image as host

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The image as a marked canvas plays host to the designer's thoughts and ideas, as an opportunity to speculate on meaning and intent within the image itself and the embodied action of the interior it conveys. Where the photograph of an existing interior is utilised as the starting point for a design journey, it captures a presented situation, as we now find it, or as it once was, to be reread and reused, inviting its audience, the designer, and the viewer to simultaneously inhabit both space and image. As a venue for one's gaze, the host image acts as a conduit from site and studio, past and present, a memory cast in print. Images of rediscovered interiors expose forgotten narratives, providing insight into previous ideas, activities, and behaviours. Each photograph journeys through time, inviting a second audience to enter the space, playing host to new visitors who may project their own interpretation and experience within, 'breaching the boundary between world and self'.[1]

When the interior is entirely lost, the image becomes real, challenging our perception of truth and tangibility. Which is more fixed — the image as a controlled snapshot in time or the interior as a physical reality of place? Which is more ephemeral, which is shifting, what is permanent? As a premade canvas for reuse, the host is a catalyst, contextual yet provocative. Despite the reality contained upon its flattened interior, the designer sees at once both boundaries and opportunities to be remodelled, overwritten, reworked, reimagined.

As opposed to the detachment in imagery created as so-called 'paper architecture', the act of imaging over an image correlates to building on the built, directly engaging with both the resonance of place, and our place within it. In this 'medium of exchange' where the process of making a 'drawing' or image will directly impact the conception of a tangible space itself, we are able to mediate between the remote activity of designing and physical place, between real and imaginary.[2] In this process, where the host image is positioned as the base layer, it immediately alleviates both the starkness of the blank sheet of paper and the physical detachment from site; a design dialogue commences as a back and forth between the existing and the imagined, the found, uncovered, and the designer's intent.

In this 'territory of discovery' each photograph acts as a canvas to be reread through a new lens, acting beyond the original intention.[3] In denial of the stance that 'the drawing as object, disappears at the moment of construction', the marked canvas becomes a venue for reuse, as a place that exists as both building and image simultaneously.[4] As the image is changed it goes through its own change of use, behaving as the interior it was once instructed to serve. Laden with context, narrative, and atmosphere, superimposed interventions take on parasitic characteristics, clashing and colliding, as provocateurs for creative stimuli.

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Each of the five images that follow invite us to step inside their respective interiors, as we revisit the journey from origin to photograph and, in some cases, beyond. The audience view in tandem an image that behaves like an interior, and an interior that behaves like an image. Articulated through the author abstracts, we are presented with a variety of tactics that utilise images as iterative tools questioning representation as a medium to record, construct, fantasise, and rebuild.

At their most basic these images are simply a photograph of an interior, which records and conveys how it existed at that precise moment in time through the eyes of the photographer. Used as an interrogative tool across research, teaching, and design practice, these photographs when presented in their original state operate as a window to the past, unchanged and frozen in time. We understand how this archival photography can strip back the layers of previous remodelling to allow us to contemplate original décor and form. And, as the images are overlaid and reworked, the collaged host image becomes a palimpsest, where the preserved and the altered coexist as a layered structure, revealing remnants to form the foundations of a new beginning.

As a site for reuse, the images are seen as an 'invitation to speculate' — with layers exposed and 'sketched' over as a generator of ideas.[5] Reconfigured to create new strata of speculative representation, different approaches are communicated to convey multiple techniques such as montage, digital collage, and photographic imagery combined with LiDAR scans that at once excavate and dissect, reinterpret and reinhabit. They blend digital and analogue techniques, as creative approaches, teaching tools, and mechanisms for reflection.

Adolf Loos was quoted as saying photographs of interiors were worthless, in that a two-dimensional image could not capture a complex spatial reality or idea, arguing that one could not experience haptic material qualities or movement through the spaces in a two-dimensional flattened image.[6] In our post-digital age, that notion now seems outdated, and the hyperreal imagery we present here reflects upon the ability of the image to transport the viewer into and beyond a singular fixed static gaze, communicating movement, atmosphere, expression, and a sense of time; as Belinda Mitchell suggests in her following abstract, allowing the image to 'operate as an affective site of encounter.'

