images between imagination and memory

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Images both simulate and stimulate imaginaries. For interior design discourse, Mario Praz's magnum opus, *An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration*, proposes a history of the interior by and through images, visualising the evolution of ideals and conventions of inhabitation.[1] As a compendium, it charts the aesthetic evolution of domestic styles, yet each image is only a fragment of a more complex picture of inhabitation as described, for instance, by Witold Rybczynski's *Home: A Short History of an Idea*.[2] Praz's images project a history that is incomplete, missing what is out of view. Nonetheless, they model a reality that is virtual — an imaginary — arranging a genealogy for the home as a curated, enclosed universe, separate from the 'outside' world of the street or the factory, albeit informed by bourgeoisie aesthetics.

Images not only capture the past but also propose futures. Emblematic of a future-to-come that never quite arrived, the film *Design for Dreaming* (1956), for instance, was produced for the General Motors Motorama industry exhibition to feature the 'kitchen of the future.'[3] In the defining aesthetics of 'atomic futurism', on display is a progressive imaginary of domesticity, its high tech gadgets presented a self-cleaning and labour-saving environment, albeit one that preserves gendered norms of labour. It was situated within visions of the home in the service of an embryonic form of techno-capitalism, 'speculative scenarios where the boundary between reality and imagined future is blurred.'[4]

Such images of futures that never quite appeared are compelling. They exemplify a nostalgia and recycling of the past, which cultural theorist Mark Fisher describes as hauntology.[5] By suggesting that we have an inability to imagine new futures, he instead describes how we take comfort in images of alternative futures that co-exist with, or haunt, our present.[6] The type of 'vague fiction' proposed by the General Motors kitchen continues to be deployed in the production of imaginaries for the so-called 'smart home', but the new imaginaries have a different kind of familiarity.[7] The experience of digital domesticity is not made visible in the past exuberant fetishisation of chrome and moulded plastic, but nowadays slips invisibly into everyday objects and habits, to promise the future is already here. The digital does not reshape the home via a clumsy array of appliances but disperses domesticity across a complexity of screens and clouds — preserving the memory of home, by augmenting it.

Now roles are reversed: we do not simply look at the home; rather the home gazes back upon us. The interior itself is an imaging device, observing its inhabitants, and proposes a different type of haunting. A growing complex of devices view, sense, share, and record our movements and behaviours for inscription in digital memory. The ability to remotely observe and regulate the home from wherever we are tethered to a wi-fi signal contributes to an imaginary of the domestic that is distributed across the post/urban condition.

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Further exacerbated by the visual consumption of the home via a plurality of screen-based experiences, exemplified by the image archiving of short-term accommodation-sharing platforms, the interior has undergone an entanglement with the lens, as one mechanism of sensing space. How we consume the interior is a matter of how it is framed, amateur or otherwise.

Within the wider context of our image-saturated society, the circumstance of the visually mediated and digitally extended interior must be repositioned. Over 5 billion digital photographs are produced each day and manifest what image theorist Sean Cubitt defines as the 'mass image', a composited picture of the world that is accumulated by a small number of global companies.[8] This all-encompassing picture becomes the primary means by which we access the world, an actualisation of Jean Baudrillard's 'hyperreal' in which reality is replaced by its image.[9] The production of the digital image matters, or materialises, the new experience of the interior.

Notwithstanding the 'instagrammable' manner in which interiors take on an algorithmic dimension, 'the terms of the mass image are entirely congruent with a circulation in which no human perception is involved.'[10] Such is the massive volume of digital images, it is impossible for them to be examined, manually, in any meaningful way. Databases are sifted to select which images and trends should receive our attention, popular or otherwise. As images circumnavigate the globe at the speed of light, they risk a greater flattening and reduction of visual culture.[11] Significantly, when reality is the image, the role of the interior — and its image — is entangled with the conditions and imaginaries propagated by algorithmic unknowability; as Michael Young describes, 'images are now modelling reality in ways that are inaccessible to humans.'[12]

