different levels, the student's focus was on reviving the event and the route of Chihiro while running. Hakan Elibul's poster depicted a different type of journey with an inanimate element: hot water pipes. The red pipes, which were one of the characteristic features of the bathhouse and covered all sides of the building, were connected to other drawings on the poster by extending from one drawing to another and provided a visual propellant to enhance the viewer's observations with motion.



**Figure 09.**

*Right*, Elif Asena Yaman used distortion techniques to map Chihiro's journey;  
*Left*, Hakan Elibul referred to the journey through an inanimate element: water pipes.

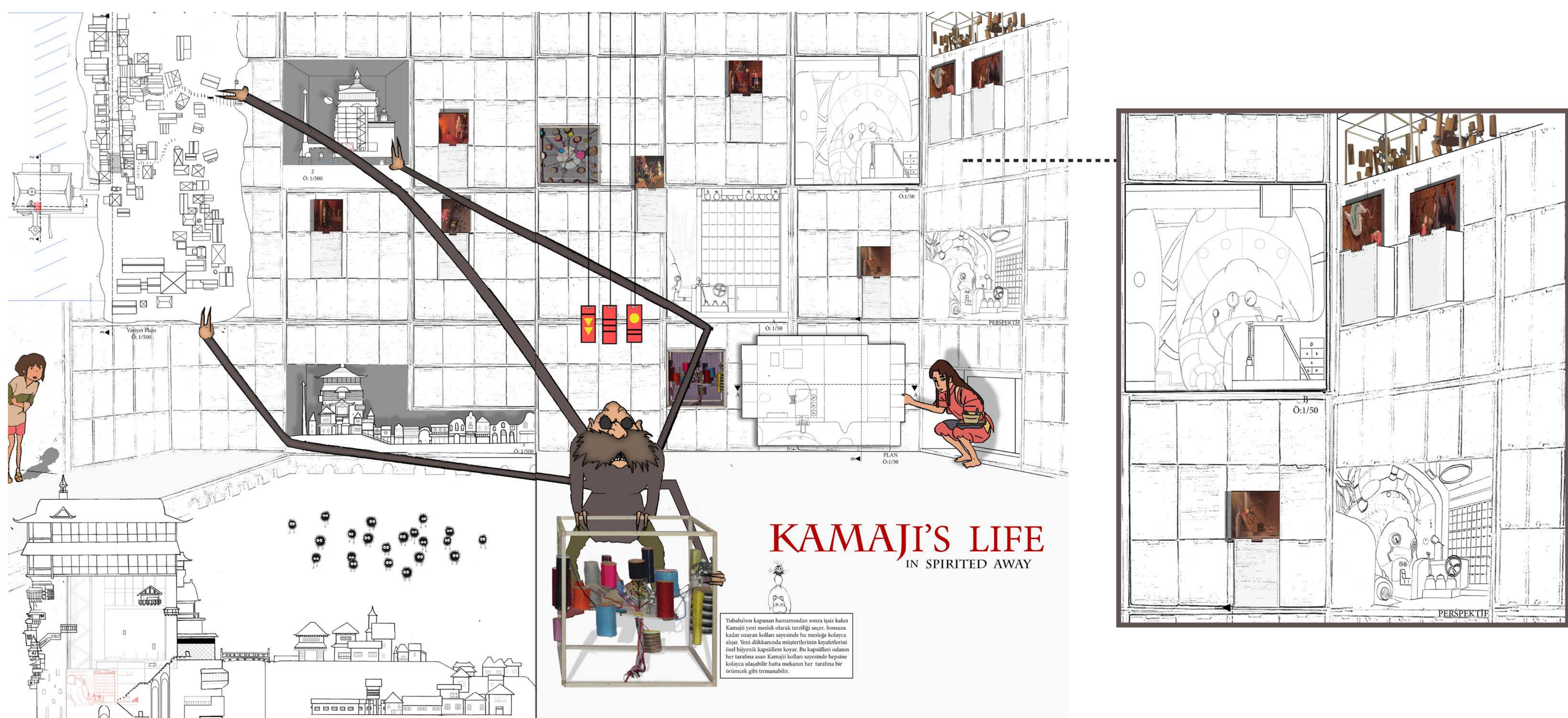
Students' projects implementing a story-based approach conveyed designs based on an additional story to the *Spirited Away* narrative either by expanding the script further or supplementing the narrative with a future scene. These projects re-evaluated and re-imagined the original story as a fantastic story. In these new stories, spirits travel to other locations by train; Chihiro finds herself in a new labyrinth, which makes it more difficult to reach her parents; or the lamp becomes a leading character with its own new adventures. For example, Oguzhan Yalcinkaya observed positive changes in Boh's behaviour when he met Chihiro, which informed his spatial design inspired by Boh's struggles, including an additional script where Boh is able to leave his room. In her own story, Fatemeh Razipour readdressed an existing scene from the animation, in which the River