The images presented here invite the reader to enter these three-dimensional places to revisit the past and journey into the future within the boundaries of their own imagination.

exposing the canon: photography as tool to forensically deconstruct the interiors of modernist icons and critique their technological context

R. Michael Spooner

With increasing awareness of the provenance of materials and consequences of design decisions, it is incumbent on both students and educators that the canon of twentieth-century architecture is situated within not only a cultural context, but also a technical one, appreciating where ideologies and industrial ideals meet realties of site, procurement, and performance.

The Villa Müller (1928–30) is among the most famous Modernist interiors, and the last by Adolf Loos, built some twenty years after his polemical lecture *Ornament and Crime*. The house features materially and personally expressive interiors, playing an outsized role in the discourse of architectural history. Beatriz Colomina focuses on the Villa Müller in her exploration of domestic space, and specifically on its representation through photography (1992, 1994).[7]

Loos stated that 'So photography says nothing, you see', and yet he carefully curated documentation of the house with the photographer Martin Gerlach in 1930, the gaze meticulously controlled.[8] The Müller interior survived much because of its archival image when the actual building was occupied, deteriorating, inaccessible.

Photography played a critical role in the analysis of the interior of Villa Müller, from the Raumplan and use of parallax to privacy and gendered spaces. More recent reconstruction efforts (1997–2000) have finally brought the house into public access, involving forensic preservation, recreated in part using historic photos and underscoring the enduring legacy of the image record.

The argument is made that to understand Loos and other canonical figures, including troublesome knowledge of the creator and the social context, contemporaneous site photos should be employed to enable a deeper understanding of the process and constraints, avoiding the disconnect of design from the act of building. In addition to the inevitable tension between objective documentation and subjective interpretation, as the photo attests there are also contradictions between the ideals and realities of fabrication, production, and restoration.



Figure 01.
Image by R. Michael Spooner, incorporating photograph, used with permission from Martin Polák (copyright 2007).

without faith, verily is there no honesty

Corryn Kosik

The Arbour Room is thought to have been the bedchamber of Regent Arran while in residence at Kinneil House in Bo'ness, Scotland. The murals visible in this room encompass Arran's commissioned Biblical and botanical decoration from the mid-1500s and later murals from the early seventeenth century.

The demolition of Kinneil House began in the 1930s — dismantling a sixteenth-century building that once served as a primary residence of James Hamilton, 2nd Earl of Arran and Regent of Scotland for Mary, Queen of Scots. The discovery of murals halted the demolition, though the entire interior of the tower house was already removed, leaving a hollow shell.

The current state of Kinneil reveals snippets of material evidence linking the building to its sixteenth-century past, further complicated by multiple later renovations completed in both the tower and lodging blocks, leaving little trace of its original form. Photography is integral to the survival of the lost interior of Kinneil, as it affords a brief look into previous architectural schemes and decoration now lost to time.

This research intends to make use of the photography taken of Kinneil's interior spaces pre-demolition and the murals post-conservation to re-create the building's appearance during the life of Regent Arran. Alongside architectural plans and inventories, these photographs have become building blocks for reconstructing the layout of Kinneil. The murals found on the first-floor walls of Arran's apartments allow for interpretation as to how the sixteenth-century rooms may have once appeared and how they functioned.

Photographs of botanical murals that once decorated Lady Arran's apartments allow glimpses into rooms that have since been whitewashed and repurposed, leaving only a fireplace to indicate how the space may once have been used. These photographs are the last vestiges of a lost interior that will contribute to a digital re-creation of Kinneil House, not only shedding light on the layout of the building, but also providing insight into court life, palace planning, and room usage in early modern Scotland.



