# scaffold/ing: a relational architectural concept

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## abstract

This essay develops the idea of the scaffold/ing in conjunction with an expanded notion of Julia Kristeva's abjection. Based on concepts developed in the book *Architecture in Abjection: Bodies, Spaces and Their Relations* (2017), it explores notions of bodies and spaces as assemblages and vibrating fields of matter. Dissolving their perceived boundaries, we stop identifying bodies and spaces as objects or things, and instead understand them for the vulnerable and unplanned constructions they are. It is within this realm of vulnerable constructions that the scaffold as a potential conceptual support structure emerges. The physical scaffold has always supported vulnerable architectural constructions through their erection, renovation, and maintenance works. Here, the scaffold is considered for how it may also be deployed as a flexible and perpetually shifting support for fields of matter.

Drawing on Céline Condorelli's *Support Structures* (2009), I propose the scaffold as an architectural concept, describing the temporal structure or network of connections of processes in bodies. Scaffolds tentatively hold all bodies together, be they human bodies, spatial bodies, or animal bodies, while they are continually undergoing construction and deconstruction. Further, the scaffold is considered as a temporal structure of processes that is inextricably woven into a body, rather than sitting to the outside and being a fixed erected structure in a traditional sense. As this idea of the scaffold is porous and not definitive, matter is able to pass in and out through the process of abjection, and it is abjection that reorganises material compositions.

To illustrate the workings of the scaffold/ing, I discuss the gradual development and shifting of my house and studio in Brisbane. Here written anecdotes, architectural drawings, histories, constructions, and lives lived compound into a vibrating material field.

## keywords

scaffold; abjection; assemblage; matter; ecologies

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## introduction

> I have never been capable of building a house, an authentic house. My idea of a house is a complex machine, in which something goes wrong every day [...] Drawers stick, carpets tear, as does the upholstery on the living-room couch [...] There's more: water drips from the ceiling (the neighbour's pipes have broken, the roof leaks, the waterproofing is loose). And the gutters are full of grey leaves, dry or rotting. [...] petals fall and armies of ants swarm over your door sills [...] The granite walls and floors are covered with dangerous slime [...] there is mould in closets and drawers, cockroaches withstand pesticides [...] Dust gets into the top of pages, tiny insects chew on them [...] drops of water from nearby vases with wilting flowers drip on the etchings, sprinkle paintings in a furious process of destruction.[1]

In 1994, the architect Álvaro Siza wrote an anecdote titled 'Living a House'.[2] He begins this anecdote by differentiating his work — the design and construction of houses — from what he terms an 'authentic' house, which he has never been able to realise, and which he sees as a complex machine.[3] For me, this anecdote is significant in the context of the idea of the unplanned interior for two reasons. First, it is significant for its acknowledgement of a clear limit to the architect's work of designing and planning, which subsequently gives way to what we might term the unplanned and unideal life lived of the house. Second (and perhaps more importantly), it brings to the fore the life lived of the house, its numerous processes, matters, and multispecies relations, that constitute a vibrating architectural or interior ecology. All buildings and their interiors, I would argue, participate in such ecologies, whether their matter movements and relations are immediately perceptible, or occur over slower timescales. All buildings are therefore unplanned and unideal to a degree as much as they might simultaneously be planned and idealised.

However, to label a building or space of any type as planned or unplanned, ideal or unideal is not productive, and risks both a dualistic and subjective compartmentalisation. For this reason, I prefer to reframe space as a vibrant temporal assemblage narrated by multiple divergent authors, be that the valorised human designer or occupant, or the various subjugated biotic and abiotic systems beyond our control. This thinking is not new, and draws on numerous threads, from Deleuze and Guattari, to Donna Haraway, Peg Rawes, Hélène Frichot, and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa among others.[4] Each of these thinkers acknowledges our more-than-human world and the ethical imperative to reorganise the human–nonhuman relations through their overlapping ideas. As a way of flexibly and temporally framing these assemblages, I develop the idea of the scaffold/ing in this essay, in conjunction with an expanded notion of Julia Kristeva's abjection, which I discuss in my book *Architecture in Abjection: Bodies, Spaces and Their Relations*.[5] As an architectural concept, scaffold/ing helps us to understand the vulnerable, porous, and perpetually shifting network of connections between bodies, spaces, and matter.

To illustrate the workings of the scaffold/ing, I utilise the qualitative research method of autoethnography, and discuss the gradual development and shifting of my house and studio in Brisbane, which operates as scaffolding (noun), i.e., as heterogeneous components that constitute a scaffold; and as a scaffold (noun and verb), i.e., a tentative structure that provides support to a never-finished body/assemblage.[6]

## scaffolded abject bodies

In 1980, the Bulgarian–French philosopher Julia Kristeva published *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection*, translated into English in 1982 as *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.[7] The book examined the breakdown of the discrete and idealised nature of bodies through the abject and its associated process of abjection, which serves to dilute the boundary between the subject and object or self and other. The leaky body was shown to repeatedly contaminate

both itself and any other body or space within its immediate vicinity.[8] While for Kristeva such events elicit horror as a human reaction, in much the same way Siza's spatial events perhaps elicit disgust and inconvenience, they simultaneously describe volatile material processes.

Viewed through the lens of process philosophy, such as that of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, these material, bodily, and spatial processes begin to overlap, forming complex and dynamic relations. In this context, as I have previously written, architecture (inclusive of the interior), 'comes to be understood as composed of a range of processes that occur at various scales of perceptibility – an assemblage of processes, existing not in isolation, but interconnected with further processes outside itself.'[9] To adopt an assemblage of processes as our understanding of architecture or the interior is to learn to work with, rather than against, the unplanned and unideal. It is to immerse ourselves in messy relations and to stay, as Donna Haraway would say, with the trouble.[10] It is within this realm of vulnerable constructions that the scaffold, as a potential support structure, emerges.