Concurrent with this proliferation of the mass image, new AI generative imaging processes (GenAI) bring further troubling to the mediation, consumption, and design of the interior. While some architects and designers have embraced these new tools, a pragmatic acknowledgment of their capacity should be highlighted. Media theorist Hito Steyerl, for instance, most aptly describes GenAI as producing *mean images*, in the sense of the averaging of all consumed images to produce a statistical rendering as the output.[13] Less artificial intelligence and more 'artificial imagining', generative processes draw upon the collective memory of events that have already happened, arguably placing limitations on the production of anything 'new' but nonetheless structures a circumstance for non/human imagination. This criticism does not deny the potential for creativity expressed via GenAI. Rather, it opens the door to innovative ways of working that themselves can reveal new imaginaries. And, concurrently as these concerns arise, GenAI equally has the capacity to produce exuberant and hybrid architectural environments, as evidenced with the 'dreamscape' trend, digital interiors that exist to stimulate the algorithmic imagination.[14]

With all images produced now retained, archived on platforms, clouds, and hard drives, what will follow Praz's pictorial odyssey? To visualise a contemporary genealogy of the interior we must ask the machine to do the work, to mine the collective memory and extract what it imagines as the suitable history. It is a genealogy we all contribute to as image makers, our personal pictorial legacy allowing our memories to live on as a shared visual condition. But in this sharing, are they still ours? If we can remember lost memories, is it possible to forget? Will we still be able to imagine?