Spirit transforms into a Stink Spirit from excess pollution. Fatemeh's narrative expansion saw Chihiro organising a separate bath-space for the Stink Spirit. Another instance of departure from the canon storyline was Semih Topcu's spatial design for Kamaji (Figure 10), which was based on Kamaji becoming a tailor:

Kamaji was unemployed after Yubaba's bathhouse was closed and chose to [become a] tailor as his new profession. He easily got used to this profession thanks to his arms that could stretch forever. He puts his customers' clothes in special hygienic capsules in his new shop, hanging them all over the room. The capsules can be reached easily by Kamaji as Kamaji can climb the room as a spider.<sup>60</sup>

**Figure 10.**

Semih Topcu's design incorporated his story-based approach where Kamaji's future beyond the main *Spirited Away* storyline has been conceived as becoming a tailor.



## findings

The semester resulted in a plethora of creative projects prepared by 156 first-year architecture and interior architecture students. Posited between real and unreal concepts, Miyazaki's fantastic world encouraged intertwined methods for analysing body-space relationships in a time-space context. The students, unrestricted in their character choices, sought to identify single frames of *Spirited Away*'s story and in the midst of this (fantasy) world, 156 multi-narratives were created based on Hayao Miyazaki's fantastic narrative. Both human and non-human bodies prompted discussions on body-space relationships and their potential to generate multiple narratives. Miyazaki's literary imagination, the fantastic spaces, and the detailed characters of *Spirited Away* provided creative opportunities to conduct diverse design strategies. The character-based approach referred to projects designing a space for a character by focusing on the character's physical and/or emotional attributes. The second approach, space-based design strategy, incorporated the reinterpretation of the spaces from the animation while adhering to these spaces' existing features. In the story-based approach, students extrapolated from the existing *Spirited Away* narrative by writing a new fantastic story, which described further body and space relations. Students analysed in this category transformed the space and created a new series of events by adding, multiplying, and changing the flow of the animation. The number of projects applying a space-based

approach were numerically higher than the other two, as it provided a more defined way of focusing on the spatiality of the body. However, the content analysis results show that, even when a space-based approach was applied, students did not limit themselves to the predominant spaces in the animation, and their exploration of other spaces opted to create a new narration on the existing spaces in the animation.

In investigating the three design approaches (character-based, space-based, and story-based), it was observed that all three approaches involved time-space and body-space commentaries and proposals based on students' interpretations of their selected subject in *Spirited Away*. The studio requirement of incorporating various formats of representation also produced effective results in increasing creativity and critical awareness of bodily and spatial requirements for designs beyond the static, able-bodied norm. Using the technique of collage-drawing and storyboard representations instead of conventional drawing methods was a decisive method in generating open-ended and multi-layered narratives, as evidenced in the final projects.