Drawing on artist Céline Condorelli's *Support Structures*, within which she discusses the workings of the scaffold, I see the scaffold not merely in its traditional sense as a support structure, but as a potential architectural concept describing the temporal structure or network of connections of processes in bodies, which allow 'for all that has been broken down to matter to be built up again, only this time, in a perpetually shifting and unfinished way.'[11] Scaffolds tentatively hold all bodies together, be they human bodies, spatial bodies, animal bodies, while they are continually undergoing construction and deconstruction. The scaffold, as a temporal support of processes, is inextricably woven into a body, rather than sitting outside and being a fixed, erected structure in a traditional sense, as I note in my book:

> As [...] a scaffold is not definitive, matter is able to pass in and out, maintaining hence a certain open-endedness and heterogeneity. [...] a scaffold is extremely porous, [...] it functions akin to a sieve, with a mesh constructed of an intricate network of connections serving to filter matter. [And] to speak about matter passing in and out, is to speak about abject(ion). Abject(ion) is the process by which matter moves in and out of the scaffold, [it is that which serves] to reorganise compositions. Abject(ion) can therefore be thought of as not only bodily or spatial expulsions — that is, as matter adding itself to or leaving bodies — but in terms of bodies entering and leaving assemblages. This shifting of matter, then, is what constitutes a body or an assemblage at a particular point in time.[12]

As a support structure, a key quality of the scaffold is its uncomfortable proximity. Whether a scaffold sits to the outside as in a traditional building context, functioning as a temporary structure that enables construction or repair, or is a more permanent scaffold within our body as in tissue engineering, it becomes entangled with what it is supporting. Condorelli writes, 'Support's first operational feature is its proximity. No support can take place outside a close encounter, getting entangled in a situation and becoming implicated in it.'[13] To support is, therefore, to become implicated in matter movements and in the messy moments of transition, which again not only echoes Haraway's thinking, but Hélène Frichot's dirty theory — a theory that contaminates thoughts and practices and catalyses profound relationships with our environment-worlds.[14] To this theory, we might add the scaffold, as it is 'bound up with the muck of mundane relations on the ground' and participates 'in the imagining of new modes of getting messy together, accepting what Donna Haraway calls our messmates: our more-than-human relations.'[15] It demands, as per Frichot's dirty theory, 'that we listen to the environment-worlds in the midst of which we lose and find ourselves, becoming and unbecoming.'[16] It is with an understanding of the scaffold, both in its traditional sense as well as this expanded definition, through which I will discuss my house and studio [Fig. 01].

## an impermanent and volatile typology

My partner and I purchased our house in 2011. The house is a Queenslander — a typology that was first introduced in Brisbane in the late 1800s, consisting of a simple timber frame, clad in boards and elevated on timber stumps, with an iron roof and verandah/s. Built sometime between the 1890s and 1905, the house was originally a four-room worker's cottage, with a kitchen accessed via a rear verandah, and with a full verandah at the front. It is located on a prominent street corner — on grade at the front and elevated a full storey at the rear — a typical condition in Brisbane's hilly inner-city suburbs.

One of the qualities of this typology, is the grid of timber stumps on which the houses are positioned, allowing for a negotiation of a range of topographies and enhanced cooling in warmer months. The grid of stumps, which can range in height from a few centimetres to a precarious balancing act of several metres (dependent on the location), supports the house above, and in doing so, assumes the role of a semi-permanent scaffold. The scaffold is semi-permanent in the sense that the stumps remain once the house is completed, albeit sinking and shifting over time, resulting in the insertion of timber and asbestos wedges between bearers and stumps, given the typically non-existent connection between the two. The house therefore has an ability to move. It can change position on the site in either the x, y, or z axis; it can change the materiality of its scaffold, from timber, to concrete, to steel, or change sites altogether. The Queenslander sits perched on its scaffold waiting in anticipation for a potential move. It is a scaffolded body, perpetually in crisis with no stable state in sight, questioning the assumed permanence of buildings [Fig. 02].

A second enduring quality of this typology is its seasonal swelling and shrinking of all the timber work, and its porosity at a material level. Although unplanned but inherent, this movement and porosity marks seasons and weather changes, immersing the houses' occupants in ecological

**Figure 01.**
House front and rear elevations, 2011. Photograph: Zuzana Kovar.

**Figure 02.**
House propped for renovation works, 2022. Photograph: Zuzana Kovar.

cycles. Australian author David Malouf has written poetically about his own childhood home in this way, recalling its volatile body:

> A complex assembly: of organs, nerve-ends, bones, cartilage, muscle. An experience machine, that observes, thinks, smells, attends, touches. It learns to listen in this forest for the creaking of familiar boards that is the approach of this or that sharer of the house, and as the day's heat ebbs and the old house-frame resettles, marks the distance we have moved into night. It gets cramps and growing-pains; it sweats, stinks, grumbles; but at certain intangible contacts, it soars till it might be angelic gifted with unique, undeniable powers – of flight, of change, of eternal instant being. It is always in a state of becoming.[17]

Twenty-five years later, architectural academic Cathy Smith added human processes to the mix, discussing her children's bodily fluids leaking through gaps between floorboards, in her made and remade cottage: 'the space became one of colicky vomit dripping onto shoulders and floors, seeking out the cracks between the tongues of the floorboards and returning to the damp clay below.'[18] Coupled with the cottage's own material processes, 'the wall-becoming-fence, partially made of broomsticks, dissolv[ing] gradually into the earth with bacterial assistance', messy relations begin to form an assemblage within which the matter exchanged between human and spatial bodies results in a physical indiscernibility.[19] Not only is there no longer a distinction between body and space / subject and object, but the distinction between the planned and unplanned similarly dissolves into a teeming material assemblage. All these matter movements are then loosely tied together by a shifting scaffold that allows one to understand the assemblage as a particular architecture at any one time.

This morning, for example, our house and studio is composed of tea tree mulch carried in on the underside of paws; hair accumulating around the dog bed; dog saliva drying on the concrete slab; ants moving inside along the base of the stair wall; dust accruing on window sills from the adjacent construction site; geckoes hiding behind the books; flies looking for scraps of food; bees becoming trapped behind large panes of glass; along with my partner and I working and travelling up and down the stairs — carrying dog hair and mulch up, and fruit and water down. These are merely a few of the matter movements currently visible. After school, the assemblage will shift dramatically as the kids return home.

## the worker's cottage

Upon purchase, our house already possessed both the above qualities (of the semi-permanent scaffold and material porosity), to which we have since contributed. Throughout our occupation, the house has been literally scaffolded two times — once to replace the roof sheeting and once to reclad the northern wall [Fig. 03]. The house has further had concrete formwork/shuttering (which may be thought of as a type of scaffolding) setup on several occasions. Some was done by us during our earlier renovations, such as the shower base, garden steps, and plinths, and others more recently by a builder [Fig. 04].