ner did it

Michelle Mantsio

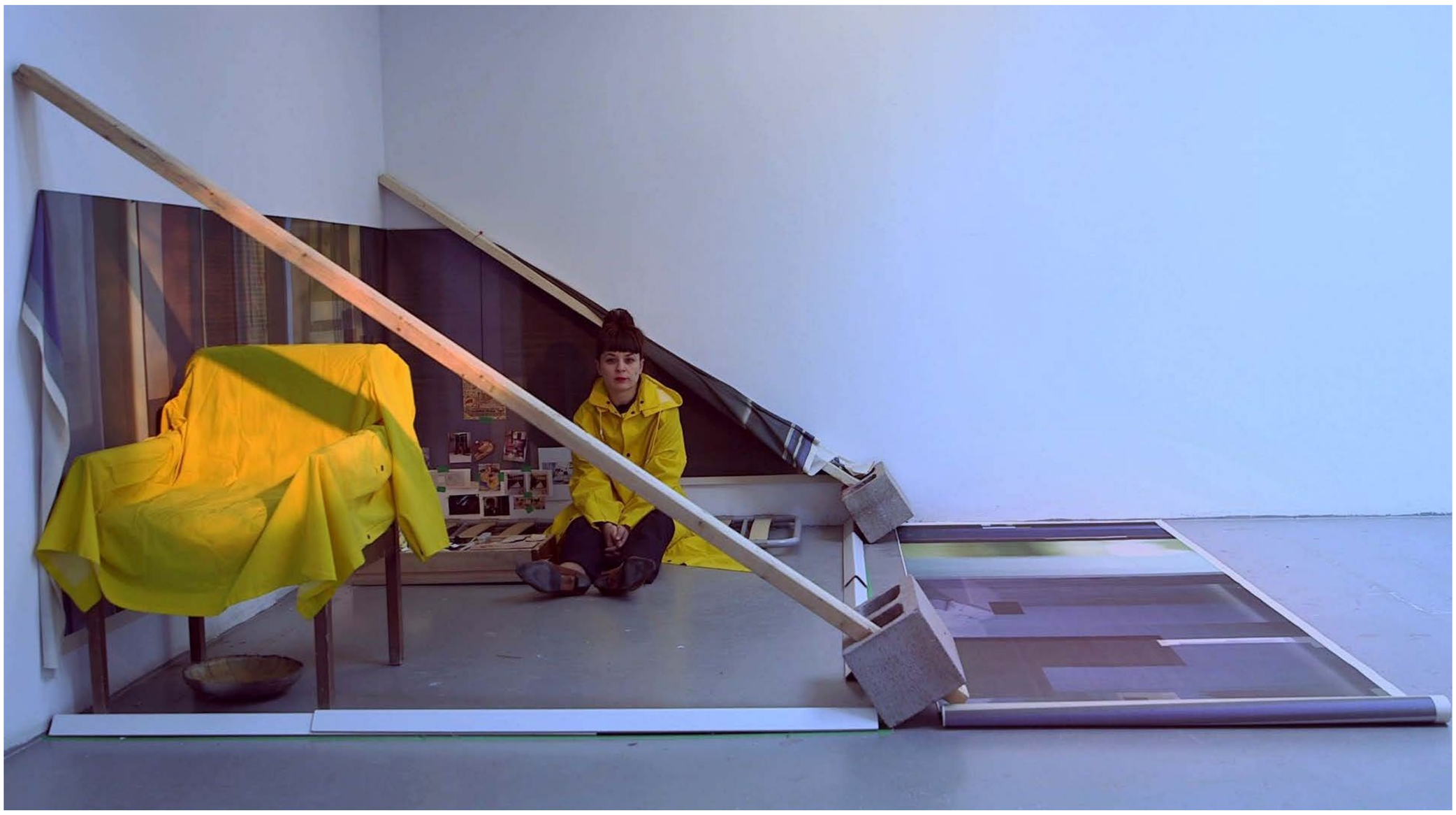


Figure 01.
Image credit Michelle Mantsio

Ner Did It is a cinematic work that explores interiority through pattern, expression, and imagination. It is a five-minute single-channel film that centres on Ner, an imaginary friend who serves as a catalyst for expansive, imaginative, and not-right practices. The film explores unfettered expression and imaginative freedom, investigating how the body might become in this improvised state — by exploring 'playacting' as a theoretical basis for the work. *Ner Did It* offers a filmic portrait of multiple selves through several evocations of inner lives and interior spaces. A spatial atmosphere of interiority is realised through creating and applying sets and a narrative voice-over. In this work, the body has the capacity to exist as singular, multiple, and mobile in uncharacteristic ways. In these expressions, the body becomes as it builds an interior experience. The film explores pattern via the use of multiple selves and repetition. It employs a visual non-linear narrative to interrogate how multiples, mimesis, and twinning can offer a scaffold to explore the improvised state via expression and imagination. In this space, the body is offered as a shadowy, unformed presence, both fully evident and ephemeral, capable of movement. This configuration is offered through the methodical building of a multi-space arrangement where the becoming body is an exploration of interiority.

spatially entangled

Madina Masimova and Yoel Langomas (Dusk Studios)

We have become accustomed to using devices like phones and computers to connect with one another. When we move away from our homes, the threads tying us to our home and family begin to loosen. We leave parts of us behind, while we carry others forward with the hope of creating a new space to call home. Such devices allow us to communicate, but they limit the complexity of our interactions. We lose our ability to hear, smell, and feel present in the places we have left.

Our thesis explores how domestic objects activate memories to distant locations. Spatially Entangled centres a personalised system that integrates customised 'memory nodes' into the user's domestic space. Based on the user's concept of home, each node is composed of an object and its associated space. Nodes evoke connections by triggering sensory, procedural, and episodic pathways that can be activated at specified times. A person can be present simultaneously in two different cities by stumbling upon a 'memory node'. This enables us to reflect on our experiences and to reposition interior and lighting design as technologies threading connections wherever we are.

The case study is done on one author living between New York and Azerbaijan. The nodes propositioned in this study are as follows:

1. Carpet node enables inhabitants' presence to manifest in one another's spaces through shifts in patterns.

2. Natural Phenomena node interacts with daylight to evoke a memory of vivid colours and shadows experienced during the sunset at home.

3. Interior lamp node is a medium bringing people together for its warmth as it recalls the memory of the open fire in Azerbaijan and represents the presence of a distant user.

4. Sound node transmits the sound of copper hammering in the mornings in Azerbaijan, while being positioned in New York, waking up the user.