Figure 02.
Image by Corryn Kosik.

pittsburgh: the urban room

Patrizio M. Martinelli

Pittsburgh: The Urban Room is part of a series exploring iconic American interiors, created after a research trip through Chicago, Denver, and Pittsburgh. The montage reimagines Pittsburgh's Union Station (1898–1904) by Daniel Burnham as a reincarnation of the Pantheon. Personal visual memories of the iconic monument interact with the station's dome; a map of Rome, drawn as an imaginary circular interior, overlays the semi-sphere, while figures gather beneath in a shared celebration, a tribute to Gehl's *Life Between Buildings*.[9]

This series draws from Cubist paintings, which dissect space and time, as well as the theories of Zevi, Rasmussen, and Pallasmaa.[10] Through these lenses, I visually explored space using Hockney's 'joiner' photo-collage technique, moving beyond one-point perspective of conventional photography to evoke, with multiple shots, movement in space and time.[11] The essence of the spaces is then extracted — their character, themes, precedents, and experiential qualities — through the dissection and re-composition of the photographs with additional cultural and artistic layers, blending collective and personal experiences and memories.

This montage also aims to return the interior to a conceptual realm, to the idea, before realisation, through transformation, transposition, and creative evocation. Assembled images create a 'short circuit' of knowledge, engaging both creator and viewer in an imaginative dialogue, since 'the principle of montage had always been linked to the theme of activating the public.'[12]

Expanding from visual perception to design, the author employs what they call 'retroactive' montages, adapting Rem Koolhaas' term from *Delirious New York* to reimagine interiors.[13] Unlike retrospective analysis, which looks back, contemplating and interpreting, the retroactive approach is dynamic and fertile, generating new interpretations, ideas, designs.

This method also serves as a pedagogical tool, developed and practised within live teaching assignments and featured in the 2021 Interior Design Educators Council Innovative Teaching Ideas collection.