**Figure 03.**
Roof scaffold and wall scaffold. Photograph: Zuzana Kovar, 2011; 2022.

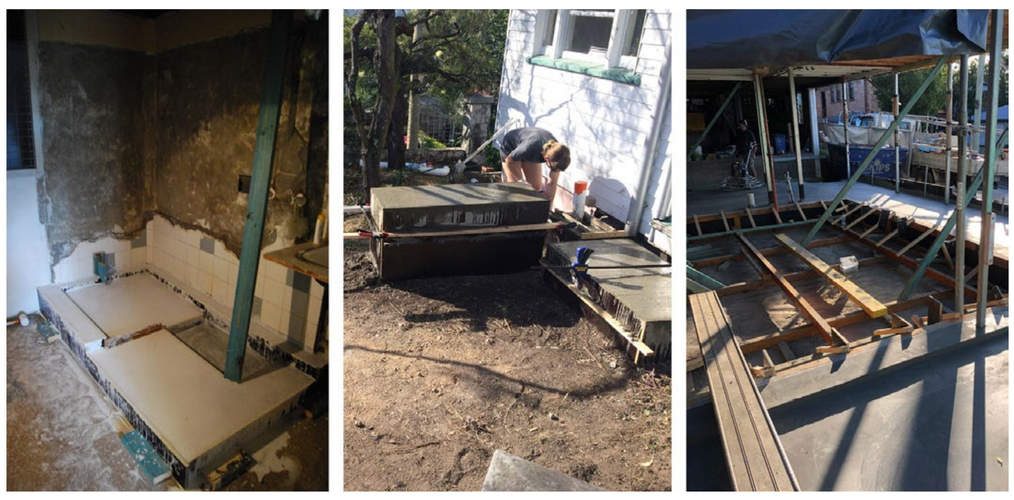

**Figure 04.**
Shower, garden plinths, slabs, and upturn formwork. Photograph: Zuzana Kovar, 2011; 2014; 2022.

Curiously, although the bones of the cottage are timber and tin, the house has a long history of scaffolded concrete and terrazzo work from a previous stonemason owner. Terrazzo splashbacks, benchtops, and a tabletop in the kitchen; terrazzo tiles, copings and concrete balustrade panels on the deck; various terrazzo copings in the undercroft; and terrazzo floors, shower tray, and walls in the bathroom [Fig. 05]. The understorey consisted of a concrete terrain, and external slabs, steps, and planter retaining walls, and cast sewer ventilation objects populated the garden [Fig. 06]. Not to mention the upper level of the cottage, of which approximately a third was covered by concrete slabs concealed beneath worn linoleum [Fig. 07].

**Figure 05.**
Terrazzo splashback, deck, balustrade, edging, floors, and shower tray. Photograph: Zuzana Kovar, 2011.

**Figure 06.**
Concrete understorey. Photograph: Zuzana Kovar, 2011.

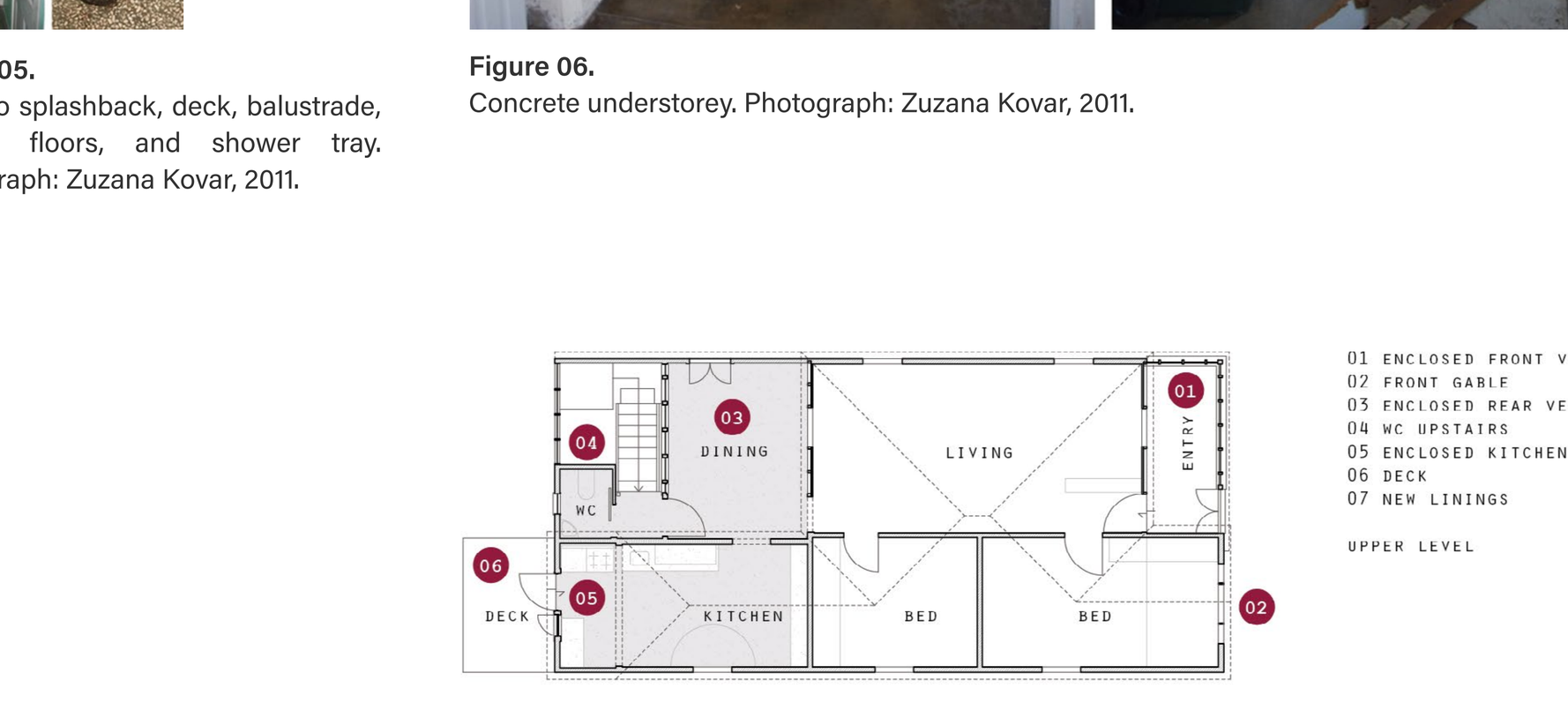


**Figure 07.**
House modifications 1950/60s. Grey showing extent of concrete and terrazzo. Drawing: Zuzana Kovar.

The upper level presented a curious situation of the house as permanent formwork or scaffold. The existing timber flooring, floor, and wall structure provided support both as formwork during the laying of the slab and then continued to provide support for the weight of the concrete until its removal in 2022. Upon the removal of the inbuilt kitchen joinery (also used as formwork), a cross-section revealed a multitude of layers akin to an archaeological site, comprising the original pine boards, linoleum, concrete of varying thickness, and another layer of linoleum. From underneath, the effect of the timber structure as permanent formwork was evident, through bowed bearers, sheared joists, and inserted timber wedges [Fig. 08]. The role of the stonemason as a body within the ever-shifting assemblage that is the house is significant, both in rendering the house a permanent scaffold and in physically reconfiguring it, such that very little of the original fabric was left upon our purchase.