Figure 02.
Image credit Masimova and Langomas

imagining interiors of memory: digital intimacy in virtual museums

Haitang Zhang



Figure 03.
Image credit Haitang Zhang

This work visualises the home in the digital era as a fragmented yet cohesive organism, a house that is at once protective and precarious. The structure is rendered as if excavated from memory: its walls are porous, its rooms exposed, and its inhabitants caught in everyday gestures of labour, intimacy, and survival. Figures climb, repair, converse, and pause within a house that seems simultaneously collapsing and regenerating, turbulent yet enduring.

The image draws on the doubleness of the interior described by Charles Rice, and reflects both an inhabitable space and an image to be contemplated.[15] Here, the home is staged not as a static container, but as a dynamic, unstable dome, echoing the tent of the nomad: always moving, absorbing relations, and reshaping itself through encounters. In this speculative vision, the domestic sphere becomes a body-machine, fleshy, fragile, and in constant negotiation. It embodies the paradox of contemporary interiors, where intimacy collides with surveillance, stability with displacement, and personal memory with collective histories.

The work imagines the home as a site of convergence: a space where multiple rhythms of life gather, where power and vulnerability intertwine, and where digital technologies reshape what it means to dwell. It is at once intimate and public, material and virtual, fractured and whole. By presenting the house in this form — open, unstable, yet resilient — the image invites viewers to reconsider the meaning of interior in a time when homes circulate as data, as image, as memory.

ai making mashup

Edward Crump



Figure 04.
Image credit Edward Crump

While the rapid evolution of visual AI remains a fluid process, making definitive conclusions difficult, it is crucial to assess its progress to understand its potential impact on design. Although OpenAI's first text-to-image model 'DALL·E' emerged in early 2021, it was not until mid-2022 — when DALL·E 2, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion were released — that these new applications began to be recognised and feared due to their ability to create convincing imagery from text prompts, leading to questions around the future of the designer.

Rather than viewing these advancements with apprehension, I have chosen to see them as opportunities for augmentation — seeking to integrate visual AI into the design process to enhance, rather than replace, human capabilities. Presently, visual AI tools are innately shackled due to their lack of ability to connect with the tangible, physical world. Therefore, by diversifying the way we communicate them, through visual language, rather than text, it is suggested we may unlock their potential through connecting them to recognised means of conventional design practice.

Visual AI can disrupt the contemporary design workflows constrained by the need for significant effort in creating digital information up front, as it can generate complex visuals from limited information, shifting focus from conservative production to flexible ideation. Therefore, it makes sense to work in ways that reflect this, focusing on how quickly an idea can be visually communicated, iterated, and explored. Utilising Visual AI in this approach would allow it to act as an accelerant in early-stage design and encourages the re-promotion of analogue craft within contemporary design workflows, due to the enhanced ability to translate ideas between digital and analogue space. This image evidences my experimentation in this area, seeking to explore how visual AI has the potential to rekindle a closer bond between the human hand and the built form, through using sketch models as inputs.

unreliable narrators: subjective spaces or home is never as we remember it

Béatrice Frant

Memory skews space. And when space endures a re-visit, perception changes. Past intangible echoes force the reconstruction using only imagination, which is why the intricacies lie in revisiting those mythical rooms. Most often, childhood shoes you once looked down on, awaiting your mother's food at the dinner table, are now tight with the realisation that they can no longer contain the size of an adult foot.

The work explores the duality of interiors as spaces remembered, where senses fill the forgotten visual gaps. While investigating autobiographical issues of domestic inhabitation as a woman, the memory of kitchens stood out in its distinctive correspondence to emotion, often unrelated to any aesthetic qualities. I thus aim to capture the specific feeling of food-centric areas in two different instances during my own time. First, the childhood kitchen: mostly reliant on spatial recollection, which blurs the threshold between real and experienced, it brings sand on the floor and the waves as windows. The actual distance between apartment and sea is not indicated, nor remembered. Below, the professional kitchen focuses on practicality, rush, and choreographed movements as captured in the mechanical system. It plays upon fragility (glasses balanced on a spinning top and the human-sized hole to the bar-back) and constriction. The use of inflatable elements showcases dysmorphic issues that arise after eating.

Ordinary kitchens contain an immense amount of habitual information where there is no need for previous exposure or understanding. We find it innate to fully engage with food preparation.