Analysing any fantastic space involves a challenge to understand how spatial domains are manipulated or distorted physically, mentally, or socially. Providing students with the opportunity to present their own understanding of a fantastic space taught them how to focus on the interrelationships

of real/unreal worlds as a part of a constant flux. The analysis phase equipped students with a space–time understanding without the boundaries of anthropocentric narratives that prioritise the human body. Instead, by considering the human and non-human world, the studio viewed non-human entities as significant actors while evaluating all entities as a woven network of relations. Fantastic Space considered creatures of all kinds as wayfarers, which refers to ‘a movement of self-renewal or becoming rather than the transport of already constituted beings from one location to another.’<sup>61</sup> Within the narratives they created, students followed humans and non-humans ‘in act’<sup>62</sup> by analysing the events in *Spirited Away* and the space–time context in each scene. The studio approach guided them to follow lines and networks rather than points, to explore the intertwining life patterns, and to focus on the time–space of ‘wayfaring.’<sup>63</sup> As a result, the final works represented the diverse interests of students — following a character, analysing a space, or writing a new story — resulting in broadening the capacities of creative thinking. The use of an animation provided this opportunity of dynamic reading on events for students to evaluate, re-imagine, and apply to their design concepts.

## conclusion

This essay presented how non-human agencies in design education enlarge the capacities of creative thinking by examining a design studio focused on fantastic spaces. According to the studio findings, three results can be highlighted as impacting students’

design thinking: Fantastic space 1. Act as an open work that increases students’ creativity, 2. Support students to gain a holistic understanding of time–space and body–space relations, and 3. Provide students with a fundamental viewpoint to conduct ‘inclusive design.’

The first impact, fantastic acting as an open work, is tied with the discussion presented in the first section, where we evaluated two distinctive approaches on how fantastic is described with reference to literature:

1. Fantastic as otherness, and 2. Fantastic as an open work. A similar two-sided evaluation could be applied when fantastic is used as an adjective to describe space. One way is to explain fantastic space as the unusual or unreal, and another is to consider it as an open work full of creative opportunities. The Fantastic Space studio implemented the second meaning of fantastic, in which a fantastic space entwines unfinished configurations of places and times and evolves into an open area for many possible interpretations. The open nature of Fantastic Space resulted in students applying three different approaches, each containing distinctive creative characteristics. In the character-centred approach, students extended the fantasy world of a *Spirited Away* character, while the story-based approach revealed new fantasies, and the space-based approach displayed a re-construction of new time–space relations for the existing *Spirited Away* spaces.

First-year design education is critical to support students' design thinking while introducing the fundamentals of design. In the first-year design studio, students learn how to explore and scrutinise body-space relations. The Fantastic Space studio supported this learning by including human and non-human agencies as its subjects for analysis and design. This studio approach guided students to employ a critical perspective to explore the relationship between various bodies and spaces, without categorisations such as able-bodies, disabled bodies, humans, or non-humans. Students re-evaluated and recreated new body-space relations by integrating the knowledge they gained by analysing fantastic characters. By not limiting the body to a human's, the studio guided students to build a holistic understanding of time-space and body-space relations as a whole system, rather than comprehending a body and space as separate entities to analyse. For example, students applying a character-centred approach evaluated both physical and emotional features of humans and/or non-human characters, analysing the potential of what each body is capable of doing. Student works employing a space-based approach adhered to a *Spirited Away* space by determining the atmosphere as a whole, including the events that occurred there, and not limited solely to its physical properties. The story-based approach involved rewriting or resuming Miyazaki's fantastic story, which required a comprehensive understanding of the characters, story-line,

and spaces that are all intertwined to build a narrative. In each design approach, students evaluated the architectural space within a network of relations, employing a holistic understanding of space in which the body-event-story are woven as a whole.

Lastly, analysing a fantastic world and designing for a fantastic character provided students with a fundamental viewpoint to design for all. 'Inclusive design' is a design strategy that acknowledges diversity and difference and considers flexible use to create an environment that responds to many people's needs.<sup>64</sup> Hence, a design strategy that is 'inclusive' requires a holistic understanding of any type of body, which is not limited to an abled human body. This studio encouraged students to build a viewpoint to analyse any subject and their possible spatial needs, not restricted to a conventional understanding of a human body and its needs. Besides, the analysis of an animation has become a helpful tool for students to understand the dynamic nature of body-space relations, acknowledging that bodies are never static or frozen in time. As a result, the contribution of Miyazaki's fantastic world and its human and non-human actors to a studio environment delivered a resourceful methodology to incorporate into first-year design education, in which fantasies offered alternative and creative methods of 'exploring' time-space and body-space relations.

## acknowledgements

*In memory of our student, Hilal Baydemir...*

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