**Figure 08.**
House as permanent formwork: elevated slabs, concrete and linoleum layers, timber wedge. Photograph: Zuzana Kovar, 2012.

In addition to the stonemason, the presence of a group of other bodies — termites — was evident throughout portions of the house. Although long gone when we arrived, the volume of material removed from the house significantly altered and expanded the assemblage through its connection with a neighbouring termite mound [Fig. 09]. These material shifts, along with endless others, whether immediately perceptible or evident over an extended period, foreground the temporal and makeshift nature of the house and its various occupants. Here, the assemblage is narrated (and continues to be narrated) by divergent multispecies authors, and the tentative and porous scaffold flexes to accommodate the volatile assemblage.

**Figure 09.**
Termite damage to cladding and structure. Photograph: Zuzana Kovar, 2014; 2022.

Similar to Malouf's and Smith's observations, I have been cataloguing material processes or the shifting of matter that constitutes a body or an assemblage at a particular point in time since 2011, through what I call 'Written Matter'. These short anecdotes speak directly to the impermanent and volatile nature of buildings and interiors. They require that

one make time to observe a diversity of timelines and move at the pace of ecological relations, which Maria Puig de la Bellacasa defines as key aspects of care and engagement with more-than-human relations.[20] Echoing Bellacasa, Haraway discusses the need for deep listening to and immersion in the matters and species that teem within, through, and around us.[21] In this sense, 'Written Matter' is an attempt at an immersion in and documentation of assemblages beyond the traditional tools of the designer — the architectural drawing synonymous with the architect's decisions, and the photograph depicting an idealised building. The drawings and photographs, of course, also exist for our house; however, they become a part of, rather than the sole description of, the vibrant architectural ecology:

> Our worker's cottage has a porous body. All such cottages do. In the rainy season its undercroft masonry swells with ground water — a consistent layer of dew forming on the surfaces. At certain times, the numerous crevices around openings above invite the water in. But this porosity only ever lasts several minutes. — December 2014
>
> After only a few years, the polyurethane on the window has begun to peel off like sunburnt skin, swaying in the breeze. — November 2021
>
> The grain of the plywood walls attracts dust, over time building up a layer that rivals the thickness of the substrate. — November 2023
>
> A seedling sprouted in the shower drain. I contemplated leaving it to see it grow — to shower with it every day. But I pulled it out, thinking that I needed to clean the drain, and immediately was disappointed that I did so. — December 2023
>
> The bare bulbs incite a commotion of various insects in the warmer months. Come morning, they are always all gone, and only the moth prints remain — delicate, dusty deposits cataloguing the journey of the night before. — August 2024

## architecture supports occupation

The final idea I would like to introduce is that architecture inclusive of the interior supports occupation, and that therefore by its very nature, architecture may be understood as scaffolding life. To explore the idea of architecture scaffolding life / supporting multispecies occupation, I will unpack key shifts from the year of purchase to the present, with aid of several plans.

Following purchase, the house was occupied in its current state, with minor modifications, which were largely about making the house habitable, through the stripping of moisture-damaged linings and a very basic and raw renovation of the semi-external bathroom [Fig. 10]. Here, much of the work that was installed by the stonemason, and that once supported occupation, was removed from the assemblage — a vast shifting of matter, stripping the house back to its bones. The work was undertaken by us, and therefore gradual — a process through which we began to learn about the house's idiosyncrasies, and through which we partially assimilated with the matter in the now opened downstairs floor and wall cavities — dust, droppings, and dead critters [Fig. 11]. This was the start of the messy relations between us and our house, and the start of what Haraway calls an interspecies intimacy, which makes clear that we have never been individuals.[22]