This critical and fictional lens of the design exercise allows an expansion of semi-autobiographical details seen from the perspective of both user and admirer. The experiential quality opens up the alter-ego dimension. It then asks whether the relationship with food, gradually limited by societal expectations or eating disorders, might influence the architectural recollection.



Figure 05.
Image credit Béatrice Frant

designing for grief and awe: sublime-informed interior design strategies in philippine funerarias to complement bereavement management

Jamieson Tan

Philippine funeral practices are grounded in Indigenous traditions yet shaped by centuries of Spanish, American, and Chinese influence.[16] While home funerals persist in rural communities, urban centres such as Manila increasingly rely on funeral homes, or funerarias.[17] Despite their central role in bereavement, these spaces have seen little architectural or interior design innovation for more than a century, often neglecting their psychological and cultural significance. Architecture and interior design extend beyond functional concerns to influence phenomenological and emotional experience.[18] Within ritual spaces, design mediates memory, identity, and collective meaning. Aesthetic principles of the sublime, particularly its capacity to elicit awe, offer an important lens for reimagining funeraria interiors as environments that can both honour cultural values and support grief management.[19]

Through Qualitative Content Analysis of sixty-six multidisciplinary sources, five Sublime themes — Vastness, Threat, Mystery, Infinity, and Transcendence — were identified as adaptable to interior design. Complementary studies involving twenty-nine respondents and ten interviewees further revealed Filipinos' strong sensitivities towards Transcendence, Mystery, and Infinity. Respondents further emphasised the importance of integrating Transcendence, Infinity, and Vastness in funeraria spaces, associating them with more meaningful grief experiences.

These findings informed the conceptual design of a chapel interior. Curved walls, consistent materials, and natural light reduce distraction and foster unity, while a centripetal layout focuses attention inward. A marble plinth beneath ethereal clerestory light and a brass chandelier anchors the casket in a setting that emphasises transcendence. White walls, functioning as projection surfaces for panoramic tributes, replace ornamentation with spatial clarity, while minimalist detailing amplifies the themes of infinity and vastness. Collectively, the design reconceptualises the funeraria as a transformative environment where architecture mediates loss, nurtures healing, and reaffirms cultural continuity.

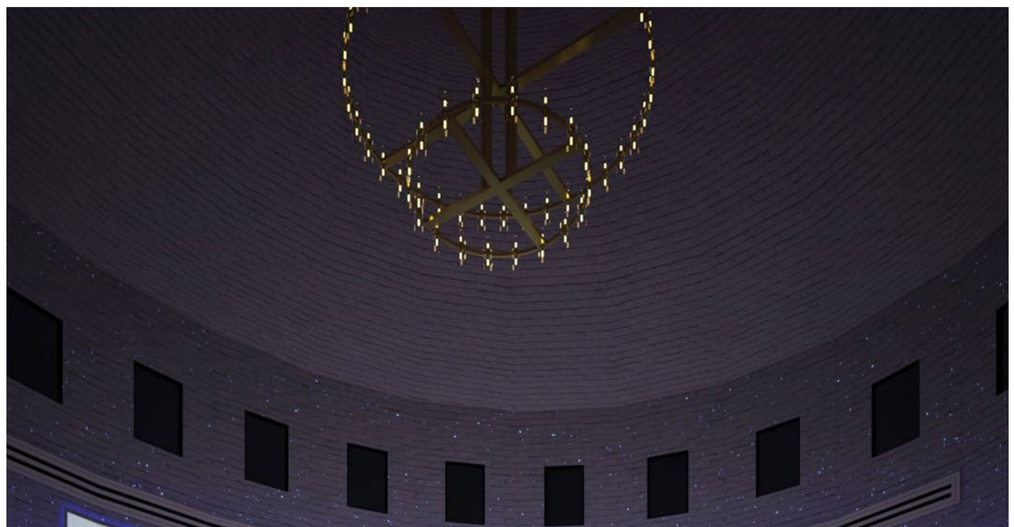


Figure 06.
Image credit Jamieson Tan

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