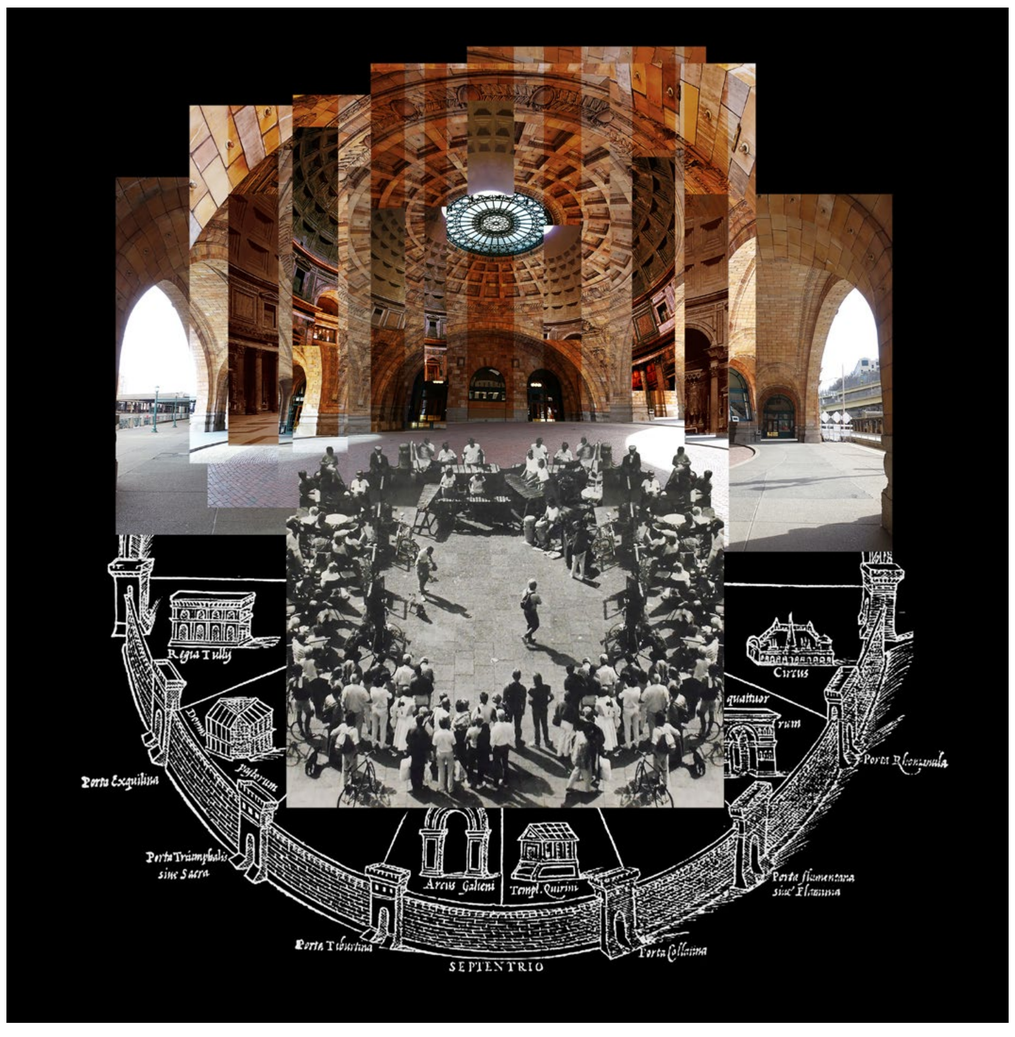

Figure 03.
Image by Patrizio M. Martinelli

unearthing lost interior realms

Inez Low



Figure 04.
Photograph of public space in the rates department of Norwich City Hall, taken in the 1930s. Architectural Press Archives / RIBA Collections.

‘Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy.’[14]

Unearthing lost interior realms as a design research tool allows the designer to step through various interior spaces in time without physical movement, and to deduct and speculate a spatial understanding of how interiors are represented in photography. These photographs are time markers that tell a story of a moment in time, an interior space frozen in time. Exhuming colours, materiality, and texture from a non-existent interior space allows designers to learn about a historical representation of a lost era and, thus, in a project, allow it to be woven back into a contemporary design narrative.

What can we see in these spaces?

What is it trying to show us?

What can we learn from them?

From the refurbishment of Norwich City Hall, this image takes on a lead role. The design process started with researching the design strategy of the original interior, exhuming colours, materiality, and texture from a non-existent interior space. The photograph shows the lost interior of the original Rates Hall in the building [Fig. 04]. As time moves on, the interior as shown has gone through many iterations and no longer carries its modernist lines and shape.

The design team time travelled to many points in history (via the humble photograph) to understand the development of the interior: what has been stripped out, what has been retained, what colours were used, what are the materials like? As it stands, the current Rates Hall has been divided into many small offices, stripped out of its original lines and modernist look. In the refurbishment proposal, we aim to honour the former glory of the space, restoring its sharper qualities and establishing a new interior language that speaks to the present.

between the real and imagined: the great hall, wymering manor, 2024

Belinda Mitchell

The photographic image, *Between the real and imagined: The Great Hall, Wymering Manor, 2024*, diffracts the architectural interior through fine art practice, offering a reimagining of how interiors are conceived and produced.[15]

Emerging from research situated in feminist philosophy, corporeal feminism (Grosz), material semiotics (Haraway), and new materialism (Barad), the work integrates embodied and digital drawing practices to trace multiple ways of seeing, being *with*, and moving through a site.[16] Improvisational movement underpins the gathering of subjective, sensory, and aesthetic experiences, while innovative drawing methods — particularly the reappropriation of digital surveying tools — disrupt gendered conventions of architectural representation and material practice.

The image brings together a handheld LiDAR scan made with a smartphone and processed through software, CloudCompare, with a photographic image. New technologies, such as LiDAR scanning equipment, the SmartStage, and motion capture equipment, are approached not as neutral instruments but as generative devices. In dialogue with feminist methodologies and movement practices, these technologies produce hybrid drawing languages that are both data-rich and affective. As such, the photographic image operates as an affective site of encounter.

By situating drawing as a site of encounter between body, material, and space, this practice proposes an alternative paradigm for the interior — one rooted in presence, multiplicity, and emergence. Evolving from a critique of gendered hierarchies and the sterile materialities of conventional design practice, it advances a disciplinary shift, refiguring interiors through inhabitation and affective spatial experience, rather than abstraction and diagram.



Figure 05.
Between the real and imagined: The Great Hall, Wymering Manor, 2024.
Image by Belinda Mitchell

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notes

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