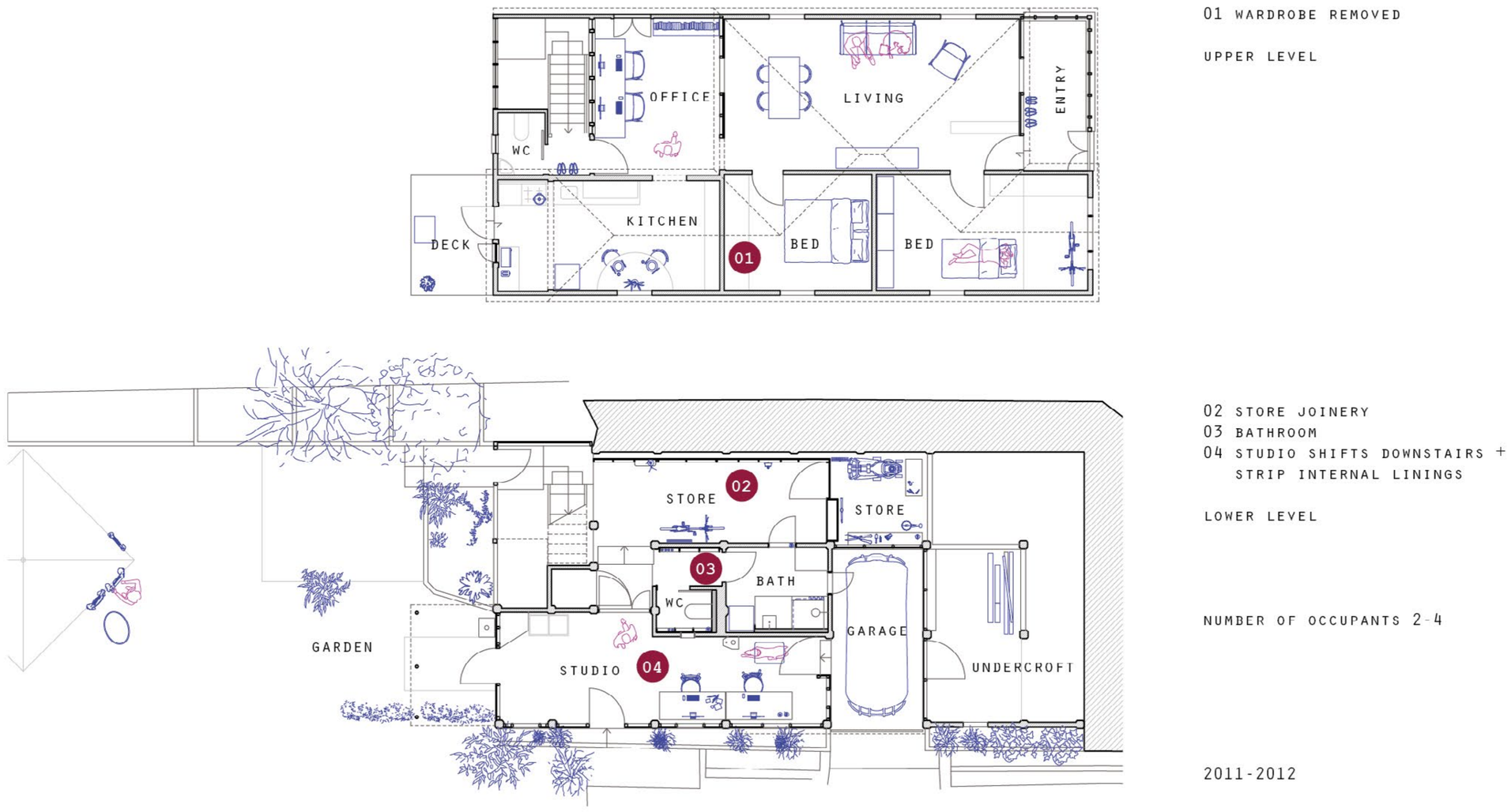


**Figure 10.**
House modifications 2011–2012. Drawing: Zuzana Kovar.

**Figure 11.**
Demolition material and detritus, 2011. Photograph: Zuzana Kovar.

The assemblage that is the house, of course, shifts with matter movement at a range of scales, and one of the perpetual shifts is the number of occupants the house has supported at various points in its life, both short-term, such as an acquaintance coming over for tea, a possum hurrying across the roof, or a gecko sitting by a bare bulb, and long term. In 2011, the house supported two bodies (my partner and I, along with various transient critters); in 2012, the assemblage grew to accommodate a friend and a dog. This resulted in a programmatic shift, with a once-empty room used for storage becoming a bedroom, and an old laundry in the undercroft becoming an impromptu studio. The house, in our initial years of ownership, was makeshift, responding to various factors as they emerged. It gradually changed room functions, material composition, inhabitant types, and numbers, as it was renovated room by room. The worker's cottage typology easily accommodated these programmatic changes, through its flexible framework of simple, similarly sized, and interchangeable rooms — some of which existed and some of which needed to be reinstated.

The above programmatic shifts are easily traced across the plans. Functions that were service heavy, the kitchen and bathroom, moved only once, while others were a lot more transient, such as our work studio, moving from the enclosed deck, to the undercroft


**Figure 12.**
House modifications 2013–2015. Drawing: Zuzana Kovar.

laundry, to the front bedroom, to the temporary studio, to the old kitchen, to finally the renovated undercroft where it is now — a room that was labelled as a bedroom for bank metrics and that may in the future serve as a living room. While some of these shifts were planned, others were unexpected and reactionary. There were no drawings, merely conversations, material quantity calculations, and negotiations with the cottage. Upstairs, a key planned change was the flipping of the bedrooms with the public spaces, to locate these on the more desired northern elevation. This was achieved via cutting openings into walls to join once separate rooms together in an enfilade configuration [Fig. 12]. Boards used from one of these openings became the tabletop for the studio — fabric once part of a wall, now supporting our design and production of new architecture.

For us there is an interesting relationship between the work done on the house by the stonemason and the work done on the house by ourselves. In both instances, the work is completed as a series of small projects, slowly accreting to a whole with a specific identity — concrete and terrazzo in the case of the stonemason, and timber in our case. Coming to the realisation that very little of the original fabric was left (only the pine floor and a total of four walls, one of which suffered from termite damage to the timber boards, such that the boards which once supported the horsehair plaster installed around the 1950s/60s, hung for dear life onto the plaster now as support), the approach was therefore taken to work with the materiality and language of the original cottage, without recreating it. Although subconscious at the time, each project on the house was conceived of in the same way — as a piece of joinery — revealing a pattern or way of working that spans from the making of a window to the making of a room. And it is joinery that perhaps even more directly supports occupation.

The studio was the first of these joinery pieces. Located in the undercroft, following the stripping

of the space back to the slab and concrete stumps, all three walls that contained the studio were made as standalone pieces, comprising of timber frames with exposed studs and rebated edges to accept shutters, glass, and a tiled datum [Fig. 13]. Designed for a loose fit, the walls struck a clean line at 2200 mm, allowing for a brass spacer to easily negotiate the irregularities of the hundred-year-old structure. As a result of this detail, the studio did not seal, with numerous gaps above the 2200 mm datum. It opened itself to, and participated in, both material exchanges and ecological cycles — the studio was porous. In occupying the studio, we subjected ourselves to this volatile field of matter. There was a persistence to this matter. Each morning, before we began work, the tables had to be swept clean, and the pages of current work shaken out. But, even then, dandruff, grass seeds, and vehicular soot managed to accumulate on the table within a matter of hours, not to mention the tops of the new walls, which clearly replaced the removed ceiling cavity, as a path for geckoes and rats travelling to and from the neighbour's compost.

**Figure 13.**
Studio interior and brass spacer detail, 2013. Photograph: Toby Scott.

The bedrooms and hallway/walk-in-robe followed the completion of the studio [Fig. 14]. The division of the large southern room into two bedrooms and a hallway reinstated the original plan of the four-room cottage. Here the two bedrooms were conceived of as singular pieces of joinery, as intimate bed boxes. The joinery was sleeved within the existing shell of the house, striking a datum at the head of the windows and marking a clear distinction between joinery and existing wall. Walls, windows, shelves, and beds were made as one. With this project, the notion of joinery operates at a range of scales, from joinery as object, to joinery as room, rendering the distinction between the two ambiguous.

Beyond the plan arrangement, the joinery took two other cues from the original cottage: studwork was expressed akin to the single skinned walls, and the wall separating the bedrooms finished at the datum, creating an oversized breezeway. These choices reinstated a lack of acoustic privacy synonymous with a Queenslander, and what might perhaps be referred to as an inconvenience. Inbuilt inconveniences however provide a framework/ metaphorical scaffold for potential unplanned situations. And these situations can harbour intimate relationships between occupants, and a greater attunement to the world, which makes them a critical aspect of an ever-shifting architectural assemblage.

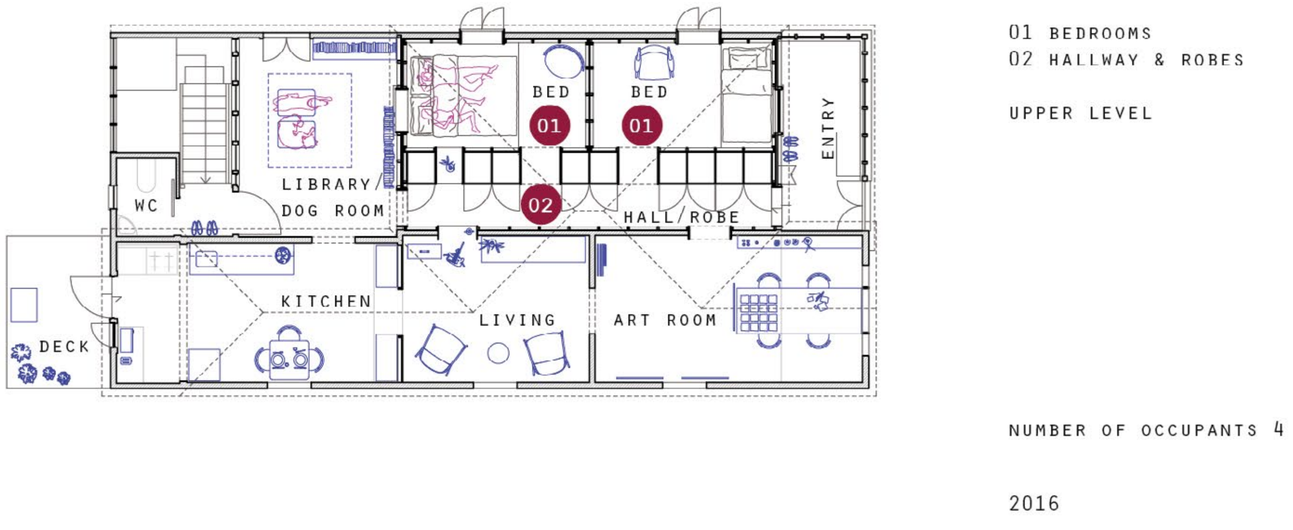


**Figure 14.**
House modifications 2016. Drawing: Zuzana Kovar.

Similar to the studio, the irregularities of the cottage were negotiated, this time with a skirt detail. Although upstairs was sealed better, geckoes and spiders still made use of the exposed top plates and cavities between studwork and plywood — we were unknowingly supporting and making kin with these species.[23] Functionally, the spaces remained relatively fixed, except for the hallway, which shifts from a public thoroughfare to a walk-in-robe twice a day [Fig. 15]. For the last six years, following the arrival of kids, this functionality has however become much more fluid, with the hallway having been a bowling alley and a race circuit (when connected to the enfilade), and the bedroom a theatre and a battlefield, among other things, evoking Bernard Tschumi's provocative spatial appropriations: pole vaulting in the chapel, bicycling in the laundromat, and sky diving in the elevator shaft.[24]

The living room marked our second project upstairs and mimics the bedrooms and hallway walk-in-robe [Figs. 16 and 17]. Here, in-built seats replace beds, but the details of making and the notion of joinery operating at a range of scales remain the same. For us, the now established and conscious way of working is both a reaction to the condition of, and the tectonic logic derived from, the existing cottage. This approach stems from an intimate understanding of the cottage and its idiosyncrasies, providing not only a conceptual framework but also a wealth of details to navigate the interface between old and new — details that can be applied to similar commissioned projects. But, despite this, each existing structure is unique and what is worked out on paper is always partially renegotiated with the building on site.

**Figure 15.**
Bedroom with oversized breezeway and hallway/walk-in-robe. Photograph: Zuzana Kovar, 2016.

**Figure 17.**
Living room exterior and interior. Photograph: Zuzana Kovar, 2017.

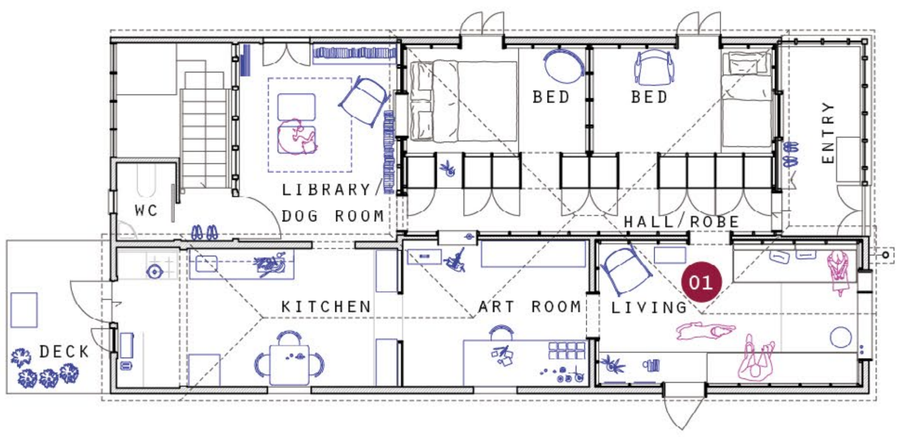


**Figure 16.**
House modifications 2017. Drawing: Zuzana Kovar.

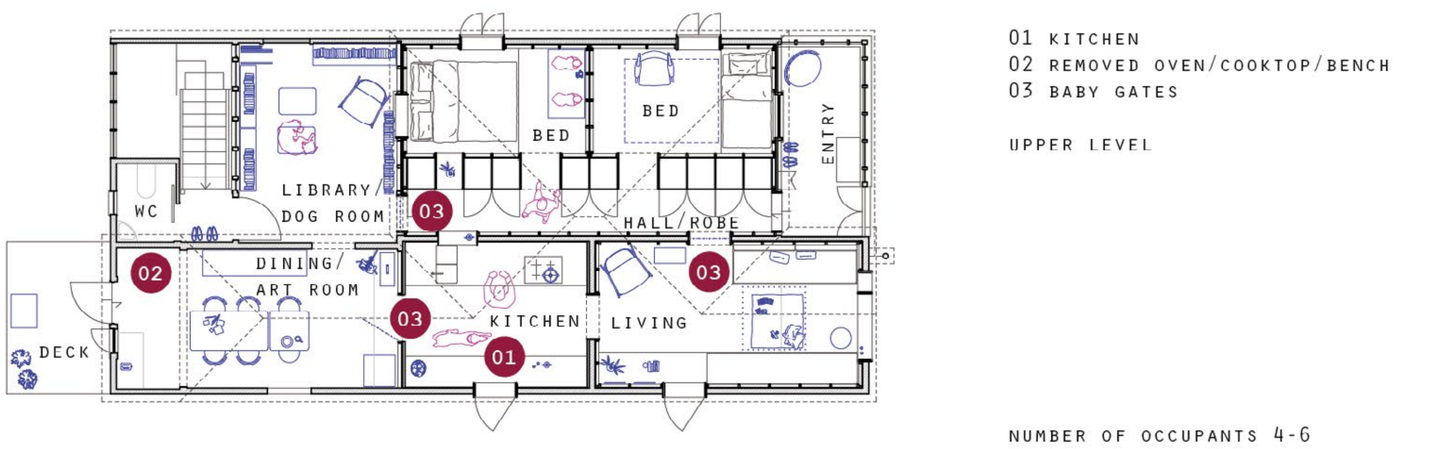


**Figure 18.**
House modifications 2018–2021. Drawing: Zuzana Kovar.

The shifting of the kitchen to the central room on the northern side was the last project before engaging a builder to complete more significant works to the rear and underneath of the cottage [Figs. 18 and 19]. The completion of the kitchen coincided with the birth of our twin boys, and a total of six bodies in the house (four human and two dog). This was a period of constant expulsion of abject matter, shifting of sleeping arrangements, and the installation of baby gates, which introduced once non-existent territories for the dogs and temporarily divided the house in two. Throughout the renovations and the early years of motherhood, I was constantly reminded of Haraway's observation that 'we are humus, not Homo, not antropos; we are compost, not posthuman'[25] and that all we do is participate in shifting matter from one place to another.

> The gaps between the woven paper coil on the first CH25 are gradually being filled by half-digested milk. While the arms of the second CH25 now carry the indentations of anxiety. — March 2020

The white painted walls reveal activity with glancing light from small hands, as do the leather seat cushions covered in stains and nail marks. There isn't a surface, horizontal or vertical, that has not been touched to a particular datum. — 2020

Every night water runs along the bathroom floor and pools at the base of one of the walls as a result of the toddler's splashing. On its route it picks up dust, dirt, hair, and sock fluff, only to deposit it in the ever-growing collection of detritus at the base of the wall. Apparently, I worry too much about these things. — August 2021

**Figure 19.**
Kitchen renovation in progress. Photograph: Zuzana Kovar, 2017.

In 2022, the upper rear of the house and the entire undercroft area underwent reworking [Fig. 20]. The stonemason's concrete topography, which was porous to moisture and never legal head height, was formalised with our own concrete topography, consisting of the practice studio, laundry, and garage [Fig. 21]. Upstairs was reconfigured, largely to house a bathroom and enclosed stairs to the lower level. Given the significance of Queenslanders and their protection through the 'Traditional Character Overlay', external walls, openings, and roof lines are to be retained, despite their often poor condition. If needing to be replaced, they must be like-for-like.

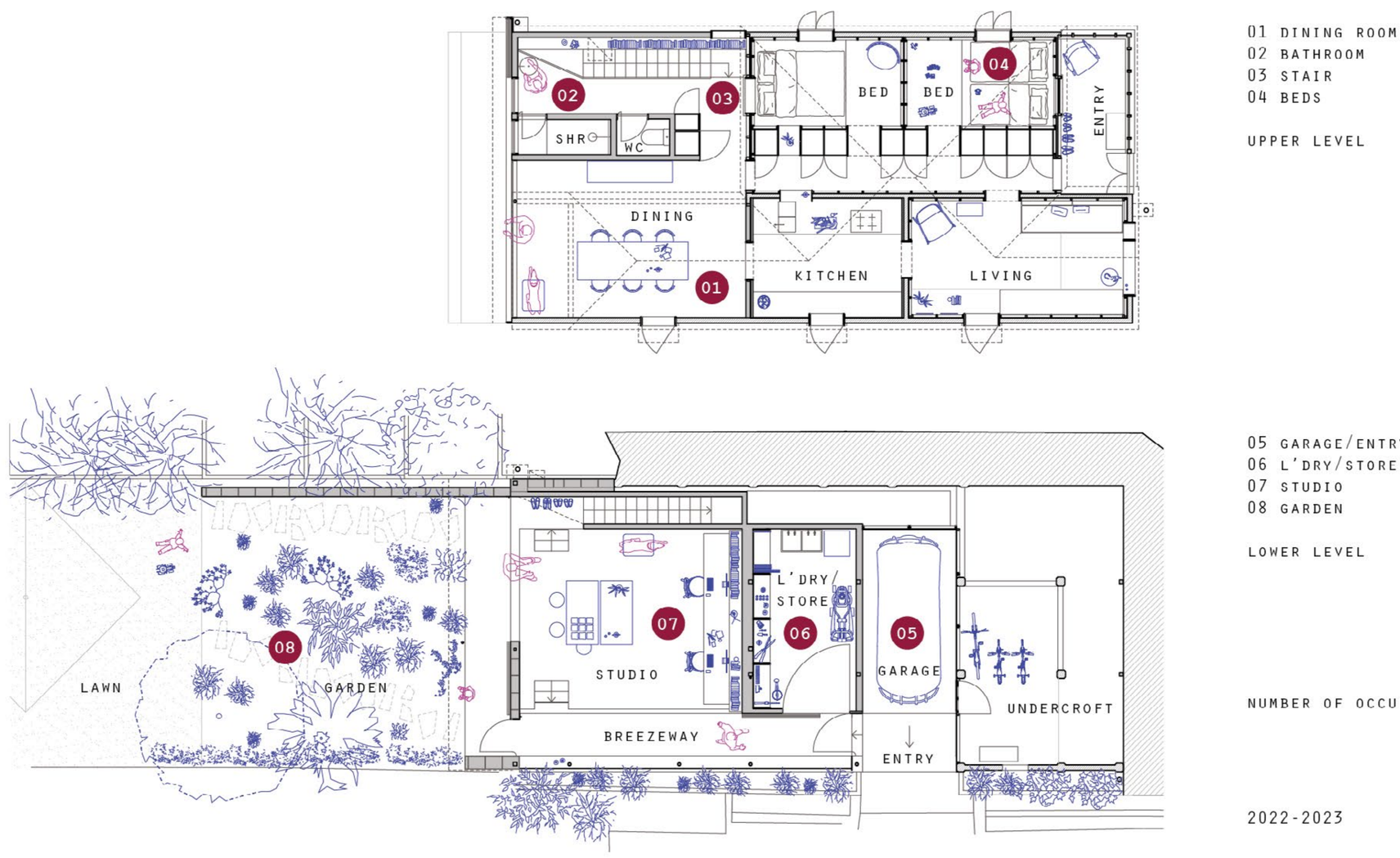


**Figure 20.**
House modifications 2022–2023. Drawing: Zuzana Kovar.

**Figure 21.**
Rear elevation and studio with a view to the breezeway and garden. Photograph: Zuzana Kovar, 2022.

The Character Overlay came into play at the rear of the cottage when renovating the roof and the prominent northern wall facing the side street. Although from the exterior these look original, they have been rebuilt; in fact, the whole rear of the house has been rebuilt out of structural necessity, made evident during construction. This presents an interesting dilemma, where the amount of original building fabric of these houses is often minimal, despite their original appearance. As a material assemblage, these houses shift significantly; however, as an architectural object, where our dependence on visual boundaries/categories prevails, they appear much more static.

The duration of the various assemblages I have discussed is of course ambiguous and may not be merely designated by a start and end date. Matter, whether perceptible or not, in the same or altered form, persists, such that the presence of an event or a body/ies linger long after their departure. For this reason, it is perhaps more accurate to collapse the last fourteen years of the house and understand this assemblage as something porous, indeterminate, and perpetually shifting — a drawing akin to Sarah Wigglesworth and Jeremy Till's dining table [Fig. 22].[26] The scaffold, which binds all these bodies and various matters together, will shift again tomorrow.


**Figure 22.**
House modifications 2011–2023 overlaid. Drawing: Zuzana Kovar.

We are surrounded by and take part in a multitude of processes that occur at various temporal scales. These processes are responsible for reorganising compositions via abjection or the shifting of matter, and creating temporary assemblages made up of various matters and multispecies engaged in becoming. Architecture is one such temporary assemblage. Although inroads have been made in considering architecture in this way, 'it' remains largely consumed as an object, authored by 'an' architect. Approaching architecture as an assemblage shifts the attention to architecture's processes, architecture's life lived, constituted by both the planned and unplanned, and further acknowledges authors of multiple species. Being attentive to ecological relations, learning to adapt, be flexible, and make kin, is a necessary shift in what Haraway calls, 'precarious times, in which the world is not finished and the sky has not fallen – yet.'[27] For me, the scaffold as an architectural concept assists with this reframing and way of working, providing an open and flexible support structure for material relations. My hope here is that the house and studio have provided a practical example of a scaffolded architectural ecology.

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## author biography

Zuzana Kovar is an architect and co-director of zuzana&nicholas architects. Zuzana has a PhD from RMIT, which was published as a monograph in 2017. Her research is interested in relations between bodies and spaces within the fields of architecture, ecology, philosophy, and art. She holds an adjunct lecturing position at Griffith University.

## notes

1 Álvaro Siza, 'Living a House', in *Álvaro Siza: Private Houses 1954–2004*, ed. by Alessandra Cianchetta and Enrico Molteni (Skira, 2007), pp. 9–11 (p. 9).

2 Siza, 'Living a House', p. 9.

3 Siza, 'Living a House', p. 9.

4 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's thinking is generally applicable here, but of particular relevance is their idea of assemblage, which they discuss in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Helen R. Lane, and Mark Seem (Penguin, 2009) and *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Continuum, 2004). For Donna Haraway, see *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016). For Peg Rawes, see *Relational Architectural Ecologies*: *Architecture, Nature, Subjectivity* (Routledge, 2013) in which she rethinks architecture as an ecology, composed of complex and dynamic relations. For Hélène Frichot, see *Dirty Theory: Troubling Architecture* (Spurbuchverlag, 2019). For Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, see *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), in which she discusses ecological ethics and temporalities of care in our more than human worlds

5 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (Columbia University Press, 1982); Zuzana Kovar, *Architecture in Abjection: Bodies, Spaces and Their Relations* (I.B. Tauris, 2018).

6 Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography* (Sage Publications, 2021).

7 Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur. Essai sur l'abjection* (Le Seuil, 1980); Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*.

8 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, pp. 3–4; 9; 27; 53; 65; 69; 108.

9 Kovar, *Architecture in Abjection*, p. 194; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

10 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

11 Kovar, *Architecture in Abjection*, p. 195.

12 Kovar, *Architecture in Abjection*, p. 198.

13 Céline Condorelli, *Support Structures* (Sternberg Press, 2009), p. 21.

14 Frichot, *Dirty Theory*, p. 11.

15 Frichot, *Dirty Theory*, p. 11; 12.

16 Frichot, *Dirty Theory*, p. 12.

17 David Malouf, *12 Edmonstone Street* (Vintage Books, 1999), p. 61.

18 Cathy Smith, *Remembering in Red: Architectural Followings in Semi-detached*, ed. by Naomi Stead (URO Media, 2012), pp. 152–59 (p. 157).

19 Smith, *Remembering in Red*, p. 157.

20 María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp. 23; 171; 176.

21 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, pp. 58; 201.

22 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, pp. 67–68.

23 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 103.

24 Bernard Tschumi, *The Manhattan Transcripts* (Academy Editions, 1994), p. 8.

25 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 55.

26 Sarah Wigglesworth and Jeremy Till, 'The Everyday And Architecture', *AD*, 68.7–8, (1998), pp. 6–9; 31–35 (p. 8).

27 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 55.